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Social Language Strategies of Saudi Students in an English as a Second Language Context

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research programme; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Signed

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Melbourne, Australia.

Date: April 2017

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

EAP   English for academic purposes centre EFL   English as a foreign language

ELICOS   English language intensive course for overseas students ESL

English as a second language

GLL   Good language learner

ILC   Independent learning centre

IELTS International English Language Testing System KASP   King Abdullah

Scholarship Programme

L2   Second language

SCT   Sociocultural theory

SILL   Strategy Inventory for Language Learning SNSs   Social network sites

TOEFL   Test of English as a Foreign Language VET Vocational education and

training

ZPD   Zone of proximal development

Abstract

This study was designed to better understand the language-learning strategies that international students, particularly Saudi students, employ in their learning of English in an English as a second language (ESL) context such as Australia. Looking at the mobility trends of international students worldwide, the majority are studying in English-speaking countries (e.g., Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States).

These countries are economically well-developed, and countries where the English language is the home language have an advantage compared with non-native English- speaking countries, as English has become an important commodity for globalisation. It is common in Australian universities and other English-medium universities elsewhere to have English language criteria for students for whom English is not the first language. These students are required to sit internationally recognised tests to meet entry requirements, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). However, although these tests are designed to measure the proficiency of four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), they do not indicate whether international students will be capable of adapting to the linguistic, social and cultural variations of the society in which they are intending to study. Studies have shown that English language abilities can influence the international student experience. There are also cultural and social practices of the international students themselves that could make their adaptation to the new environment easier, or inhibit them from having a smooth transitional experience. As Saudi students come from a social and cultural background that differs greatly from the societies they encounter as international students, there is a perceived need to address Saudi students' requirements not only as international students, but also as a special group within the international student population.

Recognising the unique nature of Saudi society and the needs of Saudi students, sociocultural theory has been used as a theoretical frame to guide this research. However, the research of language-learning strategies originated from a cognitive theory that explored second language acquisition and developed a number of models that examined how language learners employ different strategies in their learning. One of these cognitive approaches is the information processing cognitive model. This model underpins explanations that provide a conceptual understanding of language-learning strategies and has been applied to the classification of learning strategies into direct and indirect strategies. These ideas were developed into a widely used questionnaire, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to measure language-learning strategies.

The research therefore adopted a mixed-method approach and the SILL questionnaire was conducted to compare the Saudi student cohort's use of language-learning strategies with previous research. The sociocultural frame also adopted for this research enabled the researcher to examine the learner's social experiences in detail, as well as the cognitive processes required to learn a second language and how the social environment can mediate learning through the relationships and meaning-making that can be developed within the social context with peers and teachers. Sociocultural theory was a means to identify how learning is situated and this means that any learning is situated within a certain social and cultural context, at a particular time and place, and involving specific individuals. In this study, the two theoretical frameworks provide different insights that have been combined to explain the importance of context for a specific social group. For this, 65 Saudi participants volunteered to complete the SILL questionnaire and 18 Saudi participants (10 males and 8 females) took part in the semi-structured interviews.

The interviews emphasised the role of social strategies in this context and how they assisted the learners to adapt to the academic and social life in an Australian context.

Implications arising include the role of gender for Saudi students, increasing the presence of digital technology in the student language-learning experience and the benefits of studying English with a student cohort who have ESL. The SILL results of this study indicated that the most common language-learning strategies used by the Saudi ESL students in this context were metacognitive, social, compensation, cognitive, affective and memory strategies. However, the qualitative results generated from the semi-structured interviews informed the quantitative findings, contextualised them and explained why some strategies are preferred to others.

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: Introduction

Outline of the Chapter

1.1 Introduction to the Thesis

1.2 The Relevant Literature

      1.2.1 English as a Global Language

      1.2.2 International Education in Australia

      1.2.3 Saudi Students in Australia

1.3 Language-Learning Strategies

1.4 The Research

      1.4.1 Statement of the Issues Researched

      1.4.2 Significance of the Study

      1.4.3 Research Questions

      1.4.4 Theoretical Approach and Research Design

      1.4.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is concerned with the experiences of Saudi international students studying English language in an English as a Second Language (ESL) context. Saudi students are unique among international students as they present as a reasonably homogenous group because of religious and social responsibilities connected to their Saudi citizenship. It is important to consider these external responsibilities and personal traits that assist individual learning. The focus of the research is the task of learning English in a particular ESL environment. In this introductory chapter, see outline above, the importance of English as a language of globalisation is discussed, the international student market and Saudi students as part of this exchange are described and major facets of the study are identified including the choice of methodology and methods and a justification of the significance of the research.

The emphasis on social language strategies for the research has been developed by studying the history of research into second language learning. The research of language-learning strategies started in the 1970s to identify characteristics of what makes some students better than others in their language learning (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975). The Saudi learners in this research were living in a new social context and this could have presented some challenges to them. It has been well established that English language skills are one of the important factors that shape the social and academic experiences of international students in their ESL contexts (Andrade, 2006). In particular, Saudi students who learn English in ESL contexts have faced some challenges to socialise and integrate within these environments (Groves, 2015).

Language-learning social strategies are highlighted in this study as they will be used by learners to solve problems that international students may face. International students strive to express themselves and to show their social affiliation in their new environment. Saudi students are among this cohort and, like all international student populations, face their own unique cultural challenges.

1.1 Introduction to the Thesis

The thesis aims to better understand the language-learning strategies that international students, particularly Saudi students, employ in their learning of English in an ESL context such as Australia. Looking at the mobility trends of international students worldwide, the majority are studying in native English-speaking countries (e.g., Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States). International students studying in countries like Australia that have well-developed educational facilities and where English language is the dominant language have an advantage over other students who learn in non-English-speaking countries (Lasanowski, 2010).

English language proficiency in this globalised world has become essential and an important commodity (Kell & Vogl, 2012). Students who intend to study in English-speaking countries and for whom English is not the first language are required to meet specific English language criteria to be able to enrol in education institutions in the host country (Murray, 2015). It is common in Australian universities and other English-medium universities for these students to be required to sit for internationally recognised tests to meet entry requirements, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

However, although these tests are designed to measure the proficiency of four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), they do not indicate how international students will be able to adapt to the linguistic, social and cultural variations of the society in which they are intending to study (Birrell, 2006). Studies have shown that while English language abilities can influence the international student experience (e.g., Andrade, 2006), there are also cultural and social practices that have been part of the background experience of international students and that could make their adaptation to the new environment easier, or inhibit them from having a smooth transitional experience (Bianchi, 2013). Conversely, the educational and learning environment of the university could contribute to these challenges where, for example, the teaching styles and the workload are overwhelming for international students and affect their social adjustment in their new environment (Lau & Lin, 2014; Tran, 2013).

This introductory chapter is divided into three sections. The first section identifies a number of areas of the relevant literature of the thesis: English as a global language, Saudi students in Australian universities and language-learning strategies. The second section concerns the research, presenting the questions, explaining the aims and justifying the significance. It introduces the theoretical approach and the research

design. The third section concerns the overall thesis structure and the content that is included in each chapter.

1.2 The Relevant Literature

1.2.1 English as a Global Language

There is no doubt that the English language plays an important role in a globalised world. It is used as the primary medium of international communication for many purposes, including trade, tourism, politics, business, education and technology. Statistical reports estimate that there are around 1.7 billion individuals using the English language as a second language for communication worldwide. This figure is expected to rise to two billion learners or users by 2020 (British Council, 2013). One of the areas dominated by the use of the English language is the global academic community which manifests as a huge international student market. The picture of this vast use of English as a lingua franca of the academic community is best explained as 'Most international academic conferences, seminars, workshops and the like, regardless of their geographical setting, are conducted using English as their main, and usually only, lingua franca, even though there are often few or no native English speakers present' (Jenkins, 2011, p. 927). Therefore, the English language has an enhanced role worldwide and has become a valuable asset in the globalised world (Lasanowski, 2010). For international students, global mobility provides an opportunity to obtain a degree from an English-medium university within a widely respected educational system that could change their lives and increase their personal and intercultural skills (Murray, 2015). In 2007, fifty percent of international students who were non-native English speakers were studying in English-speaking countries (Northrup, 2013). Therefore, learning English can be seen as an investment for international students as it is one of the main keys to today's global market (Lasanowski, 2010). Also, the presence of these students contributes to the

diversity and internalisation of the classrooms, campuses and communities (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). They bring with them different cultural perspectives from their own societies and this mixing of experience has the potential to encourage cultural respect and mutual understanding of others.

1.2.2 International Education in Australia

Australia is a main destination for overseas students as it enjoys the third-ranking place for the total number of international students worldwide (8%). In 2014, there were 226, 048 international students in Australian higher education (Department of Education and Training [DET]—International Education, 2017). It was estimated that the economic revenue for Australia from the international education market was $19.5 billion, with flow on benefits created for different sectors of the economy such as hospitality and tourism (Colbeck, 2016). In addition to the economic aspects of the education market, the Australian government can develop its cooperative ties with the countries of origins of the international students who are studying in its universities. In its *National Strategy for the International Education 2025*, the Australian government highlighted the role of the diplomatic mutual benefits that can result from recruiting international students at its educational facilities (National Strategy for International Education 2025, 2016). For example, in the Asia-Pacific political context, the presence of large numbers of Asian students is an important practice for Asian countries and Australia—for example China, because it is a major player in global business and main trading partners (Sheng, 2015). In addition, one of the aims of the internalisation of Australian higher education is to promote the cultural understanding between Asian countries and Australia (Welsh & Kostogriz, 2015). The international education journey provides students with the opportunity to study in world-class facilities and to network with fellow students who are from different cultural backgrounds. This offers

international students the opportunity to gain intercultural skills that will enable them to live and work in different cultural, language and global contexts in the future—a valuable result that is desirable in an ever-changing global world (Kell & Vogl, 2012).

In the Australian context, mastering English language skills is one of the difficulties that affects international students' experiences (Benzie, 2010; Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Mewett, 2010; Pham & Tran, 2015; Prescott & Hellstén, 2005). Pham and Tran (2015), for example, suggested that English is significant for international students because it is their medium of exercising intercultural communication with others. The participants in the Pham and Tran study sought to learn English as a form of cultural skill development that would enable them to communicate and build connections with the society that would provide a useful career network for them. The social satisfaction of these students can be largely shaped by their language skills, which, to a large extent, ensures their positive involvement in their social environments. However, several factors contribute to English language difficulties experienced among international students. One of the difficulties faced by international students in Australia is the approach taken in their previous learning of English (Park, 2006; Sawir, 2005; Zhang & Mi, 2010). In their home countries, they may have been taught English language through grammar and translation methods and how to use English in a standardised form. Their education may have been based on the assumption that mastering the English language depends mostly on understanding its written grammatical rules (Sawir, 2005). In addition, lack of confidence and experience in socialising in an English-speaking study context may influence international students' English learning (Novera, 2004; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas 2000; Sawir, 2005).

Others have stressed the importance of the non-linguistic factors that can influence international students' English language learning. According to Phakiti, Hirsh

and Woodrow (2013), personal factors, such as values, perceived difficulty of learning the language, self-efficacy and self-regulation are related to each other and to language learning. These authors found that personal values and motivation are positively connected with students' language and academic learning and their ability to engage in effective interactions with individuals in the host country in order to gain assistance to perform social functions, like making friends and gaining intercultural experience.

Other researchers found that language difficulties among international students may result in emotional insecurity that affects their dignity (Tananuraksakul & Hall, 2011). Overcoming English language barriers could accelerate the better adjustment of overseas students, and accommodate social and cultural issues that may arise within the host context. This is why most universities in Australia provide academic support programmes and sessions for these learners to address their challenges (Ashton-Hay, Wignell, & Evans, 2016).

1.2.3 Saudi Students in Australia

For Saudi students, all the above comments apply but like all other international student populations, there are other added considerations. Saudi Arabia is witnessing a strong growth in its economy (Bukhari & Denman, 2013). In the international education sector, rapidly developing economies influence the direction of overseas student mobility (Lasanowski, 2010). In Saudi Arabia, there is a perceived need to fill the gap in the workforce and to provide the knowledge and experience that is required to drive a developing economy that requires knowledge workers to be competitive in a globalising world. The Saudi government has acknowledged this with the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme (KASP) in 2005, which was designed to grant qualified Saudi students full-fee scholarships to study in universities that would furnish them with the latest knowledge in sciences and research (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). It is considered the

largest fully funded government scholarship programme, with over 120,000 students studying in more than 50 countries worldwide (Bukhari & Denman, 2013). The rationale behind this programme is to focus on the capacities of Saudi individuals and increase their professional and personal skills by enabling their mobility to attend international universities (Bukhari & Denman, 2013). The mission of KASP is 'to prepare and qualify Saudi Arabian human resources in an effective manner to compete on an international level in the labour market and in scientific research' (Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau in Canada, 2014, p. 1).

The specific goals of the KASP are:

- Developmental: to provide the local labour market with the required qualified Saudi individuals.

- Educational: to master the scientific disciplines by studying at globally recognised universities.

- Social: To give qualified Saudi individuals the opportunity to receive an international education.

- Cultural: To strengthen the cultural bonds with the other cultures and introduce the Saudi culture and values to the world (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015).

The Saudi government chose Australia as one of the main destinations for the students of KASP. In 2016, there were 7,984 students, with 3,822 students joining all education sectors in Australia: English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS), higher education, Vocational Education and Training (VET), schools and non-award studies (DET, 2016a). The number of studies that have investigated the academic, social and cultural experiences of students who have participated in this programme indicates the positive effect the KASP has achieved, and presumably many of its stated goals, have been met. In Australia, in particular, the

presence of a large number of Saudi students has attracted the interest of researchers wishing to examine the student experiences of this particular cohort (e.g., Alhazmi, 2013; Ata, 2015; Belchamber, 2011; Groves, 2015; Hilal et al., 2015; Midgley, 2010, 2011; Orth, 2015; Reid, Alsaiari, & Rosmilawati, 2015). These studies were driven by the need to explore the academic, cultural and religious practices of students who came from a society with very different practices from the host nation and the impact of encountering such diversity. These studies had a specific focus on Saudi students as the students come from a unique environment that is dominated by cultural and religious practices, such as gender segregation and observation of religious duties that make this a visible population given the necessity for prayer and for females' particular dress styles (Orth, 2015).

The presence of Saudi students in Australia has resulted in a body of literature that has examined the social and cultural transitional experiences of these students (e.g. Alhazmi, 2013; Midgley, 2010). However, an ongoing issue reported by many Saudi students in Australia is the problem of learning English as the language of scholarship. Therefore, the focus of this research is the need to learn the English language to a level where the student can communicate, write and study at the level required for higher education. As most Saudi students need to undertake extra English language studies when they first arrive in the host country, this research examined the language-learning experience of a specific cohort of students in an ESL class to investigate the language-learning strategies they used to promote optimal language learning. These students themselves had myriad interests and studied in different disciplines (see Chapter 4), but as international Saudi students learning English in Australia they share a particular experience. As the studies in second language learning have highlighted the need for students in this highly visible environment to develop strategies that enable them to

become proficient in the host language while maintaining their levels of confidence and wellbeing (Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006), language-learning strategy research has become even more relevant.

1.3 Language-Learning Strategies

With the publication of Rubin's (1975) and Stern's (1975) studies, research into language-learning strategies gained popularity in the field of applied linguistics (Macaro, 2006). Studying language-learning strategies was part of the shift from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred approach that made the process more accessible and meaningful for the learner (Lewis & Hurd, 2008). The early research into language-learning strategies focused mainly on how successful language learners employed strategies that could assist them to achieve greater proficiency (Grenfell &Harris, 1999). Research into successful language learners produced findings that encouraged scholars to seek theories that could explain what constitutes successful learning strategies and how these could be classified (Macaro, 2006). Although there is no agreed-upon definition of a language-learning strategy, there is a strong belief among language scholars that this area is 'one of the most fertile areas of language learning research' (MacIntyre, 1994, p. 185). Research has shown that success in language learning is not just identifying a set of strategies that can be taught to learners. Instead, other factors intervene to influence the choice and use of these strategies, such as gender, motivation, age, existing level of proficiency, cultural background, personal preference, learning style and the learning context. Even personality and the ability to take appropriate risks will influence outcomes. Language-learning strategies are important because they enable learners to actively involve themselves in self-directed learning that aims to improve their language proficiency and thus promote their self-confidence (Oxford, 1990).

According to Oxford (1990), learning strategies are 'specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more-self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations' (p. 8). Oxford provided a model to classify learning strategies into two main categories: direct and indirect strategies.

Direct strategies include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, while indirect strategies include metacognitive, affective and social strategies. The current thesis focuses on social strategies that involve asking questions; cooperating with others (peers or experts); and empathising with others, which includes cultural understanding and being aware of other's thoughts and feelings. The reason behind the choice of this particular category of strategies is that Saudi students are studying in a new learning context and come from a radically different culture. Therefore, it is important that they develop skills that enable them to make the transnational journey in terms of moving across very different languages and social practices. The experiences for Saudi international students at Australian universities will be shaped greatly by how they communicate with others in this specific context. As students living in different educational, cultural and linguistic contexts, they are more likely to face challenges during their stay in Australia. These challenges may contribute to their academic, social and cultural adjustment in the host country (Phakiti et al., 2013; Prescott & Hellstén, 2005; Robertson et al., 2000; Sawir, 2005).

1.4 The Research

1.4.1 Statement of the Issues Researched

The aim of this study was to explore the language-learning strategies that Saudi students use in their ESL context. In second-language-learning studies, language learning takes place in different contexts, such as learning English as a foreign language (EFL) where the English language is not widely used as a medium for interaction or

instruction (as in Saudi Arabia; Kamalizad & Samuel, 2016). ESL contexts are when the English language is the first language of the native speakers (Nguyen & Godwyll, 2010). As the Saudi students in this study come from an EFL environment, the ESL context of English learning in Australia presents some opportunities and challenges that will have an influence on how successful their studies will be in Australia. The students will try to develop strategies that will assist them to adapt to the transitional experience of living and studying in Australia.

Since the 1970s, researchers have been trying to define and classify the strategies that assist second language learners to better achieve success in their studies (Cohen, 2011). Effective instruction influences the choice and use of strategies for learning a language (Chamot, 2005); however, there are other important individual and external variables. This study explored two variables that have been found to influence the use of language-learning strategies among learners: cultural background and the context of learning. The first variable explored in this study was cultural background. The ethnic background variable has been established in ESL studies and it creates differences between learners in their second language acquisition (Ellis, 1994).

However, in the research of language-learning strategies these studies are limited (Grainger, 2012), and some of these studies found that learners from specific ethnic backgrounds tend to use specific strategies differently from other students (e.g., Hong- Nam & Leavell, 2006; Lee & Oxford, 2008). The second variable, contextual factors, was highlighted by researchers to influence the use of language-learning strategies by language learners (Gao, 2006, 2010; Jang & Jiménez, 2011).

From the language-learning strategies, this thesis will focus on the social strategies that are one part of the indirect strategies classified by Oxford (1990). These strategies include 'actions that learners choose to take in order to interact with other

learners and with other native speakers' (Cohen 1996, p. 5). As the early research of language-learning strategies was mostly influenced by the cognitive theoretical framework, there is a little emphasis on these strategies and their role in language learning (Harish, 2014). The Saudi learners explored in this study are learning in a new environment and they use these strategies to interact inside and outside the classroom. Because social strategies have an emphasis on individual action and the importance of context, more knowledge of the development of positive strategies to engage with language learning in a second language environment should provide useful information to guide the design of the learning environment and assist individuals with different language-learning needs and skill levels.

1.4.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the following:

I.   This study examined Saudi students learning English in an ESL context. This cohort of international students is special as they come from a very conservative and religious society. The studies that explored their social and academic experiences are not enough to be compared with other students in Australian higher education. Research on Saudi students' ESL experiences contributes to the challenges of the instructors and lecturers who are teaching Saudi students (Belchamber, 2011).

II.   This thesis adds to the studies that considered the international experiences of Saudi students in ESL contexts (e.g., Al-Otaibi, 2004; Alwahibee, 2000). As the thesis emphasises the contextual factors in language learning, it provides information on how Saudi students use English language strategies in a specific context and it comments on characteristics of the particular context and the social culture of learning

that exists within the context. In this case, all students were ESL and complementarity between their differences (e.g., language background, and their learning relationships and practices). This perspective will inform Australian institutions and ESL countries about the general and individual features of Saudi students as users of language-learning strategies to acquire English. It will show the cultural, social and practical frames within which Saudi learners can learn English in ESL contexts. . This research brings emic perspective to the experience of the Saudi students, confirming of the findings of previous studies that were designed and conducted from an etic perspective.

III.   The study used a sociocultural theoretical approach (Aimin, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978) to investigate the use of social strategies among the students in this study. Theories of language acquisition, second language learning and the value of the use of social interactive strategies were valuable for this research, and the sociocultural frame was chosen because the research was contextual and heavily influenced by cultural and historical differences among the individuals, as well as heavily reliant on the design of relationships within the context of the English learning environment (Zhang, Wanyi, & Wanyi, 2013). The research was designed to add to the theoretical understanding of the design of learning contexts for international students requiring proficiency in English and how specific groups and individuals can exploit particular types of social learning strategies to optimise results. The study was a mixed-method study as there is an acknowledgement in the research community that early language-learning strategy research (Rubin, 1975) is enhanced

when the perspective of individuals is added (Gao, 2010). In this case the experiences discussed by the participants provided valuable insights and strengthened the emphasis on context that was adopted in a sociocultural framework, the approach used in this research.

1.4.3 Research Questions

The current study examined the social language strategies used by Saudi students studying in the Australian ESL context. To achieve the aims of the study, the following question was addressed:

- How can the Australian ESL context encourage the use of effective social language strategies to encourage optimal learning?

To answer this overriding question the following subsidiary questions were investigated:

  a. What are the language-learning strategies that Saudi students use in a particular ESL context?

  b. What are the most common language-learning strategies used by Saudi students in the ESL context?

  c. What is the role of social language strategies used by Saudi students in the ESL context?

  d. What is the importance of social language strategies in the ESL context?

1.4.4 Theoretical Approach and Research Design

This study applied sociocultural theory (SCT) as its theoretical framework to guide the research. However, the research into language-learning strategies originated from cognitive theory, which explored second language acquisition from the point of view of a focus on psychological processes that can be measured by comprehension and production (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012). These two language functions are

often referred to as receptive and expressive language. Within this theory, there are a number of models that explore how language learners employ strategies in their learning. One of these cognitive approaches is the information processing cognitive model developed by Anderson (1983). This model underpins the explanations of several scholars for the concept of language-learning strategies, such as Oxford (1990). Oxford applied Anderson's theory to classify learning strategies into direct and indirect strategies and to develop her questionnaire (the SILL) to measure these strategies.

According to Oxford (2003), the traditional approach to language-learning strategies examined the characteristics of individuals as aggregated into groups, ignoring the highly dynamic and socially interactive relationships that exist and can assist people in learning and teaching a second language. Therefore, SCT enables the researcher to examine the learner's social experiences in detail, as well as the cognitive processes required to learn a second language and how the social environment can mediate learning through the relationships and meaning-making (Aimin, 2013) that can be developed within the social context with peers and teachers (Oxford, 2003). SCT shows how 'learning is situated' (Oxford, 2003, p. 276), and this means that any learning is situated within a certain social and cultural context, at a particular time and place, and involving specific individuals. In the current study, the two theoretical frameworks were used to explain the findings.

This thesis has adopted a mixed-method approach in order to deeply investigate the personal experiences of the Saudi learners and the variables associated with them. The qualitative data will allow the researcher to interpret meanings assigned to experience. To conduct the study, two methods were used to explore the questions of the study. First, the quantitative phase administered the SILL questionnaire and 65 Saudi students volunteered to participate. The SILL questionnaire in this research was

used as a secondary method to give a general picture of the language-learning strategies used by Saudi students in this ESL context. Then, the second phase was applied, that is, the qualitative method, where semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 Saudi students (10 males and 8 females). Using a combination of data adds depth to the discussion and provides insights into actual learners' experiences. Recent researchers still implementing the SILL have stated that it is much more valuable when used in conjunction with the perceptions of those experiencing ESL in a foreign environment (White, Schramm, & Chamot, 2007).

1.4.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis has been arranged into eight chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the thesis to contextualise it and presents a justification of why language-learning strategies are significant in the world of the international student experience and the learning of ESL. This literature covers aspects about the use and importance of English as a global language, international education in Australia, Saudi students in Australia and what language-learning strategies are. The research questions are presented and the thesis design described. This first chapter therefore introduces the content, research methods and theoretical frame adopted for the research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

.This chapter examines the role of social context in the support of the use of social language-learning strategies by Saudi international students studying ESL in Australia. Second language learning is an enormous area given the role of language in human activity and this review is selective, focusing on the language background of the participants, definitions and models of research regarding social language strategies in the ESL context. As this was a mixed-methods study, the theoretical frames

underpinning the qualitative and qualitative methods are explored and relevant studies and findings summarised.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

This chapter explains the research approach and the choice of mixed methods for this research. The identified importance of including the participants' voice and an increased emphasis on context are highlighted. Analytical decisions are described and the contribution this research adds to the already large volume of work in this area is covered in the discussion of the rationale.

Chapter 4: Findings of the Questionnaire

The aim of this chapter is to provide the quantitative findings of the SILL questionnaire and to present some descriptive analysis of the results. This chapter covers how the questionnaire was administered, the questionnaire results and their implications for the language strategies participants employed in their ESL context.

Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

In Chapter 5, the results of the qualitative interviews are categorised according to main themes arising from the participants' interviews. These main categories are expanded to include issues like the advantages of a multicultural group of speakers, which arose under the first heading.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In this chapter, the results from the two sets of data are brought together and combined to address the research questions.

Chapter 7: Technological Mediated Language Learning and Language- Learning Strategies

This chapter explores the use of technology as a social strategy that Saudi students used in their ESL context. This theme emerged as a factor influencing Saudi

students' use of strategies to mediate their language learning in the ESL Australian context. The use of these technologies is part of the social context of the learners in this ESL environment.

Chapter 8: Reflections on the Questions, Implications, Limitations and Conclusions

Chapter 8 wraps up the findings of this study, reflects the research questions in this thesis and summarises the conclusion and contribution of this research. New material emerging is contextualised and the implications presented.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Outline of the Chapter

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Background

    2.2.1 Education in Saudi Arabia

    2.2.2 English Language in Saudi Arabia

    2.2.3 International Students and Second Language Learning

2.3 Early Research on Language-Learning Strategies

    2.3.1 Definition of Language-Learning Strategies

2.4 Learning Styles and Language Strategies

2.5 The Good Language Learner Model

2.6 Classification of Language-Learning Strategies

    2.6.1 Social Strategies

2.7 The Cognitive Theoretical Frameworks of Learning Strategies

    2.7.1 Interlanguage Theory

    2.7.2 Bialystok's Second Language Learning Model

    2.7.3 Anderson's Adaptive Control of Thought Model

2.8 Variables Influencing Language-Learning Strategies

    2.8.1 Cultural Background

    2.8.2 The Context of Learning

2.9 Vygotsky and Second Language Learning

2.10 Vygotsky and Language-Learning Strategies

2.11 Technology and Second Language Learning

2.12 Saudi Students and Language-Learning Studies

2.1 Introduction

The focus of this thesis is on Saudi students in Australia enrolling in higher education programmes; specifically, the research examines their experiences in studying and learning English in an ESL context. As English language learners in an ESL context, Saudi students are constantly using social strategies to communicate with the world around them. The importance of the learning strategies lies in that they help researchers understand how learners process language and how their language learning develops (Ellis, 1994). As the choice and use of language-learning strategies are influenced by a number of factors, such as age, gender, ethnicity and motivation (Griffiths, 2003), the current study has examined how the social context (ESL context) has shaped the choice of social strategies that Saudi students prefer and employ in their language learning. This thesis contributes to the field of language studies and research on international students by exploring the role of the social context in encouraging social strategies that assist students to successfully learn a second language. The study aimed to examine the opportunities that were available in this social context of learning that could develop international students' learning strategies, and thus their overall language learning.

In addition, the thesis highlights some of the obstacles that Saudi students encounter in the context they are situated in for their language-learning classes. The decision to research the experiences of a particular group of students in an English class at a university stemmed from the need to focus on Saudi students, as accounted for a significate number of international student population and share similar needs and challenges as international students studying in Australia. The second reason is because the English classes run by universities for international students are a common

occurrence and because of the English testing regimes tend to have similar curricular. An evaluation of the potential of this setting is, therefore, significant.

This literature review introduces the education system of Saudi Arabia and discusses the English language-learning experiences these students had before coming to Australia. The literature on social language strategies is examined, and the theoretical ideas behind the general design and choice of methods are unpacked as a background to how they have been combined in this thesis (Chapter 3). Given the Saudi focus of the thesis and the importance of context and recognition of prior learning, the literature review starts with a brief contextual description of the system Saudi students have come from.

2.2 Background

2.2.1 Education in Saudi Arabia

The educational system in Saudi Arabia has shaped the perceptions of Saudi students and this is the educational experience they bring to their studies in Australia. The Saudi Arabian educational system prioritises the principles of Islam throughout all levels of education. The education system has two objectives: religious and developmental (Roy, 1992). Saudi students are taught about Islam in the classroom from the earliest age. The teachers must be highly respected and students should raise their hands if they want to speak in the class. Male and female students are educated in separate schools and they are also taught by teachers of the same gender (Heyn, 2013). The teachings of the Islamic beliefs are part of the Saudi teaching system as Islam supports learning and seeking knowledge in every discipline. The prophet Mohammed, Peace Be Upon Him, was reported to have said: 'seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim' (Al-Otaibi, 2004).

In 1945, the founder of Saudi Arabia, King Abdul Aziz Bin Saud, started a national programme to establish schools countrywide (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Australia, 2015). There were 3,283 schools in 1970 and this figure reached 26,000 in 2010. The first university was opened in 1957, now known as King Saudi University, and now there are 26 universities distributed throughout Saudi Arabian regions (Ministry of Education, 2015). The students in Saudi Arabia attend kindergarten, followed by six years at elementary school, three years of intermediate and then three years of secondary school. In secondary school, the students can choose between two streams: academic schools to study science and arts or vocational schools to learn a trade (Heyn, 2013). All forms of education in Saudi Arabia, including elementary, intermediate, and secondary and higher education students, either university or colleges, are provided free of charge for the students. Since this thesis is concerned with Saudi students and how they learn English in an ESL context, I will provide here a brief introduction to English language learning in Saudi Arabia and the factors that influence the learning and teaching of English in the Saudi context.

2.2.2 English Language in Saudi Arabia

The English language has an important place in the Saudi educational system. The Saudi government recognised its importance and introduced it in 1929 as a subject to be taught in a few selected schools, and then in the 1940s it became a mainstream subject (Al-Twairish, 2009). The main goals of teaching English in Saudi Arabia are:

- to enable the student to acquire basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing)
- to develop student's awareness of the importance of English as a means of international communication

- to develop student's awareness of the cultural, economic, religious and social issues of the society and prepare them to participate in their solutions

- to provide students with the linguistic basis that would enable them to participate in transferring other nations' scientific and technological advances that can enhance the progress of the nation

- to enable students to benefit from the English-speaking nations, which would enhance and develop the concepts and respect of cultural differences between nations (UrRahman & Alhaisoni, 2013).

Although Arabic is the main language in Saudi Arabia, English has an essential role to play in Saudi community so EFL is important (UrRahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). English is the medium of instruction in some subjects at the tertiary level, such as medicine, dentistry, engineering and science. In some colleges, passing a standardised exam (e.g., TOEFL or IELTS) is an entry requirement for the student to join the school, such as medicine. On an economic level, the English language is a factor that influences Saudi economic relationships and trading in international markets. Technological advancement has enhanced the role of the English language in Saudi society, where government websites are now bilingual (Arabic and English) as well as some well-known English newspapers and media channels. On the other hand, with the expansions in the Saudi higher education sector, the access to language classes has increased for both Saudi male and female students equally (Al Remaih, 2016). The traditional view of Saudi females' education may have contributed to the unequal opportunities that they previously had compared with Saudi male counterparts.

English language teaching starts from the 7th grade and ends in the 12th grade in Saudi Arabia. For each grade, the student is taught from two to six hours per week.

However, after these six years of English learning, it has been found the English language skills of most Saudi students have not reached a satisfactory level (Al-Otaibi, 2004; UrRahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). Students often underestimate the importance of the English language and they consider it a subject to be passed at examination, not to develop their language skills. Al-Otaibi (2004) reports that some of the students have difficulty pronouncing words and cannot write a cohesive paragraph. Some factors that have been identified as having influenced the linguistic skills of Saudi students include the overuse of traditional teaching methods (memorisation, repetition, grammar and translation-based methods), the role of the teacher and teacher training, effective teaching methods, the differing levels of exposure to English language and little motivation from learners to learn English (Elyas & Al Grigri, 2014).

Therefore, to increase the linguistic abilities of individuals, the Saudi government decided to offer opportunities to learn English in countries where English is the native language while studying for tertiary degrees. As part of the stated purpose of the scholarship programme, KASP aimed to expose the Saudi learners to a different society to attain higher academic qualifications and to learn a foreign language, especially English (Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau in Canada, 2014). A number of studies have been conducted to examine the impact of the KASP on Saudi students and their results support this view (e.g., Alhazmi, 2013; Giroir, 2014; Hilal et al., 2015; Hofer, 2009; Shaw, 2009).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Australia was one of the destinations chosen for the scholarship programme. Table 2.1 indicates the numbers of Saudi students enrolled in courses in the various sectors from 2013 to 2016 (DET, 2016a).

Table 2.1

Total Numbers of Enrolments and Commencements of Saudi Students in Australia

Sector	Enrolments				Commencements			
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2013	2014	2015	2016
Higher education	4,952	4,817	4,747	4,473	1,632	1,759	1,698	1,568
VET	659	513	390	402	295	278	211	192
Schools	25	16	10	9	10	6	3	5
ELICOS	3,934	4,395	4,405	2,797	2,787	3,129	2,984	1,901
Non- award	263	278	319	303	147	177	170	156
Total	9,833	10,019	9,871	7,984	4,871	5,349	5,066	3,822

VET = Vocational and technical education

ELICOS = English language intensive course for overseas students Non-award = Courses without accreditation

As stated in Chapter 1, the presence of Saudi students has drawn attention from researchers to investigate Saudi international student experiences in Australia. For example, Midgley (2010) looked at the comparative experiences of a number of Saudi male students and he found contradictory results among them in relation to their attitudes towards learning English. Some of Midgley's participants were interested in learning the English language so they could make contacts, learn about the Australian culture and understand the Australian lifestyle, while others were satisfied with learning English so they could meet academic requirements, and they were relatively disinterested in paying attention to the cultural aspects of their Australian experience. In another study, Alhazmi (2013) investigated how living in a mixed-gendered environment could influence the experiences of Saudi students living in the Australian

ESL context. Alhazmi (2013) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study to describe how Saudi students had different views towards their experiences of living in a mixed-gendered society. As the students came from a segregated culture, he was interested in how this influenced their study and social lives. In a different study, Alnatheer (2013) looked at how motivation could enhance communicative competence between two Saudi groups: one group studied English in Australia and another studied English in Saudi Arabia. The researcher found the Australian group tended to be more motivated to communicate while the Saudi group were less motivated. In addition to the influence of the learning environment on the motivation of language learning, the researcher found teaching strategies were also different between the two groups. As is the case for other groups of international students, Alnatheer (2013) concluded that language skills are the main factor that could shape the experiences of Saudi students while they study in Australia.

As individuals who are living in a new social context, international students are subjected to a number of difficulties that influence their academic and social adjustment. In terms of Saudi students, researchers identified language obstacles as one of the main factors that shape their experiences in their ESL countries (Al Morshedi, 2011; Alnusair, 2000; AlQahtani, 2015; Al-Shehry, 1989; Caldwell, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Hofer, 2009; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Razek & Coyner, 2013; Rundles, 2013; Shaw, 2009). Specifically, the Saudi female students tend to face more challenges in ESL context compared with their male counterparts. This is mainly attributed to the fact that they tend to observe the cultural traditions of dress in ESL contexts (Hebbani & Wills, 2012; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Mrayan & Saleh, 2016; Szilagyi, 2015).

2.2.3 International Students and Second Language Learning

It has been well established in the literature that English language challenges contribute to the social and academic adjustment of international students in their host countries. Yang et al. (2006) examined the cross-cultural adaptation of a number of international students in an ESL context and how it related to their linguistic skills.

They found that developing students' linguistic and communicative skills to enable them to use the language in comfort is more likely to contribute to a positive experience during their stay. The researchers asserted that 'communicative competence in the host language directly promotes better well-being, perhaps because the language provides a vehicle of self-expression and identity negotiation, which is psychologically rewarding' (p. 502). With their linguistic skills international students will be able to navigate through host culture, build social relationships and to have a sense of belonging (Fallon, Bycroft, & Network, 2009; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Koehne, 2005; Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006). Considering other personal differences and learning styles that may shape the personality of the learners themselves, researchers view linguistic abilities as the most important variables that could link international students with their new environment and mediate their experiences.

In the Australian context, Prescott and Hellstén (2005) conducted a study looking at the social and academic experiences of international students' transitional experiences in the Australian educational and social culture. They interviewed 48 international students and found that variations in communication styles presented problems for the students. For example, as politeness protocols are rooted in the cultural traditions of most Asian international students, they may feel inhibited about commenting on a lecturer's individual speaking style or pronunciation even if they have

29

trouble understanding the lecturer. To avoid confrontation and embarrassment, these

students do not seek help from lecturers and other students. The study identified

learning practices of international students that could also affect their inclusion and

social activities within the Australian community, both academic and social. For

instance, the concept of success and achievement for some international students means

exerting a lot of effort and spending much time studying and preparing for their

lectures. This could increase their social isolation, which would impact on their social

experience. The study concluded that there are some cultural patterns of international

students that, if better understood, could improve their social and academic trajectories

in the new environment.

Teaching methods in the English language programmes in Australian

universities have been criticised because that they do not adequately equip international

students with English language skills that are required for both academic work and

social inclusion (Haugh, 2015). This has been thought to reflect lower standards in

some Australian universities in the international education sector; moreover, it could

affect Australian society in relation to education standards as well as the future

knowledge workforce, as many international students permanently stay in Australia

after graduation (Benzie, 2010; Birrell, 2006). On the other hand, international students'

prior English experiences and preparation (Sawir, 2005), learning styles, and

willingness and motivation to participate and learn are important factors that could

influence their experiences as well. Saudi students in Australian universities are mostly

sponsored by the Saudi government and they tend not to prefer long permanent stays in

Australia after graduation, unlike most international students (Shepherd & Rane, 2012).

As mentioned in the previous section, in the ESL contexts, the English language

difficulties are among the most important factors of Saudi students' experiences. In a

study conducted on Arab students learning in ESL contexts, researchers found that Saudi students tend to prefer the aural style of learning (Sywelem, Al-Harbi, Fathema, & Witte, 2012). There are some researchers who indicated that this preference may be associated to students having better listening and speaking skills compared with their writing and reading skills. This could be because of their learning style of English in Saudi Arabia, which focuses on rote memorisation and grammar, with less focus on reading and producing written texts (Flaitz, 2003; Packer & Piechocirski, 2013; Shaw, 2009). On the other hand, the cultural association between these skills and how the language learners use them in their ESL context is not entirely accurate (Briguglio & Smith, 2012; Lu, Le, & Fan, 2012; Tran, 2010). For example, Chinese students' difficulties with oral skills are often related to their cultural traditions and the language-teaching styles in China. Despite the influence of these factors, there are other aspects that could affect their language learning, such as the educational environment of the learning institution, the workload and teaching methodology, and other contextual factors related to the social context of learning (Yates & Wahid, 2013).

2.3 Early Research on Language-Learning Strategies

From the mid-1970s, the major focus of applied linguistics research shifted from language-teaching methods and products to how second language learners process, store and retrieve language materials (Lewis & Hurd, 2008). One dimension of this research was to find out how language learners manage their own learning and what strategies they use to improve their linguistic skills. The study that first raised interest in this area of research was conducted by Rubin in 1975. She aimed to investigate the strategies that successful second language learners deploy when learning a language. The interest in language-learning strategies research was clearly visible in the number of subsequent descriptive research studies that emerged after Rubin's pioneer study to identify the

characteristics of effective learners (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Researchers such as Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975) explored what better strategies second language learners use, or what behaviours they engage in, that enable them to achieve better results than their peers. Is it feasible to help less successful learners to become more successful by teaching them some of the strategies that the descriptive studies proposed are frequently used by successful language learners? It was believed that a successful language learner model would be enough to discover why some learners surpass others (Grenfell & Harris, 1999). This research was essential in laying the foundations of strategy research and indicating the importance of the learner's contribution to the process of language learning.

2.3.1 Definition of Language-Learning Strategies

Although the body of language-learning strategies research has been conducted for more than 30 years, it is apparently difficult to find a consensus among researchers in the field on what constitutes these strategies. In a very broad definition, Rubin (1975, 43) suggested language-learning strategies are 'the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge'. Bialystok (1978, p. 76) defined language-learning strategies as 'optional methods for exploiting available information to increase the proficiency of second language learning'. Stern (1983) differentiated between *strategy,* which 'is best reserved for general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by language learners' and *techniques,* which 'refer to particular forms of observable learning behaviour, more or less consciously employed by the learner' (p. 405). The previous definitions suggest that language learners are at the discretion of the language strategies that they bring to the language-learning task to increase their performance.

Other researchers provided more specific definitions that highlight some of the important features of language learner strategies. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) in their model of second language learner strategies use the definition 'special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information' (p. 1). In the same vein, Oxford (1989) stated that language-learning strategies are 'behaviours or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and more enjoyable' (p. 235). In Oxford's opinion, the use of the *learning strategies* term in other fields, such as education, is indicative of how important and influential the term is. However, the technical definitions of the term *learning strategies* as operations used by learners to aid acquisition, retrieval and storing of information are not sufficient to show the richness and excitement of the concept of language-learning strategies. Oxford (1990) presented a new version of her definition of this term where she views language-learning strategies as 'specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations' (p. 8).

In a comprehensive definition, Cohen (2011) defines language strategies as 'thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalised by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance' (p. 7). In this definition, Cohen indicates two special characteristics of learning strategies. Choice is one of these characteristics and it indicates that the learner is fully, or at least partially, aware of the actions he or she is engaged in to enhance learning. Griffiths (2013) explains more about this feature and states that the strategy of selection depends on a number of variables: individual, for example, motivation, personality, age, learning style, ethnicity level of proficiency; contextual, when the learner is studying in a distance-education

environment where they are isolated from the physical environment of peers, teachers and library resources, purpose of learning; or if students are studying for their own interest, personal satisfaction or preparing for a high-stake exam. All the previous variables may interrelate to influence the choice of learning strategies adopted by the learner to achieve goals. The second special characteristic of Cohen's definition is consciousness, which differentiates between a strategic, purposeful action and a non-strategic action. When language learners learn a second language, they make conscious decisions and perform purposeful actions to perform tasks. Without such conscious strategies, it would be difficult for them to acquire the language (Cohen, 2011; Griffiths, 2013).

Also, another important issue is the specificity and generality of strategies in learning. According to Stern (1983), the learner's behaviours and actions can be divided into strategies and techniques. He defined strategies as 'general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learners' (p. 405), while techniques are 'particular forms of observable learning behaviour more or less consciously employed by the learners' (p. 405). In the same vein, Seliger (1984) differentiated between the strategies and tactics, where strategies are subconscious mechanisms that control learning, while tactics are conscious mechanisms used by learners to organise their learning, assess their progress and handle demands of the language tasks (Trendak, 2015).

From the previous definitions for the term language -learning strategies, it is clear that each researcher is looking at the term language-learning strategies from his or her own epistemological point of view (Ellis, 1994). Whereas some researchers believe strategies are behavioural (e.g., Oxford, 1989), others view them as cognitive (e.g., Wenden, 1986). For other researchers, defining the concept of strategy may combine

both mental and behavioural features, as Ellis (1994) views that a strategy 'consisted of mental or behavioural activity related to some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition or language use' (p. 529). Cohen (2011) distinguishes between these differences by stating that some strategies are behavioural and easily observable, such as asking questions for correction, but others are not easily observable, such as paraphrasing when the product is not obviously a paraphrase of something else, or purely mental, as a learner who is making mental translations into the native language while reading.

Tarone (1981) provided a distinction between communication strategies, learning strategies and production strategies. She defined a communication strategy as a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not need to be shared' (p. 294). A learning strategy is 'an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language' (p. 295).

Production strategies are 'an attempt to use one's linguistic system efficiently and clearly with a minimum effort' (p. 289). The difference between communication strategies and production strategies is that the former are used to convey a message and the latter lack negotiation of meaning, such as using prefabricated patterns, discourse patterns, planning and rehearsal. However, although the distinctions made by Tarone (1981) are clearly stated between the three types of strategies, there are some situations where it is hard to identify whether the learner is applying a strategy to communicate or learn, or for both purposes at the same time.

However, the consensus that is visible from the definitions of a language-learning strategy is that they highlight the influence such strategies can have in the learning process. Such strategies '… facilitate the acquisition, storage, or retrieval of information …' (Chamot, O'Malley, Küpper, & Impink-Hernandez, 1987, p. 12); '…

contribute to the development of the language system …' (Rubin, 1987, p. 23); '… move towards proficiency and competence in a second or foreign language' (Oxford & Crookall, 1989, p. 404); and '... are intended to facilitate language acquisition and communication' (MacIntyre, 1994, p. 190). Language-learning scholars converge on certain points of the features of choice, use and application of language-learning strategies by language learners. Below is a summary of the major studies listing the features of language-learning strategies:

- Language-learning strategies contribute to enhanced learning. In a survey of a number of the field experts carried out by Cohen (2011), it was shown that they all agreed on the fact that these strategies enhance both learning and the use of language.

- As the language-learning strategies research is conceptualised from the communicative competence research (Macaro, 2006), the main goal of the language-learning strategies is to assist learners to attain communicative competence (Oxford, 1990). Through these strategies, learners can actively participate and interact within their environment and enhance their own learning.

  - Learners could use strategies in general and specific ways to support their communicative competence. In general terms, they may use strategies, such as planning and focusing on their learning, to guide their progress. The affective strategies develop their learners' self-confidence, which is needed for interaction with others. Social strategies could support their learning by increased interaction and empathetic understanding. By contrast, the strategies can be used in specific ways as well. Cognitive strategies

such as memory imagery and structural review of what is learned

can be used to strengthen the grammatical accuracy of learners.

- Language-learning strategies are problem oriented and they are used when there

is a problem that needs to be solved (Ellis, 1994). When learners need to

accomplish a task or solve a problem, they use tools to achieve their goals. So,

for example, cognitive strategies, are used to comprehend a foreign language-

reading passage.

- Language-learning strategies make learning easier, faster and more enjoyable.

They allow learners to develop knowledge about themselves and this awareness

makes learning more satisfying and enriching (Cohen, 2011).

Research has shown that there is a link between learning styles and language

strategies. There are several theoretical frameworks that have tried to identify learning

styles and then categorise them.

2.4 Learning Styles and Language Strategies

Oxford identified a number of learning styles that are among those most

associated with second language learning: sensory preferences, personality types,

desired degree of generality, and biological differences (Oxford, 2003). Learners tend to

approach their learning in different ways and what is preferred by a group of learners

might not suit another group. Reid (1987) found that some Asian students are often

highly visual learners, while the Hispanic learners tend to be more auditory.

Specifically, the Japanese ESL learner, Reid found to be the least non-auditory

learners. So, the point here is that cultural orientations have an influence on the way

ESL learners approach their learning (Oxford & Anderson, 1995).

However, the findings obtained about the relationship between learning styles

and learning strategies are inconclusive (Trendak, 2015). Ellis (1994) argues that it is

hard to validate the argument that a group of learners characterised by special learning styles are more likely to succeed or achieve than their peers who may have different learning styles. It is commonly believed that an individual's learning style is fairly fixed, however, there is evidence that it is possible to assist learners form their learning styles in ways that will enhance their learning and this is done by employing particular strategies (Trendak, 2015). It is therefore recommended that language instructors assess the learner's' learning style and then try to stretch their learning by introducing them to other styles that require different learning strategies (Cohen, 2011).

2.5 The Good Language Learner Model

This review of the literature started by giving a glimpse of the emergence of the language-learning strategies research and how pioneer studies drew attention to the importance of the concept of a good language learner (GLL). Most of the studies conducted in that earlier period focused on examining the features and qualities of successful language learners and what learning strategies they employ that make them better than their peers. According to Grenfell and Harris (1999), the main purpose of the GLL research was twofold: to raise awareness of the metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective processes that are involved in second language learning; and to assist less successful second language learners to learn new strategies that would help them improve their linguistic level.

In 1975, Rubin conducted a study by observing students in classrooms, talking to *good language learners* and to ESL teachers. Then she listed a number of language-learning strategies reported by the successful language learners. She found that these successful learners were willing, accurate guessers, had a strong drive to communicate, were often uninhibited, focused on the patterns and forms of the language, practised as much as they could, and monitored their speech and the speech of others. In the same

period, Stern (1975) conducted a study on GLL strategies and arrived at a list of 10 strategies used by successful second language learners (pp. 311–316):

- – a personal learning style or positive learning strategies

- – an active approach to the learning task

- – a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language and empathy with its speakers

- – technical know-how about how to tackle a language

- – strategies of experimentation and planning, with the object of developing the new language into an ordered system and of revising this system progressively

- – constant searching for meaning

- – willingness to use the language in real communication

- – self-monitoring and critical sensitivity to language use

- – developing the target language more and more as a separate reference system and learning to think in it.

In 1983, Stern reviewed the language-learning research and identified four main strategies that successful second language learners are likely to employ: *active planning strategies*, which are, for example, selecting goals and sub-goals for learning, recognising stages of development of learning and actively participating in the process of learning. Secondly, Stern considered *academic learning strategies* and what they involved; these strategies included paying attention to the linguistic features of the target language, comparing the target language with their first language, conscious learning, monitoring their performance and revising until they achieved progress in the target language and viewed the language as a tool to acquire knowledge. S*ocial learning strategies* were another category and these strategies were those where successful language learners would seek communicative contact with native speakers of

the target language, develop communication strategies and actively participate in authentic language use. Finally, Stern discussed *affective strategies* and how successful language learners are able to approach their learning with a positive frame of mind.

They are able to develop the energy required to overcome frustration and the emotional and motivational difficulties of language learning. Stern highlighted that these important strategies are not used equally by learners and are not employed at all times.

Extending on this literature, a number of researchers also tried to shed light on successful language learners and the strategies they employ in second language learning (e.g., Naiman, Froanhlich, Stern, & Toedesco, 1978). However, the GLL model has been criticised by several scholars, such as Skehan (1989), who said that results obtained from the successful learners' research should be treated with caution as the strategies used by the *good learners* in a particular study might be also used by the less successful language learners. So, according to Skehan, 'the GLL strategies cannot be claimed to be causal' (p. 76). The GLL model did not effectively answer the questions of the good learning strategies research. It is still not easy to know what a successful language learner is doing and to catalogue the strategies they are using in learning a language and then train other learners to improve their performance (Grenfell & Harris, 1999). This point was criticised by Oxford (2003) who stated that there is 'no single set of strategies always used by good language learners' (p. 10). Studies have shown that less successful learners also use learning strategies but in a random and uncontrolled way, whereas, successful learners use the strategies in a more targeted and relevant way to the language task. Also, O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo and Küpper (1985) found that strategy instruction is important in developing learners' abilities to use the strategies in their learning. In the early research of the language-learning

strategies, there were some researchers who tried to classify the strategies that are used in language learning.

2.6 Classification of Language-Learning Strategies

Bialystok (1978) presented a model that is composed of four strategies: (a) formal practising, which means knowledge of the target language; (b) functional practising, which is using the language in communicative situations; (c) monitoring, which involves noticing errors; (d) inferencing, which is guessing. Rubin (1981) provided a categorisation of the learning strategies where she divided them into two categories: strategies that may directly contribute to learning (there are six: clarification/verification, monitoring, memorisation, guessing/inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice) and strategies that may indirectly contribute to learning (creating opportunities for practice, production tricks).

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classified the strategies relying on Anderson's Adaptive Control of Thought model. They identified three major categories of strategies: cognitive, metacognitive and affective/social strategies. Cognitive strategies directly process the incoming information in order to enhance learning. They can be the rehearsal, organising and grouping of words and summarising that have been learned.

Metacognitive strategies are used in processes that include planning for the task, planning to listen for keywords and phrases, and evaluating language production after the event. The last category is affective/social strategies, such as cooperation with other speakers and asking questions. Because of the cognitive theoretical framework adopted in O'Malley and Chamot's classification, a number of scholars (e.g., Macaro, 2006) criticised this model on the grounds that strategies cannot occur purely on the cognitive level.

Oxford (1990), presented a comprehensive taxonomy of language-learning strategies that is still widely used in studies that investigate language-learning strategies (see Figure 2.1). Her classification also relies on cognitive psychology and it was developed mainly for inventory applications. According to Oxford, there are two categories of language-learning strategies: direct strategies and indirect strategies. The direct strategies are those that require mental processing of the language. This category involves three subcategories: memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. The memory strategies help the learner store and retrieve the new information when needed, such as creating mental linkages and associations, reviewing what is being learned and arranging information into different categories to be accessed when needed. Cognitive strategies are found to be the most used strategies among language learners (Oxford, 1990), such as practising, receiving and sending messages, analysing information and reasoning techniques to seek meanings. The compensation subcategory means that language learners develop the ability to use their new language knowledge for either comprehension or production. Examples of compensation strategies are guessing and using linguistic and non-linguistic clues to extract the meaning of words learners do not know.

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │  Language Learning Strategies │
                    │  Oxford's Taxonomy (1990)     │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                         │                  │
              ┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
              │ Direct Strategies │   │ Indirect Strategies │
              └──────────────────┘   └──────────────────┘
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Figure with boxes: Memory Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, Compensation Strategies (under Direct Strategies); Metacognitive Strategies, Affective Strategies, Social Strategies (Explained in *Figure 2.2*) (under Indirect Strategies).
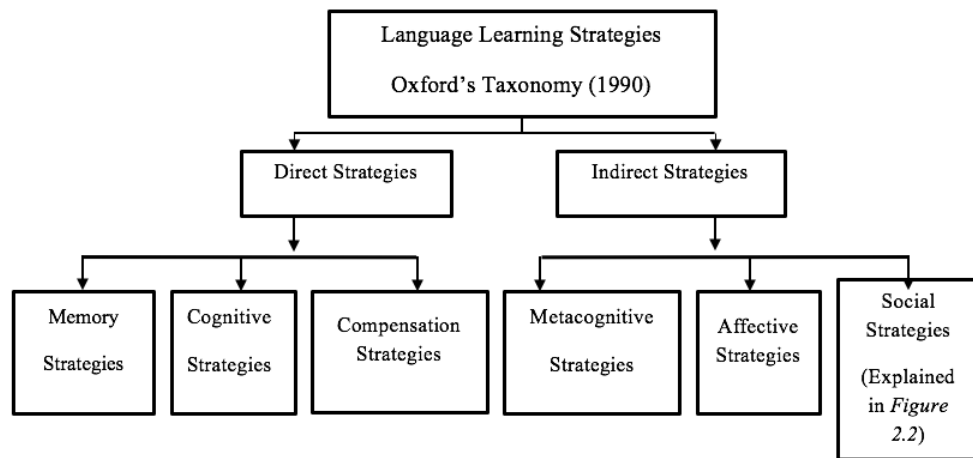
Figure 2.1. Oxford's taxonomy of language-learning strategies.

At the end of the taxonomy, Oxford put the indirect strategies that are composed of three subcategories: metacognitive, affective and social strategies (Oxford, 1990).

The metacognitive are the strategies that go beyond cognitive strategies and they help learners to coordinate their learning. They assist learners to regulate their learning and positively develop their academic achievement (Anderson, 2002; Norton & Williams, 2012; Pintrich & Garcia, 1994). This subcategory involves arranging and playing with words and meaning, setting goals and objectives, identifying the purpose of the language tasks, self-monitoring and evaluation. The second subcategory is the affect strategies and they include, for instance, reducing anxiety, self-encouragement and discussing feelings with another. The last subcategory is social strategies and they are divided into three kinds of strategy: asking questions for clarification or correction, cooperating with others and empathising with them.

2.6.1 Social Strategies

The category of social strategies has been chosen in this research because these strategies facilitate communication of language learners within their sociocultural context (Oxford, 2011). They provide learners with tools assisting them to understand their cultural context and the roles they play in it. The context is the 'different setting in

which L2 can take place' (Ellis, 1994, p. 197). In the early studies of language-learning strategies, the classification of language social strategies was not adequately elaborated (Harish, 2014). This can be explained because of the influence of the cognitive theoretical framework used at that time in which the focus was mainly on the cognitive and metacognitive strategies that are directly associated with learning. The focus was on the strategies that directly affect learning (Rubin, 1987). However, O'Malley & Chamot (1990) were the first researchers who identified three categories of language-learning strategies: cognitive, metacognitive and social/affective strategies. Using Anderson's Adaptive Control of Thought model (1983) in their classification, they are the first researchers who pointed to the important role of the affective/social strategies after almost 20 years of research.

In 1990, Oxford adopted the classification of a new taxonomy classifying the language-learning strategies into direct and indirect strategies (discussed above).

Oxford's classification model could be the most comprehensive classification of learning strategies to date (Ellis, 1994). However, she separated the affective and social categories and combined each category under the umbrella of indirect strategies. She divided the social language strategies into three categories: asking questions, cooperating with others and empathising with others (see Figure 2.2). Asking questions is a strategy that is essential in social interactions and it enables learners to understand intended meanings. According to Oxford, the questions could be for clarification, verification or correction. The second category is cooperation with others, either the peers or the proficient users of the learned language. The third category is empathising with others and it means the learners develop their understanding of other's feelings and thoughts that might potentially influence their behaviours.

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │  Social Language Strategies (Oxford, 1990)  │
                    │                                      │
                    │  (These strategies are used to achieve one of the │
                    │          following tasks)           │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
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Asking Questions:	Cooperating with others:	Empathising with others:
1- Asking for clarification or verification, 2- Asking for correction.	1- Cooperation with peers, 2- Cooperating with the proficient users of the language.	1. Developing cultural understanding, 2. Becoming aware of others thoughts and feelings.

Figure 2.2. The social strategies categories (Oxford's Taxonomy 1990).

2.7 The Cognitive Theoretical Frameworks of Learning Strategies

The cognitive theory of second language acquisition considers learning strategies as a significant part of the cognitive processes of language acquisition. It has been found that successful language learners consciously employ strategies in their learning, this means they rely on cognitive abilities to use such strategies (Griffiths, 2003). Therefore, the language-learning strategies are best explained through the cognitive theoretical models that explain how the second language is acquired.

2.7.1 Interlanguage Theory

From observing native speakers and second language speakers, Selinker observed that they differed in expressing meaning through the use of phrasing and this was termed interlanguage (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013). This is a linguistic system used when the learner is transiting from a native language and still using those concepts as meaning in the target language. Fossilisation occurs when the learner succeeds in gaining communication and thus sees no need to correct the expression

further. According to this theory, language learning goes through five cognitive processes: language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of learning a second language, strategies of communication in the second language and the overgeneralisation of the linguistic material. It is apparent that learning strategies are central to this theory as interlanguaging evolves over years and second language learners need to make sense of the language input and output (Boniface, 2008).

2.7.2 Bialystok's Second Language Learning Model

Bialystok's (1978) model comprised learning processes and learning strategies.

Learning processes hold true for all learners, while strategies are used as optional functions for different people in various circumstances. Formal practising occurs to memorise language features; functional practising is using the language in communicative situations; self-monitoring corrects errors; and using inferences refers to making assumptions. In terms of the language strategies, functional strategies occur when language learners consciously engage in the second language, or try to make the learned explicit knowledge automatic (Boniface, 2008). Formal strategies are when the learner tries to expose oneself to the target language via communication.

2.7.3 Anderson's Adaptive Control of Thought Model

In assessing the acquisition of a second language, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) considered strategies and cognitive processing of learners using Anderson's (1983) Adaptive Control of Thought model. This model implies that there are two types of knowledge: *declarative* knowledge, which refers to knowing facts and things; and *procedural* knowledge, which involves what we know how to do. The model explains language learning through three stages: cognitive, associative and autonomous. In terms of the learning strategies, this model interprets the strategy as they occur, first in the cognitive stage as they are conscious and then, they cease to be strategic. Or, it views

the learning strategy as in the form of 'if … then' conditions, and here the strategy passes through the three stages. For example, if the goal is to find a meaning of a certain word, then I will look it up in a dictionary. However, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) warranted that while learning strategies are complex skills, they are employed consciously in the first stage and then by practising they become proceduralised (autonomous). The important point here is the declarative knowledge, as learners are able to be conscious of the strategies they use and to verbalise them. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) used this model to classify the learners' strategies (mentioned above) into cognitive, metacognitive and affective/social strategies.

2.8 Variables Influencing Language-Learning Strategies

Research into language-learning strategies has shown how the choice and use of these strategies are influenced by a number of factors. Examples of the factors are age (Peacock & Ho, 2003; Victori & Tragant, 2003); gender (McMullen 2009; Wang, 2002), motivation (Al-Otaibi, 2004; Kaylani, 1996; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989); level of proficiency (Griffiths, 2003); and learning style (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989). In this current research, the focus will be on two factors: cultural background and the context of learning.

2.8.1 Cultural Background

Research into the influence of the cultural background on second language learning has provided studies that have shown learners from certain cultural backgrounds tend to use certain strategies in language learning (Grainger, 2012). Griffiths (2003) found that European students generally use strategies more frequently than do other students from Asian backgrounds. This is due to the similar cultural, linguistic and education practices that enable the European students to learn English more easily. European students were found to use more strategies that are related to

interaction with others and to looking for opportunities to increase and practise their English, for example reading for pleasure. Conversely, the Asian students mentioned they use memorisation and rule-oriented strategies more than other strategies. Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) used a questionnaire among fifty-five ESL students from different cultural backgrounds and highlighted some significant differences in their results. Their research indicated that where the Japanese students preferred metacognitive strategies, Chinese students favoured social strategies. They stressed, however, that although the majority of the participants in their study were from Asian countries, it was impossible to attribute a specific language-learning approach to students just because they shared a similar cultural background.

From the early stages of research on language-learning strategies, scholars pointed to the influence of cultural background on the choice and use of language-learning strategies (Rubin, 1975). Politzer and McGroarty (1985) conducted a study on a number of ESL Hispanic and Asian students to discover the successful language strategies that are favoured by each group. Among other variables, the cultural background was found to influence the participants' choice of learning strategies and possible explanation for lesser engagement with strategies that require social interaction by the Asian students. The researchers argued that in the Asian learning institutions, the priority was given to memorisation, translation of texts and correcting grammatical forms, while interactive learning is second in importance. On the other hand, the Hispanic learners use more social interaction strategies that assist them to increase their linguistic gains and proficiency.

Lee and Oxford (2008) researched more than 1000 Korean learners from different education levels at high school and university. The researchers found that such learners used compensation strategies more than any other category of the SILL

questionnaire. The reason behind this higher use is that learners rely on compensation strategies to make up the knowledge they miss in their EFL context of learning. This provides an indication of why social strategies are among the less preferred strategies of Korean learners who are from different educational systems. In addition, interviews have shown that learners use more strategies than those defined in the SILL questionnaire, such as: I write a lot to memorise English words or expressions, I dictate while listening to English tapes several times and I watch a movie / listen to a pop song until I memorise the lines. In their study, Lee and Oxford concluded that language learners are influenced by their learning environment to use strategies that serve their learning.

2.8.2 The Context of Learning

The context of learning has been defined as one of the main factors that influence the choice and employment of language-learning strategies (Cohen, 2011; Griffiths, 2013; Ho, 2004; Oxford, 1990; Takeuchi, Griffiths, & Coyle, 2007; Palfreyman, 2006; Tamada, 1996). The learning context involves the social, cultural political and educational environment in which learning is taking place (Gu, 2012). It 'can include the teachers, the peers, the classroom climate or ethos, the family support, the social, cultural tradition of learning, the curriculum, and the availability of input and output opportunities' (Gu, 2012, p. 346). In one of the studies that suggested how the contextual environment could shape learning, Riley and Harsch (1999) conducted a comparative study between Japanese learners learning English in two different environments. One group of students was studying EFL in Japan, while the other group was studying ESL in America. The study explored the reported use of strategies in both environments by the two groups of learners and identify salient strategies the learners frequently used. This research found that ESL students tended to use strategies more

frequently than EFL students although both groups were equally found to perceive the usefulness of these strategies in their learning. The statistical data showed that the both groups favoured a number of strategies on the questionnaire provided to them, such as, I pay attention when someone is speaking English, if I can't think of English, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing and I try to find out how to be better in English. However, for the ESL group, there were specific strategies that were more commonly used, such as, I try to talk like native English speakers, I start conversations in English, I watch TV shows or movies in English and I ask questions in English). The researchers explained the frequent use of the previous strategies as the learners focused on taking advantage of the English-speaking resources and availability of native speakers. In contrast, EFL learners preferred specific strategies that were more related to 'studying' and did not involve interaction with others, such as, I say or write new English words several times, I first skim an English passage, then go back and read carefully and to understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses. This may explain the more frequent use of language strategies by ESL learners as they are more motivated and active in their learning (Riley & Harsch, 1999).

Another study by Gao (2010) investigated the choice and use of language-learning strategies among a number of Chinese language learners who moved to study in Britain. He found the Chinese learners' strategy patterns changed when they moved to live in Britain. Some of them stopped using and relying on memorising, note-taking and the regular reviewing of strategies to learn new English words. They used, instead, more social strategies to learn and apply the meanings of the new words in actual conversations. In Gao's explanation, the powerful influence of the learning discourses of the Chinese learning environment (assessment methods, teachers, parents) diminished when learners started to study in British institutions. The study indicated

that learners could manipulate the crucial elements of the context they are living in and adapt to appropriate learning strategies that serve their own purposes.

The study of the influence of context of learning on the preference of language strategies was emphasised by White et al. (2007). The context of second language learning could be formal or informal, ESL or EFL, self-access or distance learning environment. According to the authors, 'the contextual approach', as they call it, will enable the researcher to see the strategy use not as a stable mental process in the mind, but as a result of the mediation of the particular environment in which they are situated. They argue that this approach is not yet applied to many learner strategy studies. It aims to gain a better understanding of strategies in a specific context, or strategy instruction in particular contexts. It could be applied to exploring why students prefer particular strategies to others. Or, how they strategy instruction and how it is influencing their language learning. The importance of this approach lies in how it could reveal the extent to which learning strategies are part of the learner's experiences, and how they are interrelated to their environment (Ranta & Meckelborg, 2013). This approach could show how learners rely on strategy use in the class and outside the class.

As can be seen from the above discussion on the GLL research, these mainstream studies have shown the importance and influence of learning strategies on language acquisition. However, the traditional view in these studies highlighted the effective strategies used by second language learners but outside the context they are situated in. The view characterises the language-learning strategies as 'cognitive predispositions or personality traits', ignoring the roles of sociocultural factors that influence the choice and use of language-learning strategies (Jang & Jiménez, 2011, p. 142). This view does not consider the contextualised and situated experiences that

learners are going through, such as, interactions with peers, teachers and native speakers.

2.9 Vygotsky and Second Language Learning

The social turn in the second language research was introduced in an influential paper by Firth and Wagner in 1997. These scholars criticised the approaches that had dominated the exploration of the second language research as they identified the social practices that language learners engage with in their daily lives. However, SCT, which originated from the writings of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky, provided an alternative in considering language use in real world situations as fundamental to learning language (Zuengler & Miller, 2006). According to this view, language was not considered an input itself, but a source for participation, where learners could use symbolic mediation to engage in different kinds of activities in their daily lives. This theory has placed language as its central focus and it views language as tool of thought (Mitchell et al., 2013). The main argument of this theory is that human mental activities are mediated through social mediation with individuals and structured environments.

This is explained by Lantolf (2000):

The central and distinguishing concept of sociocultural theory is that higher forms of human mental activity are mediated. Vygotsky (1978) argued that just as humans do not act directly on the physical world but rely, instead, on tools and labour activity, we also use symbolic tools, or signs, to mediate and regulate our relationship with others and with ourselves. Physical and symbolic tools are artefacts created by human cultures (s) over time and are made available to succeeding generations, which often modify these artefacts before passing them on to future generations. (p. 80)

The foundational basis of this theory is that the higher psychological developments of the human (such as learning) are mediated by culturally constructed artefacts or mediational means (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Language is the most influential and pervasive artefact that enables individuals to interact with their external world (Gutiérrez, 2013). In its origins, SCT analyses how language development occurs among children and how, through their communication, they can internalise what they have learned (i.e., within the individual) to mediate their own cognition and thinking.

This view is extended to the second language research because development among the second language learners is not just about the acquisition of second language, but about how this acquisition mediates the development of their communication abilities, their conceptual thinking, and perceiving and representing things in their external world (Van Compernolle, 2015). The process of internalisation does not just concern the mastery of the language structures, but how to gain the capacity to manipulate the second language artefacts in order to achieve the user's communicative purposes (appropriation). Second language learning is open to semiotic resources that can be used by learners to regulate their mental and communicative activities. For instance, the learners may opt to diverge from the idealised native speaker norm of language and manipulate their own form to meet their communicative and interpersonal needs (Van Compernolle, 2015).

Another important principle of this theory is that the mediation can take the form of joint activities with other humans. The collaborative dialogues and activities between contextual experts and novices create the metaphorical space of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) where the development of higher psychological functioning is located (Gutiérrez, 2013). This social interaction results in the cognitive development of learners, where these functions are internalised and they may appear as intrapersonal or

interpersonal. For the second language learners, the presence of an expert (either a teacher or a peer) allows them to experiment with language by repeating, correcting, guessing and restoring knowledge on the form. In expert-to-novice joint activities, second language learners can practise their language by gaining more control over it (Brooks & Donato, 1994; Kayi-Aydar, 2013; Philp, Adams & Iwashita, 2014; Storch, 2002; Watanabe & Swain, 2007).

According to Lantolf 'it is in the ZPD that individuals are able to perform at higher levels of ability than they can alone, and in so doing eventually internalise the mediation provided by their con-specifics, which results in enhanced development' (Lantolf, 2007, p. 32). Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) found that the development of the ZPD may change with the level of different types of mediation (i.e., more implicit or explicit) and this may influence the control of language learned. This has drawn the attention of some language researchers to explore the influence of the language socialisation inside and outside the classroom and how this could assist learners' cognitive, academic and social development (Duff, 2010; Walsh & Li, 2016).

2.10 Vygotsky and Language-Learning Strategies

The introduction of the sociocultural principles into the second language research was also applied by researchers into the language-learning strategies research. Donato and McCormick (1994) argued that applying the genetic (social) approach to investigating language-learning strategies helps researchers to see how these strategies develop in their learning situations. They criticised the cognitive research approach of these strategies as it 'relies heavily on making lists of particular aspects of an individual's strategy use, [while] the genetic method goes beyond static taxonomies' (p. 454). They argued that the SCT is a 'robust framework' to investigate and examine

the development of language-learning strategies. It shows the importance of the dialogic and positive communities of language-learning practices, and the inclusion of mediation as a variable is influential in strategy teaching and learning. Instead of training the students on ready-made encapsulated strategies, SCT can explain the culture of the learning situations, for example, in a classroom, home or library.

The call for the use and investigation of the language-learning strategies in contexts was present in the literature of the language-learning strategies (Takeuchi et al., 2007). However, empirical research that looked at how language learners' strategies develop and change according to the context was not until thoroughly explored Gao's study (2006).

Oxford and Schramm (2007) compared the perspectives of the cognitive/psychological and sociocultural paradigms and how they can influence the choices of language-learning strategies. While the cognitive theories show how the strategies are related to mental activities (cognitive and metacognitive strategies), SCT can explain the action patterns of the strategies and their social and historical factors. They can be used to explore the aptitude, self-regulation and motivation of the language-learning strategies. Takeuchi et al. (2007) asserted that language learners bring into the learning situation their own individual characteristics that influence the outcomes of their learning, for example, age, ethnicity, motivation and gender. They also stated that it is complex to investigate how a learner operates in their own social contexts. However, exploring the social contexts led them to find out that language learners learn best in situations where they are supported, their goals and needs are met and shared, and the activities are developing their language strategies.

This thesis has applied SCT as a theoretical framework to investigate the language-learning strategies employed by Saudi students who were learning English in

Australia (ESL context). This theory allowed the researcher to see how the Saudi language learners mediated their social interactions with the new social learning context they were living in. It was informed by what Norton and Toohey (2001) called the good language-learning strategies and these were considered according to access to a variety of communicative contexts within which the learners were situated. Recruiting five ESL learners of English, who showed a number of the language-learning strategies in their learning, Norton and Toohey (2001) found that there was a student who was performing better than others. They found the reason behind the learner's effective behaviour was her access to a neighbourhood where she could practise language skills. She was also working and, thus, she had the opportunity to meet and have conversations with native co-workers and customers. This experience indicated how the learner can use social communities to be a *good learner* and to show that belonging to a community where the learner can practise English is an advantage. Donato and McCormick (1994) suggested that rather than training learners to use a set of GLL strategies, the social context could be strategic itself. In such a setting, learners can discover new orientations of language learning and critically analyse their own learning.

2.11 Technology and Second Language Learning

Technological environments (such as Social Network Sites [SNSs], tutoring websites and smartphone applications) are increasingly becoming an integral part of the education settings in our current time (Lamy & Mangenot, 2013; Lin, Warschauer, & Blake, 2016). In this sense, they are becoming part of the social context of the learners, and in some learning situations, they can be used by them as learning strategies (Amir, 2006; Shakarami, 2012).

The history of the use of technology and language-learning pedagogy goes back as far as the 1960s (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). During that time, the use of

computers was the main technological tool to be used in teaching and learning language, and the role of the teachers was influential in creating the learning and teaching materials through linguistic labs. However, in recent years, language-teaching pedagogy is witnessing a state of transition from these specific designed language and teaching resources on the computer, to the use of online technologies that are embedded in the daily lives of teachers and learners (Kozar & Benson, 2016). The potential of these technologies lies in how they are not typically designed for language teaching and learning purposes, and yet they can be appropriated for these goals. The advantages of the use of these technologies are associated with the direct learning of language skills such as building vocabulary, improving speaking skills or writing (e.g., Mayora, 2009), or indirect skills where they support the language learner's autonomy, agency and motivation in learning language (Blake, 2013; Lamy & Hampel, 2007; Little, 2004; Yang, 2015). The positive uses of the technology in language learning and teaching in our time led Vandergriff (2106) to argue that the recent developments in technology use for language learning and teaching are more promising than ever and this is because the social web with its power to connect people has created favourable conditions for appropriation the power of new media. However, there are some researchers who argued that the use of technology is not associated with actual development of language skills (Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson & Freynik, 2014).

Technology has made it easier than ever before to find and access instructional language materials of different types that can be used to develop specific skills (Ishihara & Takamiya, 2014; Liu et al., 2014; Lamy & Mangenot, 2013; Zourou, 2012). For instance, the use of YouTube channels provides many instructional teaching materials that target specific language skills of the English language (Balcikanli, 2009; Brook, 2011; Ynuus, Salehi, Amini, Shojaee, & Fei, 2005). However, the rapid development of

handheld technology and the increasing availability of the mobile internet have created new spaces, and greater access and possibilities for communication and collaboration for education purposes (Terras & Ramsay, 2012). The strength of these SNSs as learning environments is that cultural learning is included in these interactions (Chen, 2013; Kurata, 2010; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Thorne, 2010). When users engage in dialogue in these environments, they are exposed to authentic texts of the English language (Godwin-Jones, 2013).

The use of SNSs has been positively associated with academic and social experiences of international students in their new trajectories. In these environments, the learners enjoy their face-to-face contacts and their SNSs friendships (Mitchell, 2012).

Regarding the SNS friendships, these are mostly with family members and close friends in their home countries (Gomes, Berry, Alzougool, & Chang, 2014).

Gomes et al. (2014) argued that having these virtual bonds with their home-based friends and family members facilitate the formation of new connections in the learners' local environments (friends from their cultural background, or co-cultural and native English). In an empirical study, Lin, Peng, Kim, Kim and LaRose (2012) investigated how the interaction on SNSs with native English speakers can shape the adjustment experience of international students. The researchers contended that the longer the international students stay online with the local English speaker, the better social experience they will have. This is indicated in the intercultural knowledge that can arise from collaborative dialogue on the SNSs (Thorne, 2010).

In the Saudi student context, there are studies that have highlighted the positive attitudes of the use of technology in their learning. Most of these studies have been conducted in the Saudi EFL context (e.g., Aifan, 2015; Alaugab, 2007; Al Lily, 2011; Almekhlafy & Alzubi, 2016; Al-Shehri, 2011; Alzahrani, 2016; Barhoumi, 2015;

Jaradat, 2014; Kabouha & Elyas, 2015). They show the positive attitudes that these learners have when they use the technology in their learning. However, with the recent increasing presence of Saudi learners in ESL environments, investigators have wanted to explore the use of technology by Saudi students in their language learning in ESL contexts. For example, in the Australian environment, Binsahl, Chang and Bosua (2015) conducted a study on a number of female Saudi students and they found the main purpose of their use of SNSs was to keep them connected with their family members and close friends in Saudi Arabia.

In ESL learning classes, Alzahrani (2016) found that the Saudi learners use of technology created more opportunities for their learning and encouraged them to keep motivated in their learning. Saudi female students preferred online discussions to the face-to-face discussions in ESL classes (Alanazy, 2013). This was mostly reported by the married students who found it uncomfortable to be in contact with other male students in the class.

The cultural background has an influence on how users interact on the online platforms (Al-Jarf, 2006; AlSagri & AlAboodi, 2015; Alsaggaf, 2015; Cho & Park, 2013; Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Petersen, Divitini & Chabert, 2008). Aljasir, Woodcock and Harrison (2014) found the Saudi individuals prefer to not disclose their personal information when building relations with others on the SNSs. Individual differences among language learners could determine the use of technological environments and applications in their learning (Abd Halim, Ali, & Yahaya, 2011; Alomyan, 2004; Foroozesh-nia, 2015).

2.12 Saudi Students and Language-Learning Studies

Since the current thesis is concerned with Saudi learners of English language, I will report here some studies that have looked at Saudi students as a specific group of

learners who share the same cultural background, and at how they employ learning

strategies when they are learning English. There are a number of studies that explored

how Saudi students use English strategies in their learning (AlMaghrabi, 2012; Alnufaie

& Grenfell, 2012; Alsamadnai, 2008; Baniabdelrahman & Al-Shumaimeri, 2013; Daif-

Allah, 2012). These studies were informative and they contributed to the characteristics

of Saudi English language learners in ESL contexts.

However, studies that examined language-learning strategies among Saudi

students are limited, either in the EFL or ESL contexts. In the ESL context, Al- Braik

(1986) investigated the factors that could contribute to successful language learning

among 176 Saudi learners studying in United States colleges and universities. The study

found that learners perceive cognitive factors to be important in their language learning,

such as memorisation, language aptitude and general intelligence. The learners showed

positive motivation and attitude to their learning, although they were mostly against

learning the English language for the purpose of being part of the host society they are

living in (i.e., ESL environment) (Alkaabi, 2016; Hagler, 2014). Another study that was

conducted in an ESL context was by Alwahibee (2000). The researcher applied the

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire and found that his

participants ordered use of the strategies as follows: compensation, cognitive,

metacognitive, social, memory strategies and then affective strategies. In spite of this,

the finding contradicts the other studies conducted in the ESL context, where learners

mostly highlighted the use of metacognitive and social strategies over others (e.g. Abu

Shamis, 2003; Che Wan Ibrahim, Prain, & Collet, 2014). Alwahibee (2000) justified

this by stating that Saudi students had a number of linguistic difficulties and this could

greatly impact their social interaction with American native speakers. Therefore, they

reported using compensation strategies, such as asking for clarification, guessing the

meanings and changing the topic of discussion to overcome their obstacles. Also, Saudi learners relied on cognitive practices such as rehearsing and repeating the words and expressions they heard on the TV or the radio, or read in a newspaper, in order to develop their English learning.

In the EFL context, there were also a number of studies that tried to shed light on how the Saudi learners employ their learning strategies in that context. Alhaisoni (2012) explored how gender and level of proficiency are correlated with how Saudi language learners employ their learning strategies. He found the Saudi students who are studying in English intensive course tend to use cognitive strategies more, followed by metacognitive, social, affective and then memory strategies. The study revealed that female participants tended to use more social strategies than did male participants.

Al-Otaibi (2004) conducted a comprehensive study to examine the relationship between motivation, gender, the level of proficiency among the EFL Saudi learners and their employed language-learning strategies. The researcher found that highly motivated students tend to use more strategies than less motivated learners. He found no significant differences in terms of gender between participants. However, the study highlighted the influence of the educational context on the learning-strategy use.

According to Al-Otaibi, the centralised system of teaching in Saudi Arabia, where teachers use identical syllabuses and methodologies, does not allow the learner to have the freedom to choose among strategies in their learning. Intentionality and free choice are important factors in strategy use, as discussed previously in this chapter. Also, the emphasis on evaluation was in the learners' context made them focus on meeting the school requirements and pay less attention to developing their English skills that need communication.

McMullen (2009) examined how the academic major studied and gender could influence the learners' use of language strategies. She compared students from three universities ($N = 165$) and found that in general female participants use strategies more than males, and computer science students have a higher use of strategies in their learning than do information systems students. Consequently, the researcher developed a course that aims to improve learners' writing skills. She found an improvement in their writing skills as a result of the strategy-based instruction.

Therefore, although there are some studies that addressed acquisition of the English language, the sociocultural aspects are not represented in the literature.

Moreover, most of these studies were conducted in the United States and Britain, while the learning of English in the Australian context is not covered in the literature. Also, these learners were found to have positive attitudes in learning through technology as they were heavy users of the SNSs. The potential of using these environments in language learning is not well represented in the literature of language-learning strategies.

In summary, this chapter has reviewed the literature of some significant topics that are related to the experiences of Saudi students in the ESL context. These topics were:

- a background of the participants explored in this study and the place of education and the English language in the Saudi society
- a review of language-learning strategies and how they are defined in the literature
- an explanation of the role of the GLL model and how its cognitive framework influenced the early research of language-learning strategies, how language-

learning strategies were classified and categorised, and what variables affect the choice and use of language strategies

– a presentation of two factors that affect the choice and use of language- learning strategies: social context of learning and ethnic background

– an introduction of the technological environments and how they could influence the learning of a second language

– a look at the previous studies that investigated the language-learning strategies of Saudi students, mostly in the EFL context, and there is a lack of the sociocultural factors in their choice and use of these strategies.

The next chapter will explain and discuss the choice of the methodology and methods, and the data collection processes and their analyses.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Outline of the Chapter

3.1 Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the social language-learning strategies that are employed by Saudi students who are studying English in Australia. It particularly focuses on the impact of the social context on the student's learning and how the context affects choice and use of language-learning strategies. This chapter will look at the methodological framework of this thesis and describe the mixed-methods methodology adopted and its accompanying methods used to conduct the research.

The first section begins by providing a rationale for the choice of approaches, then it explains the theoretical paradigm chosen in this research, that is, social constructivism, and why the SCT can be combined with Oxford's (1990) more

psychological theories of learner autonomy and self-regulation. In this sense, learners use strategies to regulate a number of aspects of their internal mental states, beliefs, observable behaviours and the learning environment. As the context of the language learner will either enable or constrain the use of certain language strategies (Gao, 2010), then a sociocultural-contextual approach is consistent. This will enable the study to elicit aspects of the learning context of language-learning centres that encourage these students to be confident learners and to become proficient second language learners.

The second section of this chapter discusses the methods that have been used to investigate the research problem, including data collection and pilot interviews, and methods of analysis are described and justified.

3.2 Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks

3.2.1 The Qualitative Approach

The research design approach adopted in this thesis is a mixed-method approach with emphasis on qualitative data. Qualitative research is characterised by looking at the phenomenon in its natural settings with a focus on the social context (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Qualitative research is interpretive in nature in that it looks at the complex social interactions of everyday life and the different meanings that individuals attribute to them (Creswell, 2013). These various meanings are socially constructed and through the deep thoughts and views of the participants, this research approach will help understand the variables that might be affecting their social interactions (Heigham & Croker, 2009). The participants in this research were learning in an ESL environment and they interacted within their social context to engage with others, show their affiliation and regulate their learning. As such, the research goes beyond the traditional look at language learning which decontextualises the learner and assumes the view of language learning occurs in its social context (Palfreyman, 2006). According to this

view, it considers the social infrastructure of networks, everyday materials and social resources that shape the language-learning process of the individuals. However, as previously explained in Chapter 2, the foundations of the language-learning strategies body of knowledge are built on the cognitive framework of language learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). This is why little attention has been given to social learning strategies as they will never exist without context. Therefore, the need to focus on the qualitative data in this research to extensively explore deeply the interpretations of social interactions and their meaning.

The choice of mixed methods with an emphasises on the qualitative approach to investigate the social strategies among Saudi students in this study came after formulating relevant questions that aligned with aims of this current research.

According to Morse and Richards (2002), questions are of the highest importance to inform the scope of the research to be conducted and the nature of the data to be collected. Considering the literature of language-learning strategies by Oxford (1990), the scope of the research problem of this study, that is. social language-learning strategies, is underrepresented in the research (Harish, 2014). This, presumably, is because a cognitive theoretical paradigm was dominant in the language-learning strategies research from the early years (the1970s). The nature of the data of individuals' social interactions in daily activities needs to be deeply explored and interpreted to add depth to the previous qualitative studies, which is the purpose of this research.

To explore the meanings that Saudi students assigned to their experiences in this ESL context, the present research was designed to investigate the social strategies applied by these learners in their ESL context. Figure 3.1 explains the design of the research and the epistemological, theoretical and methodological decisions that

67

underpin this design. As explained in Chapter 2, social constructivism is the view that individuals' meaningful realities are conditioned by human experience (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2012). This entails different views from one individual to another and how these differences could influence their social interaction in an ESL environment.

Their realities are constructed by social, cultural, historical and political norms. From this perspective, a qualitative approach is commonly used to explore daily life personal experiences where meanings and personal views are unpacked. This research applies a mixed-method approach where the quantitative phase aims to investigate the general use of language-learning strategies among the participants, while the qualitative phase deeply explores the reasons and relations behind the use and choice of the social strategies in this particular context.
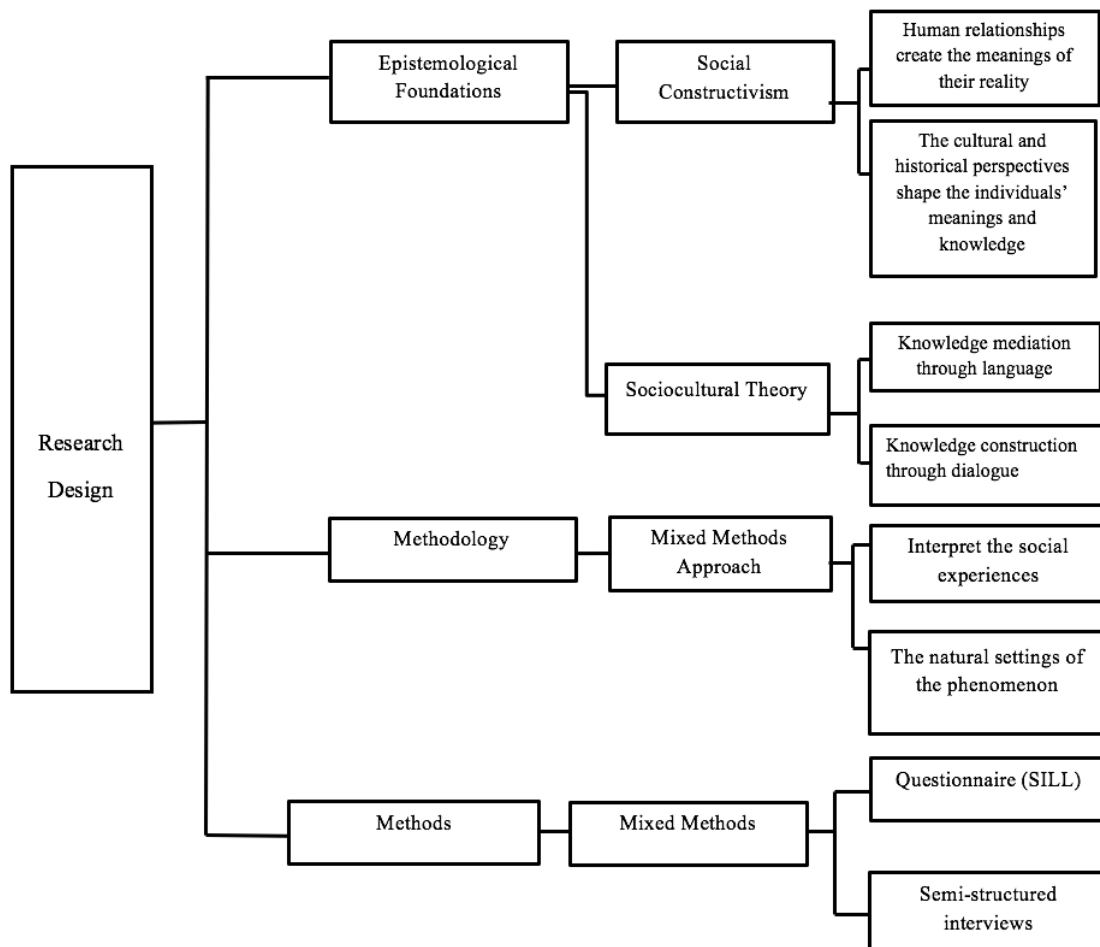
Figure 3.1. The research design.

The research questions are reiterated here:

How does the ESL context encourage the use of effective social language strategies to encourage optimal learning? To answer this question a number of supplementary questions are discussed:

1. What are the language-learning strategies that Saudi students use in the ESL Australian context?

2. What are most common used language-learning strategies used by Saudi students in the ESL Australian context?

3. What is the role of social language strategies used by Saudi students in the ESL Australian context?

4. What is the importance of social language strategies in the Australian ESL context?

3.2.2 The (Methodological) Theoretical Paradigm

The theoretical paradigm is 'the general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds' (Creswell, 2009, p. 6). The worldview provides a framework for choosing the problems/issues and events to be investigated for the design of the research question, and it dictates how to analyse the research data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Choice of a theoretical paradigm is shaped by a number of factors, such as the beliefs of the particular academic discipline—in this case, education and second language learning, and past research. This study adopted social constructionism as the theoretical paradigm. This study adopted social constructivist as the theoretical paradigm which aligns with Al-Jabri's discussion of the worldview. This paradigm doubts the existence of a direct relationship between accounts and reality. Instead, it looks at the origins of knowledge and meanings and nature of reality as

processes created with human relationships (Harper, 2012). This framework assumes that individuals have no direct relationship with their physical world, but their experiences of living are mediated through cultural and historical concepts (Creswell, 2013). It was employed to identify use and choice of social language strategies among Saudi students in the Australian ESL context and led to the analysis of experience that provided information about meaning-making within the context of Saudi students' learning environment and learning of English.

Social constructionism is the framework that was chosen to look at the experiences of Saudi students in this study because this paradigm allows individuals' accounts to be seen as windows to their interpersonal and social functions (Harper, 2012). Individuals engage with their world and make sense according to historical and cultural perspectives of their own. These meanings are always social as they arise in and as a result of social interactions within a social community (Creswell, 2009). For the Saudi students who are learning English in a new environment, this paradigm enabled the researcher to see how their cultural and historical perspectives were influencing their experiences in the Australian context. This will be analysed within the sociocultural theoretical context discussed in the next section.

3.2.3 Sociocultural Theory

Theory is defined as 'a set of interrelated constructs (variables), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of the phenomena by specifying relations among variables with the purpose of explaining the natural phenomenon' (Creswell, 2009, p. 51). This is the definition adopted when making the choice to adopt a sociocultural framework to examine how the context of learning English in an Australian setting has influenced a group of Saudi international students temporarily studying in Australia. The SCT theory takes the historical and cultural aspects of the

experience into consideration and tries to link them to the situation in which they exist. In the field of second language acquisition, SCT adopts the view that language learning is a social phenomenon that occurs in a group setting (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012).

This approach argues that human cognitive development and higher mental functions are the results of social interactions with others (Aimin, 2013). It assumes language learning is socially constructed through interaction with others and to achieve this interaction, individuals' biological elements integrate with the sociocultural environment and this affects the way they interpret experience and communicate their views to others.

A central tenet of this theory is that human mental activity is mediated and human individuals rely on materials and symbolic tools to mediate within their external environment (Mitchell et al., 2013). For Vygotsky, language is the main tool that enables this mediation and assists in the shaping and organising of thoughts among individuals so they can be shared on a specific social plane. From this point of view then, humans share social mediation that includes face-to-face interactions, discussions with experts or peers and joint problem solving. This theory takes into account that dialogic communication in language learning is a medium through which learners construct their knowledge and several studies have shown that collaborative interaction between second language learners increases their ability to learn (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012). Two of the main concepts of this theory that Vygotsky (1962, 1978) has developed are mediation and the ZPD. Other scholars, specifically in the field of second language learning, who have utilised these concepts are Duff (2007), Lantolf and Beckett (2009) and Swain, Kinnear and Steinman (2011).

Mediation: This concept is a major part of SCT. It takes the view that mental human processes result from participation in and appropriation of the forms of cultural

mediation integrated into social activities (Lantolf, 2006). This means that the individual's interpretation of reality occurs on social and personal/internal levels. To understand the individual experience, it is essential to look at the learning environment to see how second language learners construct and constitute knowledge between themselves and each other through interaction and use of cultural artefacts like teaching methods and materials (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012). It is essential to look at the learners in the context of their history, as sociocultural beings. Individuals rely on psychological artefacts, such as language, signs and symbols, to mediate with the material world around them.

Zone of proximal development: According to this concept, there are two developmental levels in the learner: actual, which is the actual ability to learn without help from others; and potential, which is the ability when learners are offered assistance from others (Vygotsky, 1978; Zhang et al., 2013). This dialectical part of the SCT is important in pedagogy as the learners constantly need to interact with their teacher or peers, or materials provided so their understanding is scaffolded and their potential constantly pursued. The ZPD is a metaphorical zone and the potential of the learner is what becomes possible within the zone. When individuals interact on topics of the same interest, they develop their conceptual knowledge. Although in the original formulations of SCT, interaction is to occur between 'expert and novice', in recent studies, this interaction can take place between peers as well. Donato and McCormick (1994), found that English language learners collaboratively support each other in dialogic communication. Their interactions assist them to expand their linguistic knowledge.

This collective communication assists them to internalise, organise, rehearse and control their own learning of the language.

However, it should be noted that this theory is different from the traditional approaches that investigated the communication strategies of second language learners: psycholinguistic and interactional approaches, as the context takes precedence (Sin-Yi, 2015). Traditional approaches paid less attention to context and its influence on the process of communication and the learner. Psychological approaches look at communication strategies from the viewpoint of cognitive processes that underlie speech activities and this traditional view is enhanced when the interactional approach to communication strategies, a set of surface linguistic variations, are extended to include the social and interactive world of the learner and the relationships that exist (Sin-Yi, 2015).

3.3 Methods and Data Collection

The researcher is mixing two research methods to examine the social strategies that Saudi ESL students use and choose while studying English in the Australian context. Triangulation involves corroborating data from different sources to focus on a specific problem or perspective (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This design aims to achieve a deep and nuanced understanding of the students' experiences. In the first phase of this research, the researcher applied a quantitative method by conducting the SILL to obtain an overview of the language-learning strategies that these particular international students employ in this specific context of learning. In the second phase, the researcher applied a qualitative method through semi-structured interviews with volunteers who had previously completed the SILL for this research.

The use of mixed methods has been gaining popularity among several researchers in recent years for investigating language-learning strategies used (Cohen, 2011; Griffiths & Inceçay, 2016; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014). The prevalence of this method approach comes as a result of the realisation that there has been an over-

dependence on the questionnaires and the general patterns they produce of the language learners and how they use the strategies to learn. In the literature of language-learning strategies, the use of self-report scales is widely adopted by researchers. Their use has formed the backbone of the language strategies research (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014).

Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) clarify the reasons for this as these scales are easy to conduct, cost-effective and they provide a general assessment to the researcher and learners of the strategies employed. Although there is criticism of these highly quantitative studies of language-learning strategies, data generated has yielded informative and rich resources in the literature of strategies and is therefore an important part of understanding research into second language learning. Figure 3.2 illustrates the relationship between the two methods utilised in this research.

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                    ┌──────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
                    │                      │        │                      │
┌──────────────┐   │      Phase A         │        │      Phase B         │
│              │   │    Quantitative      │        │    Qualitative       │
│ Mixed Methods│   │                      │        │    (In Depth)        │
│Research Design│  │                      │        │                      │
│              │   └──────────────────────┘        └──────────────────────┘
│              │        ┌──────────┐                    ┌──────────┐
└──────────────┘        │ Results  │                    │ Results  │
                        └──────────┘                    └──────────┘
                             ▼                               ▼
                    ┌──────────────────┐          ┌──────────────────┐
                    │   Descriptive    │          │ Thematic Content │
                    │Statistical Analysis│        │    Analysis      │
                    └──────────────────┘          └──────────────────┘
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                    ┌────────────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │          Complementary Analysis            │
                    │  Quantitative Results + Qualitative Results │
                    │                (dominant)                  │
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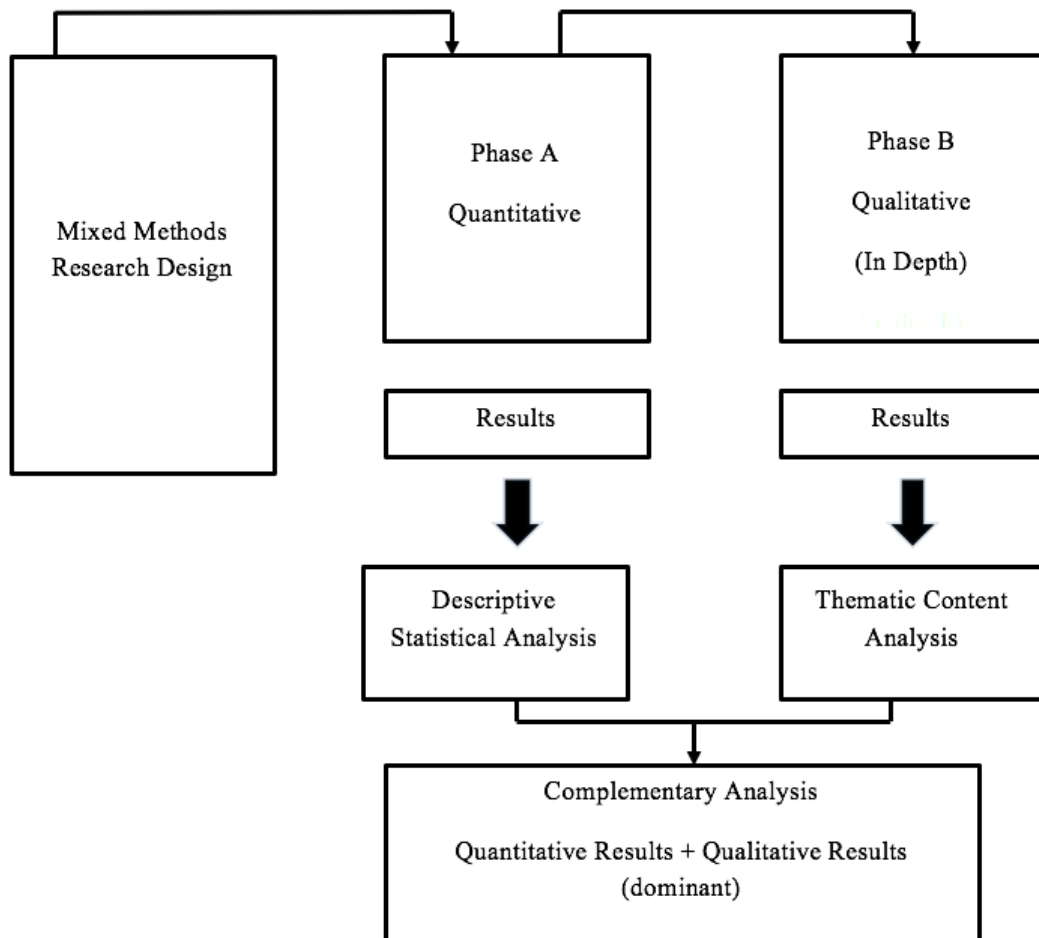
Figure 3.2. The mixed-methods relationship employed in this research.

However, with the shift in the field of second language learning to focus on
individual differences (Cohen 2003; Skehan, 1991), there has been a perceived need to
move beyond the heavy use of predetermined questionnaires to examine how language-
learning strategies are used. There is a need to consider the contextual and
environmental factors that can influence the choices and use of strategies among
learners. These questionnaires were weak in their considerations of the contextual
factors and in examining the differences between and depth of the strategic use of
learners (Gao, 2010). The questionnaires or inventories covered the possible learning
behaviour of the learner and provided information on the strategies they use according
to their learning goals, relevant linguistic skills and functions. But, the strategy aspects

of language learning are hard to identify just by filling out a summative scale that only shows the frequency of use ranging from never to very often. There are many issues that may influence strategy use, such as attitudes, beliefs and proficiency.

Therefore, scholars who criticised the limits of quantitative findings of questionnaires and inventories in learning strategies encouraged multiple methods to more thoroughly explore the strategies used by learners (e.g., Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Woodrow, 2005). In second language research, the use of mixed methods was advocated by a number of researchers as combining the quantitative and qualitative methods to 'reinforce and cross-validate each other so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts' (Harklau, 2011, p. 199). In language strategies research, researchers called for qualitative methods to be introduced to provide the explanations of the use of strategies. This study is an example of such research and has developed a clearly perceived relationship between the two.

For this study, the researcher believed that investigating the questions listed above would be limited if the researcher relied on a single research method, either qualitative or quantitative. The quantitative methods, such as the questionnaire used in this study, might be problematic if it is the only method used to measure the strategies that second language learners use or choose. Limitations of the questionnaire include:

1. learners may not understand or interpret the strategy described in the questionnaire
2. learners may claim strategies they do not use
3. learners may fail to recall strategies that they used to have in the past (White et al., 2007).

The idea of being able to categorise the learning strategies across languages has been criticised in recent years as well (Chamot, 2005; Oxford, 2011). This thesis, by

76

introducing the Vygotsky concept of context, a specific language in a specific learning environment, and self-regulation broadens the perspectives of the language strategies research popular in the 1990s. On the other hand, relying on a qualitative design may focus too narrowly on the individual learner. The interviews add richness and depth to the data from the questionnaire.

Following the trend of recent research methodologies to examine the language strategies among learners, the current study utilised the mixed-methods approach to explore the social experiences of Saudi students in Australia. It utilised the SILL questionnaire in the first phase to understand the range of language strategies that Saudi students deploy in the Australian context. Considering the literature of the language strategies and as the current research adopts a qualitative methodological theoretical framework, it was important for the researcher to build on solid data to guide the interviews and form questions. In general, the language strategies are various and changing in nature depending on the age of the learner, level and context of learning (Cohen, 2011). To identify the range of language-learning strategies that are commonly used and chosen in the Australian context, the research used the SILL questionnaire in the first stage. This is a valid and reliable questionnaire and it was administered and tested across a variety of language learner populations and, therefore, it was used to measure Saudi students' strategies usage (Cohen & Macaro, 2007).

3.3.1 Questionnaire

Using questionnaires is a popular method in quantitative research; however, the purpose of the questionnaire used in this research was to gain a general picture of the language-learning strategies employed by Saudi learners in the Australian context. It was used to identify common patterns or variables that could influence the students' use of social strategies. This study aimed also to examine emerging patterns in order to

sharpen, clarify and revise the questions for the interviews in the second stage of the research based on the participants' answers to the SILL. One of the features of questionnaires in second language learning is to measure the behavioural actions of the respondents, and their beliefs and values (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). In the literature of language-learning strategies, the SILL is a questionnaire that is widely used to ascertain the learners' language-learning strategies and was therefore chosen for the first phase of this research.

3.3.1.1 The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

The SILL is conducted to collect and analyse correlations that influence the use of language-learning strategies among language learners (Chamot, 2004). The SILL has been the most influential in the language-learning strategies research since 1990 (White et al., 2007). It has been translated into 20 languages and used in many studies. This questionnaire was developed by Oxford (1990) to measure language strategy use and identify the relationships with other factors, such as age, gender, proficiency level, learning style and culture. According to Oxford and Nyikos (1989), the internal consistency reliability is 96 using Cronbach's alpha. Context reliability is 95 and validity can be assumed according to the questionnaire (SILL) factors and the self-ratings of language proficiency and language motivation. The social desirability responses bias is another factor that indicates the reliability of SILL for this study. This means that participants' responses tend to be less than honest for one or two reasons: either to please the researcher or to show that they are acceptable socially (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). The SILL was tested in a number of studies and the results were very low in the social desirability response bias. This can also be shown from the frequency of strategy use either in an ESL or EFL environment.

However, the SILL has been critiqued over the years (Gao, 2004; Woodrow, 2005) and even Oxford has acknowledged limitations with the initial version of the SILL and the variability of results across studies (Oxford, 1990). In recent years, Oxford has addressed existing concerns by adding a sociocultural aspect to the SILL and emphasising the role played by context and self-regulation. It is this approach that the present study applied when utilising the SILL. Therefore, the SILL here was used to gather data on a particular group of language users and was context specific. Also, researchers, such as Cohen (2011) and Griffiths (2003), have welcomed an approach that has added qualitative data to the reliance on questionnaires (Oxford, 2011).

Interviews have therefore been included in this research.

3.3.2 In-depth Interviewing

Interviewing in general is the most commonly used research method in the social sciences (Brinkmann, 2013). In the current study, in-depth interviewing was the main research method used to explore the social strategies of Saudi students learning English in an ESL context. This is because it assists in conveying the attitudes and meanings that participants have towards their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Interview data can assist the researcher in eliciting meanings and perspectives towards the individuals' experiences and how these experiences can be categorised according to their importance or impact. For this research, the interviews with participants were semi-structured. This type of interview has four characteristics, as described below by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 3):

Purpose: Semi-structured interviews are conducted for a main purpose that serves the goals of the researcher. The researcher designs the questions and topics to pursue a pre-ordained topic. However, the participant will generally have an interest in

the topic as their participation has been requested because of their specific experience or expertise in the topic of interest.

Description: Semi-structured interviews seek descriptions of how participants experience the world and the event being explored and why these experiences may have been part of their experience.

Life world: The semi-structured interviews are conducted to describe personal experiences from a general world view. The interview is conducted within a particular frame and context that have influenced the participant's experiences. This means the interview is directed and not only focusing on subjective interpretation, but examines the phenomenon in a holistic way.

Interpret the meanings: Semi-structured interviews assist the researcher to combine the interpretations of the participants themselves with a world view seeking emerging themes that might relate to a shared situation.

3.3.2.1 Interview Questions

The initial questions for the interviews were generated mainly from the literature on language-learning strategies. The researcher adopted Spradley's classification of questions (Spradley, 1979). According to this classification, there are three interview questions that researcher can follow to interview their participants: descriptive, structural and contrast questions. In this thesis, descriptive and structural questions are the most relevant. In the descriptive questions, the researcher asked about broad and general topics related to the context of research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). These questions encouraged the discussion of relevant experiences and what would have an influence on the students' English learning in Australia.

Example: *Do you see your learning of English in Saudi Arabia as different from Australia? And why?*

In the structural questions, the researcher aimed to discover ways in which participants organised their cultural knowledge and how they categorised this knowledge according to importance (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Example: *Do you think that working with classmates to solve a task develops your language learning? Why / Why not?*

To refine the mixed methods proposed in this thesis, a pilot study was conducted with one Saudi male participant who was studying English in the Australian ESL context.

3.3.2.2 Pilot Interview

An interview was conducted with a Saudi participant who was studying at the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Language Centre, where students were attending for their language learning. The aim of this pilot interview was to refine the use of mixed methods and to test the interview questions and obtain feedback from the participant that could help in refining the main interview questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This interview also gave the researcher an opportunity to present himself to the learners in the chosen settings and explain to them the aims and desired objective for the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This was clearly shown when he started his first phase of data collection (questionnaire). The pilot interview was conducted with a Saudi student who had been studying English in Australia for one year and had sufficient experience in the ESL context as he was at the advanced level. The interview was conducted in Arabic and then the answers were translated into English.

Ethics approval for this research was presented (Appendix A) including the information sheet of participation for this study and the participant signed the consent form. The results of the pilot interview were organised under the following themes:

3.3.2.3 Understanding Other Cultures and Cooperation with Other Students

In an ESL environment like EAP centre, the Saudi student in this study explained about relying on cooperation with other international students to improve his language skills. He stated:

When you sit next to someone who is better than you in some skills, you sit next to them in the class and benefit from the skills they have and know about ... and also you give them some of the skills you have, so ... what happens is that you improve the skills you have and they improve their skills ... and I see this is a good plan to face the writing difficulties.

The participant added to gain the most from cooperation with other international students, he commented that,

I sit next to a student who is good in writing and I pay attention to how he organises the sentences and the sentences that he uses frequently, how to form a specific sentence that can be used in different situations.

In this sense, the Saudi learner in this interview reported about the strategies that he chose to use in order to improve his writing skills. According to Storch (2002), the type of tasks and interactions could determine the type of interaction between the ESL learners. This kind of interaction can scaffold language abilities by transferring knowledge between them (Storch, 2002). According to Brooks and Donato (1994) who examined the interaction of an ESL group, learners collectively act and rely on their own resources to scaffold a resolution to a language problem they are facing.

The Saudi student had the chance to engage and cooperate with students of other cultural differences that formed part of his learning experiences at the EAP centre. He was differentiating between cultures and how students from other cultures could influence his learning:

The good skill that is noticed in the Chinese is their ability to write, and I advise the students [Saudi] to sit next to a student who regularly attends the class and he wants to study, and from this student, you will improve some skills, and you can take his written essays after the teacher have corrected them and take a picture of them by your phone and ask his permission to take it and apply what his strategies, how he starts the paragraph, writes.

And he continued talking about the learners who are from South American countries: They are funny and from this you will learn from them, and their culture is close to ours, you will learn from them in speaking and things that their levels are good and generally they are better than us in writing, because you know the letters in their language are similar to the English alphabet. But in speaking, it is different.

It seems cooperation between learners is part of the EAP centre, and this influenced the language and intercultural experiences of the Saudi participant in this study.

3.3.2.4 Communication with Native Speakers

As a student learning in a country where English is the primary medium of communication, it is presumed that language learners will have adequate opportunities to communicate with native speakers, unlike students who are studying in EFL contexts (Duff, 2007). However, the Saudi student in this interview expressed his disappointment that he had a little contact with native speakers with whom he could practise his communication skills. The participant answered that he had adequate contact with his

native English teachers. On the other hand, his lack of communication with other native speakers was a result of their nature (according to the interviewee):

They [Australian native speakers] don't like to contact with others. Yes ... and with other cultures they are a bit conservative ... actually, ... I do not know ... but this is their culture.

He added:

The Australians are difficult to deal with as they are closed.

And when the researcher asked about opportunities for contact with a native speaker, he replied '*just a little*'. So, the researcher asked the participant: what are the places in which you can practise English language outside the class? The participant replied '*When you want to purchase something*'. This Saudi learner was expressing his limited opportunities to use English with native speakers and how he relied on limited contact with staff when he went shopping. He proved this contact to be advantageous for him because:

You find them [the sales assistant] is trying to understand what you want to say ... even if your speech is not understandable. He will try to get what you are trying to say.

The participant thought this would help him and he was satisfied with it:

... and he helps you, this could improve your language, in some shops, you enter and you ask and this is good, the staff member will simplify the information for you and you improve your language ...

In the participant's terms, ironically speaking:

... but in the street ... if you want to ask about something, the Australian will say two sentences that you will never understand and then thank him and that's it.

Having relationships with the locals and building friendships with them is one of the factors that impacts the experiences of the international student (Andrade, 2006). In the Australian context, several studies explored the reasons behind the lack of close friendships between international students and native speakers (Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Robertson et al., 2000; Thomson, Rosenthal, & Russell, 2006). Possible reasons for the challenges of making friends with native speakers included different cultural beliefs, values and traditions, the lower English language proficiency among international students and some stereotypical images. Kudo and Simkin (2003) found that the place of residence of international students is a main factor that enhances the close relationship between them and the locals. In the case of the participant in this interview, he mentioned in another section of the interview that if he had come to Australia as a single person (he was living with his wife), he would have lived in a homestay in order to develop his English abilities. Additionally, the presence of a relatively large number of Saudi students may have inhibited the participant from practising English as he was likely to stay with his Saudi classmates most of the time.

3.3.2.5 Motivation to Learn English

From the interview data, it was apparent that the participant was motivated to learn the language and improve his English skills. The participant was a sponsored Saudi employee and this means that he was funded and supported by his employer to study in Australia. This is different from a sponsored student who is funded by the Saudi Ministry of Education. In this participant's case, the pressure of failure made him anxious. Talking about his choices if he sat for the IELTS test,

> *The university you are studying for might be banned at any time [by the*
> *sponsor] because of the large number of Saudi students, and then you transfer to*
> *another one … or, the university may change the entry requirements … so, in*

this case, you could have choices if you have the IELTS exam with you … and

this is an advantage for you.

Recent measures imposed by the Saudi Cultural Mission in Australia were

reasons for the participant's concern about finishing the English course and starting

university studies as soon as possible.

3.3.2.6 Prior English Experiences

To the participant, prior experiences of English learning can impact his learning

in Australia. He was a health worker in Saudi Arabia and these staff need to take

intensive English courses as required for their work. He explained his English

experience in Saudi Arabia:

Yes … there are differences … because of my work in Saudi Arabia, I use

English just for eight hours during the work hours, and then when I leave work,

there is no communication with anyone in English. as you know, our culture is

Arabic and our speech is Arabic.

As the participant had another experience in a language centre in Australia, this

may explain the extent of his use of the strategies in his language learning. Learners

who have already engaged in learning a second or a foreign language display a higher

use of strategies than those who have not (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). These learners

are privileged to use their procedural skills that they have learned before. These

experiences enabled the participant to have more control over his learning and extend

various strategies to enhance his learning.

3.3.2.7 Awareness of the Problems

From the analysis of the interviews, it could be deduced that the Saudi learners

were aware of the problems and constraints faced in learning English in ESL context.

This awareness is important and it is emphasised in the literature of language-learning

strategies (Cohen, 2011; Griffiths, 2003). From the interview of the Saudi participant, there were personal factors such as marital status resulting in the lack of opportunity to socialise and gain contact with English speakers in the Australian context. The participant utilised strategies to enable him fill in the gap in his learning such as the traditional memorisation and repetition strategy for learning vocabulary. To him, there was a need to focus on the academic words that are frequently used by the teachers. He explained one of his strategies to learn vocabulary:

> *I think it is important to focus on what the teacher is saying in the class. And the vocabulary she repeats, because this vocabulary is the one that you will use … I advise them [his Saudi classmates] to pay attention to what is being said and repeated in the class. Since the teacher is saying the vocabulary that is academic and she is explaining to you, and her vocabulary is considered the best because she is not going to bring some slang words or street expressions.*

Another important strategy that was stressed by the participant was the use of mobile applications to improve his English skills. The participant used this strategy to chat with his friends and exchange some of the information on the course they were studying. He said:

> *Look, I see and advise the other studentsis to use chatting … it is very useful especially in writing. My advice is to put your mobile phone on the English [not Arabic] from the first time you come here in Australia if you want to benefit. This will help to correct your spelling mistakes.*

The participant used his smartphone applications for practising his language skills: Chatting is when you talk with someone else, I mean with your friends. like WhatsApp and alike.

Mobile-mediated language-learning applications are found to have a greater impact on second language learning (Barhoumi, 2015; Jaradat, 2014).

3.3.3 Implications of the Pilot Interview

The pilot interview suggested several implications for the research that need to be considered when designing follow-up interview questions and probe questions:

- It has shown that the ESL context of English learning for Saudi learners with and the availability of specific opportunities and challenges faced.

- There are aspects of the experiences that can be explained within SCT, which is the theoretical framework applied in this thesis.

- Although there are a number of social strategies that are specific and defined by the SILL (the questionnaire used in this thesis), it seems that there are other emerging strategies used by Saudi learners in their ESL environment, such as using mobile applications in language learning.

- The pilot interview provides a guide for refining some questions that are needed to enable the researcher to gain deeper understanding of the Saudi learners' experiences.

- It was clear that in the ESL class all fellow students will have English as a second language and there may be individual and group differences, and differences in study habits and proficiency.

3.4 Participants

As this study sought to understand the experiences of Saudi students who were studying in the Australian higher education context, the researcher chose purposive sampling for selecting the participants of this study. This sampling technique is to look for participants because for their characteristics (Morse & Richards, 2002). The overall aim for conducting this research was not to generalise the findings, but to achieve an

overview and some insights of how these students were constructing their language and study experiences in their introductory English classes in Australia. As stated in Chapter 1, English learning proficiency is a major issue for international students in their host countries (Andrade, 2006). Studies of the use of social language strategies are one of the ways of assessing the learning environment provided by the host country, and also of ascertaining the particular challenges one group of language users might encounter. For this reason, purposive sampling enabled the researcher to obtain rich data and insights into the phenomenon of this group of students and their impression of events in the Australian study context (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). This profile was developed from the characteristics of the whole Saudi student population studying English in this institution. The selection criteria for the students to be included in this study were that they should be:

- Saudi students attending the EAP centre

- Saudi students who were willing to take part in voluntarily filling out the questionnaire and attending the interview

- Saudi students who agreed to sign a consent form for their data to be used for academic publishing purposes.

3.5 Data Collection Process

The data collection process followed in this research was sequential (Creswell, 2009), where the first stage of research was the quantitative data collection followed by the qualitative stage. The researcher approached the participants by contacting officials of the EAP centre, the language institution where the learners were studying. The researcher asked the EAP's administration to distribute an Arabic letter of invitation to the Saudi students asking them to participate in the study (Appendix B). If the participant agreed to take part in the study, an information sheet on the research was

then provided to them. This information sheet explained the aims of research, its processes, how data would be collected, what would be involved in their participation and that all personal information would be confidential (Appendix C). Participants were given a consent form to sign (Appendix D). The information sheet is translated into Arabic in order to make instructions and information clear and to avoid any misunderstanding.

The process of data collection started by distributing a hard copy of the questionnaire to the participants, as this was the first phase of the research (Appendix E). The questionnaire was provided by the researcher and then collected after being filled out. The total of the questionnaires was 75 and the 65 questionnaires were returned and analysed. Seven questionnaires were excluded as they included printing typos and three questionnaires had incomplete answers. After the questionnaire phase, the participants were asked to participate voluntarily in semi-structured interviews (Appendix F).

3.5.1 Interview Protocol

To conduct the interview and obtain the best possible information, certain protocols were developed:

- The interviewee was a Saudi student who was studying English at the time of the research being conducted.

- The interviewee was from the higher levels at the EAP centre. This was to ensure that the participants had experienced adequate time to establish a social life and reflect on their experiences.

3.5.2 Data Analysis

As discussed in the design of the research, shown in Figure 3.1, the mixed-methods approach in this study aimed to expand on the investigation of the experiences

of Saudi students in this ESL context. This would allow the researcher to identify the differences between the quantitative and qualitative findings, complement similarities and compare differences. The data analysis applied in this research was sequential (Creswell, 2009), where the quantitative results were used to measure the language-learning strategies used by Saudi students in this ESL context. Then, the qualitative results of the interviews were used to describe and understand the personal aspects of the use of these strategies (Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado, 2015). The process of the data analysis in this study is represented in the following Figure 3.3:
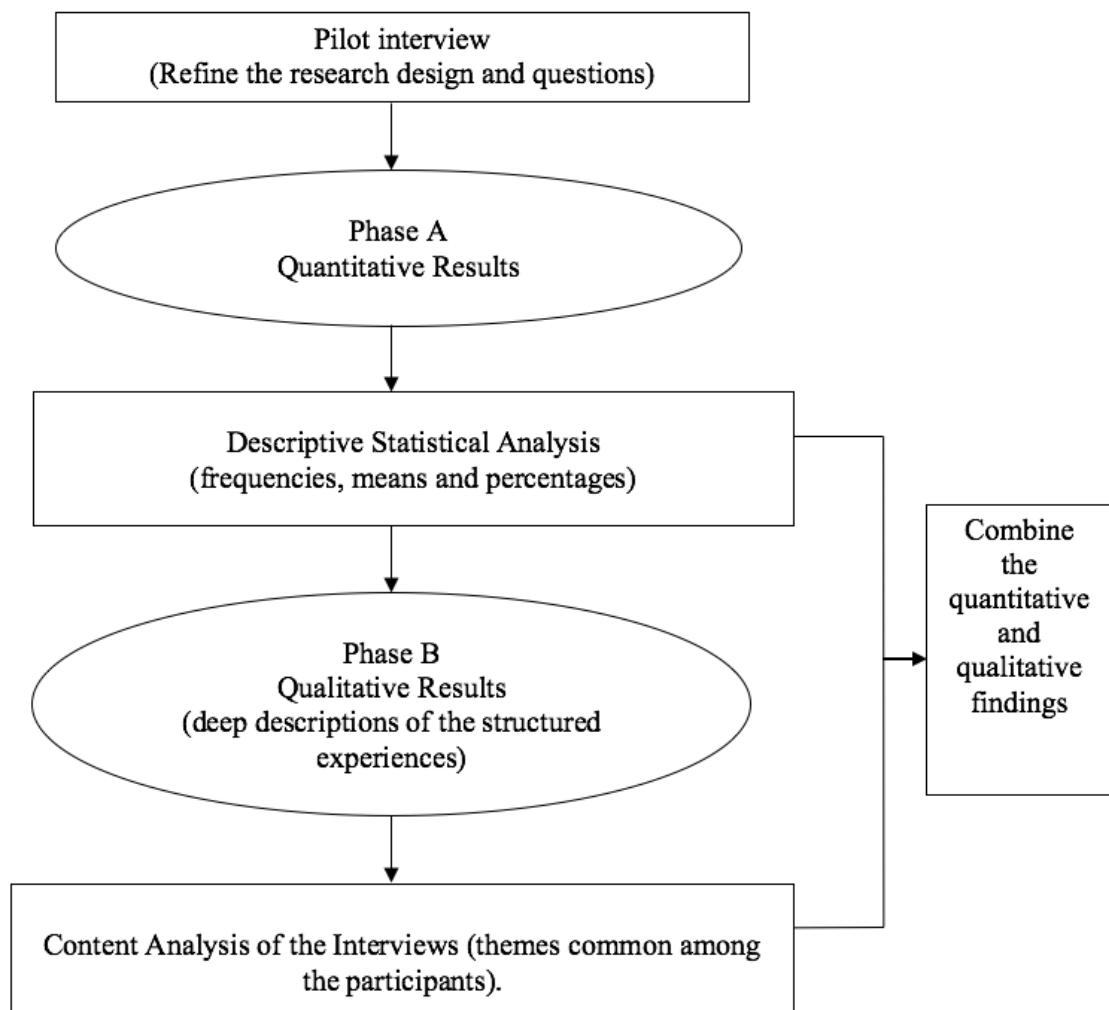
Figure 3.3. Process of data analysis.

3.5.2.1 Quantitative Results Analysis

The quantitative results of the SILL questionnaire were analysed *descriptively*.

The descriptive statistics is a tidy way of presenting numerical data into *means* and *ranges* of a variable (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). In this kind of statistics, the researcher is not interested in considering the correlations between variables. Although the variables such as age, gender and level of proficiency were researched in the literature of learners' strategies, they are not in the scope of the current study. The purpose of this study was to provide qualitative descriptions of the learners and how their lived experiences shaped their decisions to choose and use specific strategies to socialise with the context around them. As the conceptual framework used in this thesis is a socio-cultural one, then experience personal perception is important. For this reason, interviewees own voices are present where possible when discussing results. The researcher applied Microsoft Excel (2010) software to measure the quantitative data of the participants.

3.5.2.2 Qualitative Results Analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data was interpretive and mainly relied on thematic analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2011). This kind of analysis is a method that enabled the researcher to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data and it is perceived as a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Liamputtong, 2013). The interview sessions were audio recorded and then transcribed. The interview procedure was conducted in the Arabic language, the participants' mother tongue. This was to avoid many blurred meanings of questions and words. The Arabic tape-script was translated into the English language in order to analyse the data. There may be risks associated in the misinterpretation of data collected during the translation process of qualitative interviews conducted because of cultural differences and understanding (Van

Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). To minimise the risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the data collected, the researcher conducting the study shared the same Saudi cultural identity and linguistic background as the selected participants (Larkin, Casterle, & Schotsmans, 2007). As the researcher can understand and speak the Saudi language fluently and also shares the same cultural mores and background as his participants, this further reduced potential threats in relation to the validity of the research data (Choi, Kushner, Mill, & Lai, 2012). Given the researcher has professional qualifications with a Bachelor degree in English Language and Translation, this further ensured the quality of transcribed interview data. To increase the validity of data collected in this study, all translation and interpretation of the transcribed interviews was double checked by another professional translator with bilingual expertise in Arabic (Marshall & Rossaman, 2006).

A number of studies have highlighted the challenges involved in the translation process in qualitative research (Temple & Young, 2004). The core challenge of translating interview data is the loss of the meanings of what participants stated.

According to Van Nes et al., (2010), 'Quotations of participants are commonly being used in qualitative research articles. Translation of quotes poses specific challenges, because it may be difficult to translate concepts for which specific culturally bound words were used by the participants' (p. 315). It is important for the translator to consider the individual situation and the cultural context of the research in order to produce an understandable version of the translation (Choi et al., 2012). The role of the researcher/translator provides the researcher with significant opportunities to examine closely the cultural meanings and interpretations through which the interviewees are describing their social experiences (Temple & Young, 2004). This was evident in the current study as the researcher unravelled the translation of some of the cultural

meanings that were essential to the interviewees' social experiences of this context. For example, Interviewee #1, who shared a house with native Australians, expressed certain difficulties in his socialisation because of intercultural sensitivities and differences. He stated this in Arabic:

أنا أشوف إني ماني اجتماعي لدرجة من يوم تقول إنك اجتماعي عندهم فأنت حق بارتي وما إلى ذلك، فلاحظت الناس هنا تخف إذ نادوك لحفلة مرة أو مرتين ولا جيتهم، يصرف النظر عنك، وأنت عاد تعرف وضعنا ما يسمح إنك تروح لحفلات لأن الوضع ما يسمح..

The English version of this statement is:

Here, by social person they refer to a person who attends parties a lot. I noticed that if someone here invites you once for a party or twice, and you don't go, they avoid you. In Saudi Arabia, having parties is not common, but here the society is more open.

The interviewee referred to the Saudi cultural and religious constraints being different from Western cultural perspectives. In light of the discussion, the participant expressed the variation of cultural differences in terms of the meanings and understanding of being a 'social' person and 'open' to attending parties. The term 'more open', when translated into Arabic, formed different meanings for the interviewee, as the culture of drinking and clubbing is a constraint in Saudi culture and this provided reasons for the participant to avoid such events.

The emerging patterns, themes and relationships from the interviews were coded. General agreements were elaborated and experiences compared. The data provided a description of the participants' experiences and were considered in relation to the quantitative data and the questions asked.

94

In summary, this chapter has presented the research methodology and methods used in this research. It began by justifying the choice of the research design—the mixed-methods approach—and provided a justification for this choice. Then, it explored the theoretical paradigm of this thesis and how SCT can be combined with Oxford's work. It gave details of the research methods, questionnaire and interviews, and described how they were administered. The pilot study was related to show the applicability of the interview questions. Finally, the chapter concluded by looking at the participants and how the data have been analysed. In the next chapter, the findings of the SILL questionnaire are presented and discussed.

Chapter 4: Findings of the Questionnaire

Outline of the Chapter

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Data Collection

4.3 The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Questionnaire

4.4 Individual Background Questionnaire

    4.4.1 Age of Participants

    4.4.2 Gender of Participants

    4.4.3 Academic Majors

    4.4.4 Length of Stay in Australia

    4.4.5 Satisfaction of Studying English in Australia

4.5 Data Analysis

    4.5.1 Data from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

    4.5.2 The Overall Use of Language-Learning Strategies Among Saudi Language Learners in the English as a Second Language Australian Context

    4.5.3 Social Language-Learning Strategies Used by Saudi Students in an English as a Second Language Context

4.6 Implications of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Results

4.7 The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning and the English as a Second Language Context of Learning

4.1 Introduction

The current thesis adopted a qualitative approach to examine the language-learning strategies of Saudi students studying English in the Australian context. As these students are learners studying in a different cultural and educational context, they need to socialise and communicate with the world around them. To achieve this, the

students rely on a number of social strategies that assist the interaction between the learners as individuals and the social context in which they are studying. This research focused on the language-learning strategies as researchers believe that such strategies are used and chosen by learners to resolve specific problems they face during their learning process (Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Oxford, 1990). Also important for this thesis is the constructivist approach that examines experience in a contextual framework. The qualitative data provides an opportunity to analyses the participants' perceptions and intentional activity within the context of the English class. For this purpose, the research adopted a mixed-methods approach to collect both statistical data and qualitative data that show the students' perceptions of their experiences in this language environment. As elaborated in Chapter 3, mixed-methods research is often used to compensate for the perceived shortcomings of standalone methods, either to provide a big picture of the phenomenon or to enhance coverage (Creswell, 2009). The aim of this chapter is to provide the quantitative findings of the SILL questionnaire and to present some descriptive analysis of the results.

4.2 Data Collection

The data collection process began by contacting the administration staff of the EAP centre, the language centre where the Saudi students were studying. The researcher explained to them the aims and purposes of the study and what would be involved for volunteers agreeing to participate. The researcher contacted the coordinator of the EAP centre, who provided a list of the Saudi students enrolled at the time of the study. To arrange the process of questionnaire distribution, the coordinator appointed a meeting room for the researcher to meet the students and discuss the purpose of the SILL questionnaire with them. The list included 157 Saudi students from different levels of study at the university. The researcher contacted the Saudi students by sending an email

invitation to the list. It stated that their participation in the study was important and voluntary and the results would hopefully assist future international students studying in an ESL environment, where English is not their first language. As the number of international students continue to rise and Australia aims to have one million onshore international students by 2025 (Austrade, 2015). Therefore, the need to have deeper understanding of the language learning practises of overseas students in Australia is of a significant importance. The researcher specified two days to meet the participants, from 9.00 am until 3.00 pm. However, the meeting room was small and isolated, and few participants approached the researcher, so an alternative venue was found in the Independent Learning Centre (ILC). This centre is where the EAP students gather to do their assignments, use computers to look for articles or just check their emails. Here the researcher could meet more Saudi learners and have conversations with them about the questionnaire to be completed. When the researcher distributed the SILL to the Saudi students in this study, they appeared to be interested in knowing about their language learning and what strategies might be effective for them (Oxford, 1990).

In addition, and most importantly, being present in the ILC enabled the researcher to witness the social context in which the targeted participants of the study were learning English. Information could be gathered on the characteristics of the Saudi participants, such as age, gender and academic majors; the learners from other nationalities who were attending the EAP centre; and the extracurricular activities offered that could be done outside the classrooms. It also allowed the researcher to meet some teachers. This informed the researcher about the context in which Saudi learners of this study were surrounded on a regular basis, which would presumably influence the language-learning strategies they chose to use. The Saudi students showed some seriousness while in the ILC. They were quiet and focused on their assignments.

Although EAP centre comprises learners from different cultural backgrounds, the researcher noticed that students were associating only with individuals who were from the same ethnic background.

4.3 The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Questionnaire

The use of self-reporting strategies is one of the most common ways to measure language-learning strategies among learners (Cohen, 2011). Questionnaires are often used when investigating language-learning strategies as they are quick to administer and they enable the researcher to make a general assessment of the learning strategies across various tasks (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). As some language strategies are cognitive, describing and reporting these strategies can be difficult and time consuming for the learners (Ellis, 1994). Therefore, a number of inventories have been developed by scholars in the literature of language-learning strategies (e.g., Chamot et al., 1987).

However, the SILL developed by Oxford (1990) is one of the most commonly used inventories in this literature and remains the most popular. Oxford developed two versions of the SILL: a version for English speakers learning a new language and a version for speakers of languages other than English (V.7.0 ESL/EFL). For this thesis, the ESL/EFL version was used because English was a second language for all the Saudi students.

The results of the studies that used the SILL indicate the contributions that this inventory is making to understanding and measuring the cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social aspects of language-learning strategies. The SILL has been used and translated into many languages, including Japanese, Turkish, Chinese, Arabic and Spanish. The widespread use of this instrument indicates its validity and reliability. It was used in research that examined the language experiences of Arabic students (Aziz, 2005; Ismail & Al Khatib, 2013) and, more specifically, some studies that investigated

Saudi students (Alhaisoni, 2012; Aljuaid, 2010; Al-Otaibi, 2004; Alwahibee, 2000; McMullen, 2009).

As reported above, in this thesis, the ESL/EFL version of the SILL was used because English was the second language of all the Saudi participants. The SILL comprises five Likert items, where 1 = never or almost never true to me and 5 = always or almost always true to me. Oxford (1990, p. 300) explained the averages of these five items as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Guidelines on the Averages of Strategy Use in the SILL

High	Always or almost always used	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
Low	Generally, not used	1.5 to 2.4
	Never or almost never used	1.0 to 1.4

The SILL used in this study comprised 50 items that are divided into six categories of strategies:

- 1 to 9, *memory strategies*, such as Item 2: I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.

- 10 to 23, *cognitive strategies*, such as Item 10: I say or write new English words several times.

- 24 to 29, *compensation strategies*, such as Item 26: I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.

- 30 to 38, *metacognitive strategies*, such as Item 34: I plan my schedule so I will have time to study English.

– 39 to 44, *affective strategies*, such as Item 40: I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.

– 45 to 50, *social strategies*, such as Item 50: I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.

Some studies that used the SILL modified the questionnaire to accommodate several cultural or educational characteristics. For example, when Al-Otaibi (2004) conducted a study on EFL Saudi students, he modified some items to appropriate the use of English learning in Saudi Arabia. For example, the social strategies item 'I ask for help from English speakers' was modified to 'I ask for help from people whose English is better than mine', and he added the item 'I listen to English songs' as this strategy, according to him, was common in the context of the Saudi learners in his study. To ensure the appropriate alignment of the SILL to this study, the questionnaire was translated by the researcher and the Arabic translation was revised by two bilingual graduate students (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

4.4 Individual Background Questionnaire

The researcher created an individual background questionnaire to collect demographic information about the participants. Information collected included age, gender, current level of English study, academic majors, length of stay in Australia and satisfaction of English study in Australia (Spradley, 1979).

4.4.1 Age of Participants

Although the age of learners is an essential part of the literature of language-learning acquisition, only a few studies have investigated its relationship with language-learning strategies (Trendak, 2015). Peacock and Ho (2003) found that mature-age students (23 and over) tend to use more strategies than younger students. They frequently use memory, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. In another study,

Victori and Tragant (2003) found that an older group of learners reported using advanced cognitive strategies, whereas the younger two groups preferred to use social strategies more frequently. Although these studies reported some differences in terms of age and language learners' strategies, they emphasised the context of learning as another factor (Takeuchi et al., 2007). In the current study, most of the Saudi students' ages were at the mature level ($M = 26$), which may indicate the level of their cognitive abilities and their ability to control their learning and progress (see Figure 4.1).
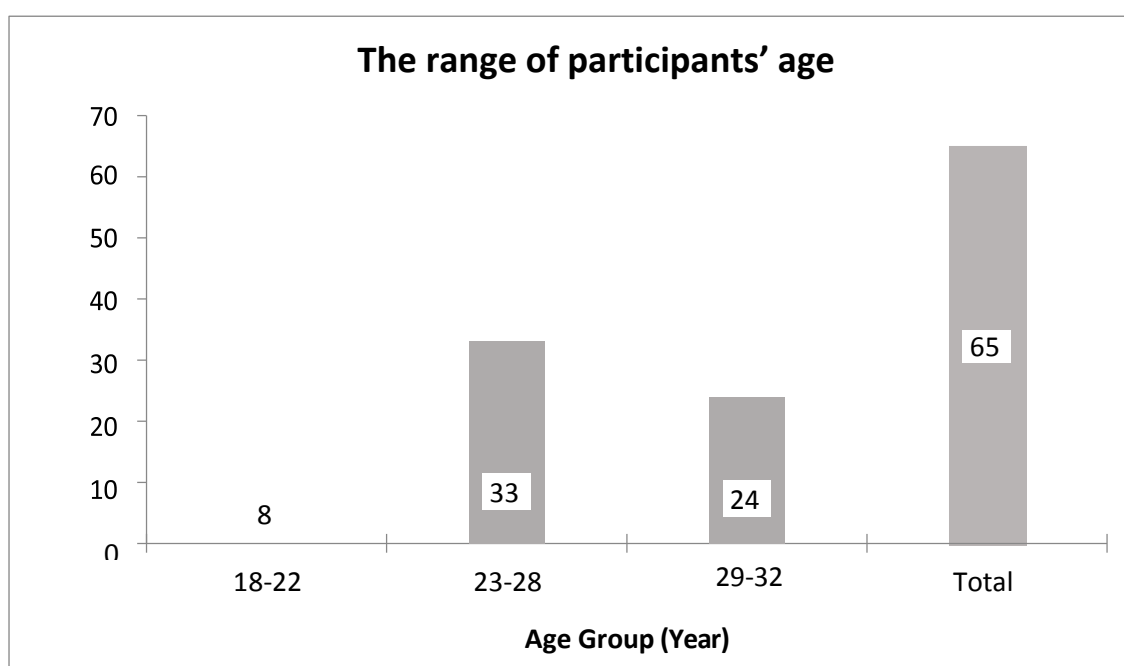
Figure 4.1. Age of participants.

4.4.2 Gender of Participants

Gender is a very common variable found to influence the learning strategies among language students (Cohen, 2011; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rubin, 1975). In terms of Saudi students, a number of researchers have found differences between male and female language learners, in either EFL or ESL contexts (Al-Otaibi, 2004; McMullen, 2009). However, it was difficult to validate comparative results in this study as the female sample was smaller than that of the males. The uneven distribution of

gender shown in Table 4.2 is due to the researcher being unable to recruit more female participants because cultural traditions prevented direct contact with the female participants at the EAP centre. The researcher relied on Saudi friends and their female colleagues in the class to approach the female Saudi students. When they agreed to participate, the researcher presented a copy of the questionnaire to them and explained what was required.

Table 4.2

Gender of Participants

Male	Female
55	10

4.4.3 Academic Majors

The various majors of the Saudi students in this study (see Figure 4.2) could indicate a preference for certain strategies according to their majors (McMullen, 2009; Peacock & Ho, 2003). Although these Saudi learners were studying the same intensive programme, they may have had some specific strategies for learning that were based on their educational fields. In Saudi Arabia, students in the health and engineering fields study more English subjects than do students of other disciplines. Therefore, they may be more proficient than others who are studying social sciences.

Academic specialisations of participants
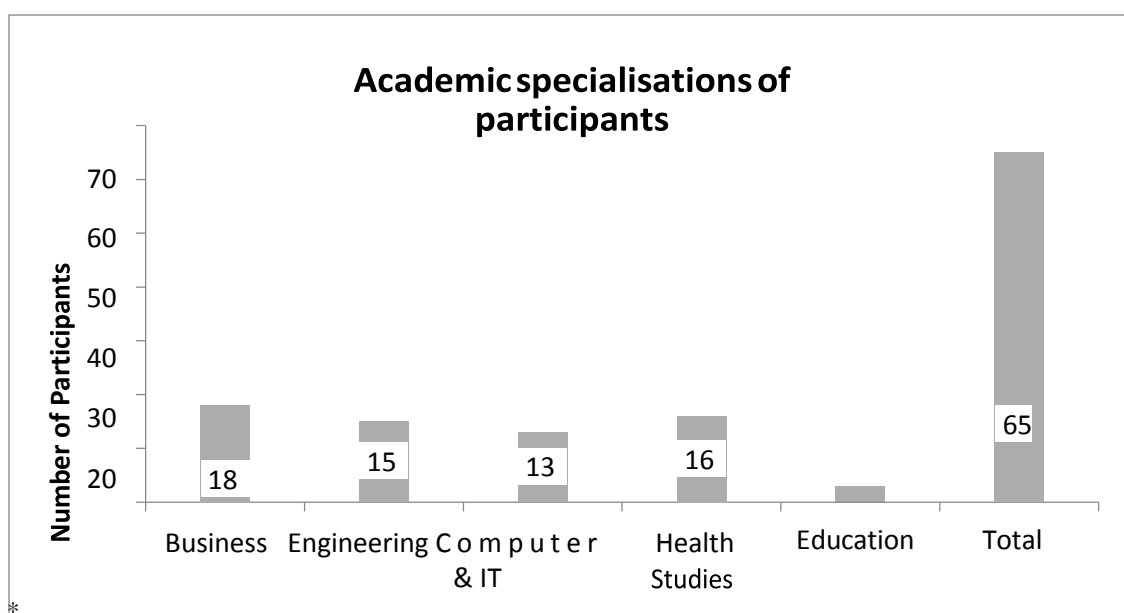
Nine students did not mention their academic majors.

Figure 4.2. Academic majors' distribution of EAP Saudi students.

4.4.4 Length of Stay in Australia

The length of stay in an ESL context of learning (see Figure 4.3) could enhance the learner's exposure to English learning opportunities. This could be through building friendships, more contact with native speakers and learning about the native culture (Chamot, 2004).
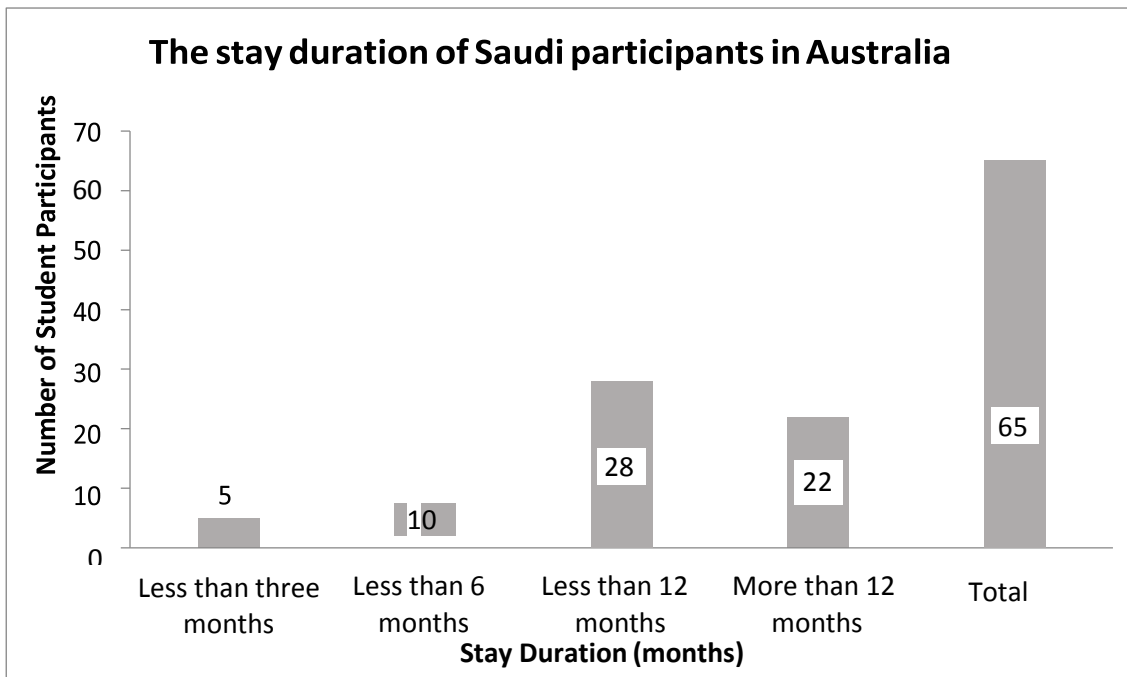
Figure 4.3. Length of stay in Australia by the EAP Saudi students.

4.4.5 Satisfaction of Studying English in Australia

As shown in Figure 4.4, the experiences of Saudi students who were studying English through the EAP centre appeared to be relatively positive. This could indicate their abilities to adjust to the teaching and learning approaches at the EAP programme. Further, the development of their language skills could be another satisfaction for them.
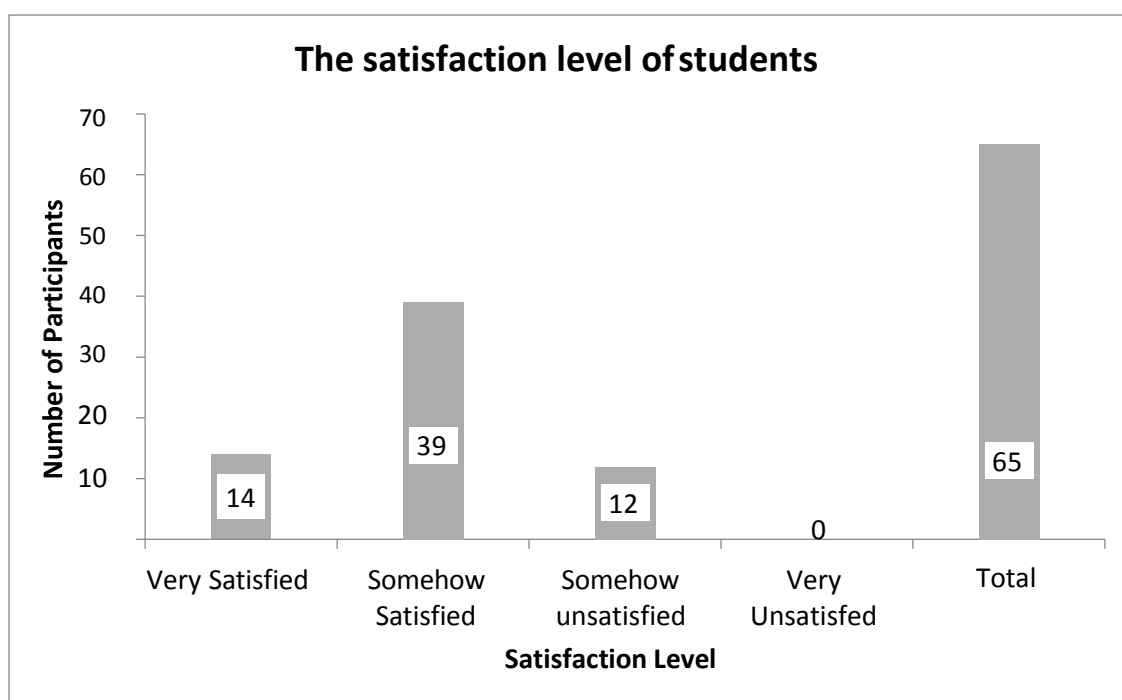
Figure 4.4. Satisfaction level of EAP Saudi students.

4.5 Data Analysis

4.5.1 Data from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

The SILL was administered to 65 Saudi students studying English in an Australian university. Descriptive statistics were used to show the overall use of strategies among these students in that particular context of learning. This type of statistics allows the researcher to convey data into interpretable forms, such as frequency distributions, means and averages (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The data in this thesis was analysed using Microsoft Office Excel 2010. The results of the questionnaire are presented in the following tables.

Table 4.3

Memory Strategies

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency of Use
1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	2.96	59%	Medium
2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	2.87	57%	Medium
3. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	2.57	51%	Medium
4. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	3.42	68%	Medium
5. I use rhymes to remember new English words.	2.59	51%	Medium
6. I use flashcards to remember new English words.	2.53	50%	Medium
7. I physically act out new English words.	2.32	46%	Medium
8. I review English lessons often.	3.01	60%	Medium
9. I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board or on a street sign.	3.01	60%	Medium

The memory strategies were the least frequently used strategies, with a mean of 55.78. It seems that the students were not relying totally on the strategies of this section.

The Saudi learners appeared to use mental linkage strategies (Items 4 and 9) and this could indicate how important vocabulary learning was for them.

Table 4.4

Cognitive Strategies

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency of Use
10. I say or write new English words several times.	3.5	70%	High
11. I try to talk like native English speakers.	3.48	63%	Medium
12. I practise the sounds of English.	3.53	64%	High
13. I use the English words I know in different ways.	3.39	67%	Medium
14. I start conversations in English.	3.22	64%	Medium
15. I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.	3.78	75%	High
16. I read for pleasure in English.	3.07	61%	Medium
17. I write notes, messages, letters or reports in English.	3.05	61%	Medium
18. I first skim an English passage (read it quickly) then go back and read carefully.	3.31	66%	Medium
19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	3.10	62%	Medium

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency of Use
20. I try to find patterns in English.	3.05	61%	Medium
21. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	3.01	60%	Medium
22. I try not to translate word for word.	3.84	56%	High
23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English	2.47	49%	Medium

Cognitive strategies are of the utmost importance in language learning, both foreign and second language learning (Oxford, 1990). It is natural in learning a language to use strategies such as repeating and practising the words or sounds of the new language. In this study, the use of cognitive strategies was in the middle (M = 3.14). The students' use of these strategies could be a result of their need to memorise and analyse the language content they were learning; they include trying not to translate word for word and finding patterns in English. This latter strategy complements the findings of the memory strategies in the previous section, as students expressed their use of mental linkages in their language learning. Another strategy that students highlighted here was using available resources for learning in their ESL context, for instance, 'I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English'. These students had the opportunity to find an English learning source that could enhance their language learning, some of these resources are not present in their EFL culture, such as movie theatres, and this may explain their frequent use of this strategy in the Australian ESL context.

Table 4.5

Compensation Strategies

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency of Use
24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	3.71	74%	High
25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	2.80	56%	Medium
26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	3	60%	Medium
27. I read English without looking up every new word.	3.14	62%	Medium
28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	3.20	64%	Medium
29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	4.07	81%	High

Compensation strategies were among the strategies most used by the Saudi students in this study ($M = 3.17$). Their use of these strategies, such as guessing, or using linguistic clues or synonyms, indicated that they were trying to learn by overcoming the gaps in their language knowledge. The least used strategy here was using gestures to make up for the missing parts of speech ($M = 2.80$). This could indicate that the non-verbal knowledge of these students is not adequate to help their communication.

Table 4.6

Metacognitive Strategies

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency of Use
30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	3.67	73%	High
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	3.89	77%	High
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	4.04	80%	High
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	4.04	80%	High
34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	3.57	71%	High
35. I look for people I can talk to in English.	3.85	77%	High
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	3.62	72%	High
37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	3.45	69%	Medium
38. I think about my progress in learning English.	4	80%	High

Metacognitive strategies were the most reported of strategies used by the Saudi students who participated in this questionnaire ($M = 3.79$). Students highlighted several strategies within this section that indirectly aimed to enhance their language learning.

For example, they had goals and objectives for their learning in their ESL context ($M = 3.45$). They thought of improving their English skills by finding

opportunities to practise their spoken English ($M = 3.85$) or by reading English

materials ($M = 3.62$). They tried to self-evaluate their learning and progress, which is an

essential strategy in effective learning (Oxford, 1990).

Table 4.7

Affective Strategies

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency of Use
39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3.32	66%	Medium
40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	3.96	79%	High
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	2.51	50%	Medium
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	3.10	62%	Medium
43. I write down my feelings in a language-learning diary.	1.95	39%	Low
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	3.07	61%	Medium

The affective strategies were among the least used strategies by the Saudi

students ($M = 2.99$). The exception to these strategies was the item 'I encourage myself

to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake' ($M = 3.96$), this could be a

result of the willingness of these students to communicate in order to develop their

language skills. It involved taking some risks, and applying strategies of this kind means

that the Saudi students were using direct strategies despite their fear of failure.

Table 4.8

Social Strategies

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency of Use
45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.	3.73	72%	High
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	3.08	60%	Medium
47. I practise English with other students.	4.06	81%	High
48. I ask for help from English speakers.	3.57	70%	High
49. I ask questions in English.	3.88	74%	High
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.75	71%	High

Social strategies were the second most used strategy among the Saudi students participating in this questionnaire ($M = 3.56$). Described by Oxford (1990) as 'learning with others', these strategies are not only specific to oral skills (listening and speaking), they can include writing and reading as well. As these students were learning in an ESL context, they had opportunities to practise these strategies. This was clear through their use of asking questions (items 46, 48 and 49) and indicates that it was one of the main class practices that students were using in their ESL context. In addition, it could be used for clarification if the learner was talking with a native English speaker. Other strategies could be cooperation with others ($M = 4.06$), which can include peers or other proficient language users. The last important strategy here was for students to try to develop their understanding of the culture of the ESL host society ($M = 3.75$).

4.5.2 The Overall Use of Language-Learning Strategies Among Saudi Language Learners in the English as a Second Language Australian Context

In ESL contexts, learners tend to use more learning strategies than do EFL students for the reasons such as ESL students tend to be more active in their learning and more motivated because they have travelled outside their home country to study (Riley & Harsch, 1999). Outside the class, they have more opportunities to use their learned language and they need strategies to achieve their goals. As they are in an English-speaking environment, this makes them aware of the strategies they are employing.

This study found that Saudi students in the ESL context used language-learning strategies in the following order: metacognitive, social, compensation, cognitive, affective and memory (see Table 4.9). The first two categories (i.e., indirect strategies: metacognitive and social) were found to be used more by students in the ESL contexts (Abu Shamis, 2003; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Nguyen & Godwyll, 2010). The high reported use of metacognitive strategies could be a result of the intensive nature of the EAP course. In this course, the learners were highly motivated to enhance their language learning and start their university studies. Therefore, their motivation and willingness to learn encouraged them to use more strategies that assisted them to organise their learning, such as setting learning goals and objectives, and monitoring and evaluating their own learning. The use of metacognitive strategies enables learners to regulate their learning in the classroom and the general environment, which positively develops their academic achievement (Che Wan Ibrahim et al., 2014; Pintrich & Garcia, 1994).

Table 4.9

Overall Use of Language-Learning Strategies Among Saudi Language Learners in the

Australian Context

Strategies	Mean	Percentage	Rank
Metacognitive	3.79	75.94%	1
Social	3.56	71.78%	2
Compensation	3.17	66.49%	3
Cognitive	3.14	62.47%	4
Affective	2.99	59.84%	5
Memory	2.78	55.78%	6

Social strategies are important because language learning involves other people with whom the learner interacts and communicates (Oxford, 1990). The Saudi students in this study needed to communicate in their new ESL environment. The social strategies are explained individually in the next section of this chapter.

Direct strategies (compensation, cognitive and memory) were used by the Saudi students in this study, but not frequently. The moderate use of compensation strategies ($M = 3.17$) could be a result of the higher language levels of the participants in this study, who were in the upper-intermediate and advanced levels. Taguchi (2002) found that among ESL and EFL learners, highly proficient learners tend to use positive compensation strategies in which they are actively participating in conversations that develop their linguistic skills, whereas learners with lower proficiency levels prefer to use negative compensation strategies such as avoidance, guessing and making use of simplified language. Lee and Oxford (2008) found that compensation strategies are

relied upon more among EFL students and this could explain the impact of the context on the choice of language-learning strategies.

Cognitive and memory strategies, which are essential in language learning, were fourth on the list. The Saudi learners reported using strategies that were related to practice, repetition and vocabulary learning, and finding patterns and similarities between English and their mother tongue. Higher use of these strategies is associated more with learners with lower levels of proficiency (Griffiths, 2003), which contrasts with the language levels of the Saudi students explored in this study. However, the learners in this study emphasised the use of some mental strategies to enhance their learning, such as 'I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board or on a street sign' ($M = 3.01$) and 'I say or write new English words several times' ($M = 3.5$).

The least used category was the third category of indirect strategies, affective strategies, which are related to interacting in order to improve their linguistic skills. As learners need the English language for survival in their new ESL environment, they take the risk of speaking English even if they make mistakes. It seems that the Saudi learners were more likely to have control over their emotions; therefore, they risked asking people questions, even if they were unsure of the correct language to use. They spoke about their feelings regarding their English learning ($M = 3.07$), and this could be related to their concerns about studying in the new environment. The teaching style was new to them and they could have had difficulty understanding what was expected of them. Most international students seek help from students or friends who are from the same cultural background. As this thesis concerns the social strategies used by learners, the next section will explain in detail the six items of this section and their reported use.

4.5.3 Social Language-Learning Strategies Used by Saudi Students in an English as a Second Language Context

The six items of social strategies were reported in accordance with the average use by the Saudi learners in the Australian learning context. They have been divided into three subcategories: questioning, cooperation with others and attitude towards the culture of the native speakers (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.10

The Average Use of Social Strategies Among ESL Saudi Students

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency of Use
45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.	3.73	72%	High
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	3.08	60%	Medium
47. I practise English with other students.	4.06	81%	High
48. I ask for help from English speakers.	3.57	70%	High
49. I ask questions in English.	3.88	74%	High
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.75	71%	High

Students no. = 56

4.5.3.1 Asking Questions

The asking questions strategy is one of the main parts of the social strategies category of Oxford's language-learning strategies classification. These basic strategies include four items:

- If I do not understand something in my second language, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.

- I ask second language speakers to correct me when I talk.

- I ask for help from second language speakers.

- I ask questions in the second language.

The findings regarding the Saudi learners from the SILL questionnaire indicated that the above four strategies were frequently used by the participants. As Saudi learners of this study were learning in an ESL context, they were continuously exposed to the English language through becoming involved and socialising in their learning environment. This finding echoed the research conducted by Ho (2004), who investigated the language-learning strategies of a number of ESL participants and found the item 'asking questions for clarification' the most used single strategy employed by the participants. In an ESL context, language learners are privileged with the availability of native English speakers—teachers, neighbours or other students—with whom English learners can practise their English language. English is their medium for survival in this context and by applying English communication and social skills, they are more likely to be accepted and acknowledged in contexts in which they are situated, such as the classroom, university, neighbourhood, workplace or grocery store (Norton & Toohey, 2001).

The language institute was another important factor for Saudi learners in this study in using more social strategies in their language learning. EAP courses are intensive and learners enrolling at this EAP centre generally have a strong instrumental motivation for English language learning (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). They are required to achieve and advance in their language learning before commencing their tertiary studies. This indicates that the classroom practices at the EAP centre in this

study enhanced the confidence of the Saudi learners by giving them the ability to ask about things they did not know or by clarifying points for them. These students were new in this social context of learning, and supporting and promoting their confidence and agency helped them to express their feelings and identities.

Moreover, as Saudi students in this study were fee-paid scholarship students, they had more responsibilities to meet, including the strict requirements of their sponsor, such as finishing the English language course in one year. The Saudi Ministry of Education recently changed its rules and announced that Saudi students are allowed to study English for one year and they can extend this for just six months, providing that they sit IELTS or an equivalent test and achieve a minimum of 5.5 overall and 5 in each division (Paul, 2016).

Compared with other studies that have examined Saudi students in ESL contexts (discussed in Chapter 2), the findings of the current study differed in that social strategies were one of those frequently used by the participants. Although Alwahibee (2000) found that Saudi students in his study did not use social strategies often in their ESL context, the participants believed that the best way to develop oral communication skills was to become involved in conversations with native speakers. A few studies found that some Saudi students were not interested in the people and culture of the English language, even though they reported that developing language skills needs thorough exposure to the culture and people of the English language (AL-Braik, 1986).

Cultural differences are important factors that can either facilitate or hinder the transitional experiences of international students in their host countries. Other researchers (Alwahibee, 2000; Caldwell, 2013; Hofer, 2009) found that some Saudi English learners in an ESL context think that friendships with ESL speakers are difficult and sometimes superficial. The majority of the participants in previous studies reported

a desire to have native English-speaking friends. However, some of them believed that having friendships with ESL native English speakers meant absorbing aspects of the English culture, such as drinking alcohol, and going to bars and dance parties. Although the ESL context provides Saudi students with opportunities to use and learn English skills, the literature has shown that Saudi students are not frequent users of social language strategies (Alwahibee, 2000), which contradicts the results of this current study, where social language strategies were among the most used strategies.

4.5.3.2 Cooperation with Other Students

This subcategory had just one item, 'I practise English with other students'. This item is one of the essential social strategies and it is mostly applied inside the classroom. The students' higher use of this strategy could be a result of classroom practices whereby students must work in groups to discuss tasks and share ideas with their peers or teachers. Through pair and group work activities inside the classroom, international students have the chance to have contact with each other. This indicates the scaffolding nature between the learners and how this can help to develop their cognitive abilities. Studies have shown that Saudi female students may face some specific challenges when studying in an ESL mixed-gendered context (e.g., Australia and the United States; Alhazmi, 2013; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). The use of this strategy indicates mutual support is present between the learners and this assists in increasing their self-esteem and their confidence in their learning (Mason, 2006; Oxford, 1990).

As in the ESL context of learning, the advantage of cooperation was clear because students at the EAP centre were from different cultural backgrounds and these learners needed to cooperate to improve their English skills and learning. For Saudi students, this was a good opportunity to mix with students from different cultural

backgrounds so they could practise and improve their learning (Riley & Harsch, 1999). It should be highlighted here that some cultures prefer cooperative learning styles over a competitive learning style. For example, Oxford and Anderson (1995) found that Latino students tend to be cooperative in their language-learning strategies with a great amount of physical activity.

From the perspective of SCT, this cooperation has been found to influence the acquisition of a second language when learners can collaboratively engage in dialogue to solve a problem or finish a task (Watanabe & Swain, 2007). Through this peer-to-peer collaborative dialogue, learners who have different levels of proficiency could benefit from working together and supporting each other's learning (Watanabe & Swain, 2007). According to Storch (2002), learners with collaborative orientations can scaffold each other's learning when working in pairs. This scaffolding can be performed in a collaborative pattern where the two learners are exchanging the role of the expert and they tend to reach an accepted resolution between them.

Alternatively, it can take the shape of an expert–novice scaffolding dialogue where the expert has the role of the expert in its traditional sense, that is, parent–child or teacher–students, and aids a less proficient peer. A number of studies (Storch, 2002; Watanabe & Swain, 2007) have found that these two patterns are effective in transferring knowledge between language learners. In the current study, Saudi subjects had opportunities to have contact with learners from other cultures through their EAP classes, which potentially scaffolded their learning and cognitive abilities (Storch, 2002).

4.5.3.3 Attitudes Towards the Culture of the Native Speakers

The frequent use of the item 'I try to learn about the culture of English speakers' echoes what Alwahibee, (2000), Caldwell (2013), Heyn (2013) and Hofer (2009) found

with Saudi students who were studying English in an ESL context. The majority of Saudi participants in the previous studies were interested in the ESL cultures and its speakers. This also supports other studies conducted on ESL students from other cultural backgrounds; for example, Chinese students who are studying in an ESL context tend to have positive attitudes towards the ESL culture and its people (Ho, 2004).

However, with the absence of deep and thorough qualitative studies that have investigated the social and cultural attitudes of Saudi students who are studying in an ESL learning context, especially the studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s (Alhazmi, 2013), it is difficult to generalise the results of some surveys and statistical data on that particular population of Saudi students in different learning contexts.

Midgley (2010) asserted that although some Saudi participants were interested in embracing the Australian culture and wanted to develop Australian friendships to develop their English skills, other Saudi students were satisfied with their English language proficiency as long as it met the requirements of the academic institution in which they were studying. According to Midgley (2010), among this latter group were participants who found their cultural and religious convictions were not shared by other ESL speakers and therefore they needed to give these convictions priority over their English language skills, which might have been gained by mixing with other ESL groups. The researcher found that Saudi students were aware of the cultural norms around them, they were confident and they were linguistically expert enough to express themselves to others; however, their strong beliefs were shaping the way they communicated socially within the ESL context. Midgley (2010) stated in his study that although these behaviours might give the impression that these participants were anti-

social and against other ESL cultures, it was not ethical to reduce the international

students to one stereotypical international student model.

Moreover, the frequent use of this SILL question (I try to learn about the culture

of English speakers) mentioned above can be justified by how the ESL context of

learning can influence the ESL learners to shift their cultural attitudes towards the ESL

culture and the cultures of international students as well. Heyn (2013) found from the

qualitative results of a study of a number of Saudi students who were studying in an

ESL context that they had gained great understanding of and respect for other cultures.

This was due to their contact with students from other cultural backgrounds studying in

the ESL course. One participant stated, 'I've gained some experience about other

cultures. I know more about different cultures, like Korean people and other Asian

cultures, and I know more about the Western way, like in the United States' (Heyn,

2013, p. 110).

4.6 Implications of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Results

The results of the questionnaire indicate the frequent use and choice of social

language-learning strategies in the Australian context of learning. They findings

indicated the order of most frequent use of language-learning strategies of these ESL

Saudi students in Australia as: metacognitive, social, compensation, cognitive, memory

and affective. The social strategies, including the three subcategories asking questions,

cooperation with others and attitudes towards the ESL culture and its people, were

analysed according to their usage.

However, these results suggest that the ESL Australian context of learning

influences and supports Saudi students to use more social strategies. The questionnaire

is limited in explaining the individual differences that influence the journeys of overseas

students in their host countries. By adopting quantitative methods in language-learning studies, the traditional approach is used whereby the linguistic skills of learners are aggregated into groups, overlooking the highly dynamic social and cultural relationships of the second language learners (Oxford, 2003). The advantage of using this method is that it gives a big picture of a large group of individuals. However, the qualitative investigation, discussed in the next chapter, explored the mediated relationship between the second language learners and their peers or teachers, and how these relationships could assist and support them in their language learning.

In the current study, although the use of the SILL questionnaire was informative in identifying the most frequently used strategies among Saudi students, it did not indicate how these strategies were socially used in their ESL context. The second stage of the research, qualitative interviews, elaborates on these strategies and how they were chosen and employed by Saudi students in the Australian context.

4.7 The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning and the English as a Second Language Context of Learning

The SILL questionnaire has been used in many studies to investigate the language-learning strategies of ESL learners and the relationship with other variables. Tamada (1996) found the ESL context of language learning is more important in determining the choices of strategies that Japanese learners made. Griffiths (2013) used the SILL to investigate the use of language-learning strategies among 348 students from different cultural backgrounds studying English in New Zealand. She found that metacognitive and social strategies were among the most important strategies used by her participants. Griffiths highlighted the frequent use among her participants of interaction with others, such as 'I ask for help from English speakers' and 'I try to learn about the culture of English speakers'. According to her, this may indicate that learners

are aware of the importance of the communicative skills of the language and that they can increase students' self-confidence and learning. Similarly, Wu (2008) found ESL Chinese students tend to use metacognitive and social strategies more than any other strategy and the author indicated the cultural and personal factors that contribute to the learners' choices.

One of the variables that Griffiths looked at in this study was how the level of proficiency of learners influenced their choice and use of language-learning strategies. The researcher found that the higher the level of the learners, the more strategies they used in general. This was also a finding of Nguyen and Godwyll (2010), who found that higher-level ESL learners tended to use social strategies and then metacognitive strategies among the categories on the SILL questionnaire. Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) explained this by saying that when English learners advance in their learning and proficiency, their confidence increases, which promotes their use of communication strategies and allows them to interact with others. Therefore, in the current study, the frequent use of communication strategies could be related to the fact that most of the Saudi participants were studying at higher levels. The above examples from the research literature have been utilised in this discussion to show the usefulness of the application of the SILL questionnaire in this study and to situate the findings against what is already known. However, individual differences are important in shaping the experiences of learners in ESL contexts and the use and choice of language-learning strategies (Ellis, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1996; Rubin, 1975).

Therefore, the current thesis built on these quantitative results from the SILL to conduct the second phase of the study, the qualitative interviews. From the findings and discussion presented here, the interviews were designed within the following aims:

- to gain a deeper understanding of the social and social strategies used by Saudi learners in the Australian ESL context

- to identify the individual factors that influence the choice and use of language-learning strategies by Saudi students in the Australian ESL context

- to identify how the Saudi learners construct meanings from their experiences within the ESL Australian context in which they are learning English

- to identify the factors that enhance or hinder the personal experiences of the Saudi student in the Australian ESL context.

This chapter outlined the quantitative results of the questionnaire used to explore the language-learning strategies of Saudi students in the Australian context. It started by explaining the questionnaire selection process and how the researcher recruited participants to fill in the questionnaire. The results highlighted the most frequently used language-learning strategies of Saudi students. It built on the literature of social strategies and how the SILL results affected the second stage of data collection. The data generated by the questionnaire were then applied to develop the questions of the qualitative research, and interviews with the participants to explore their social strategies in the Australian context were conducted. The next chapter discusses the qualitative phase of the research and the findings.

Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings

Outline of the Chapter

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how Saudi English learners socially interact within their ESL Australian environment. After presenting the findings of the questionnaire in the previous chapter, the purpose of this chapter is to provide the qualitative results of the study. The results of the qualitative interviews were categorised according to the main themes that have arisen from the participants' narratives. The learners were residing in a new environment and this presented several adjustment challenges for them. In a country where English is the dominant language, such as Australia, the successful adaptation to this environment by

learners of English is largely shaped by how well they master the language skills of English (Andrade, 2006). Language skills are important for learners to interact with the local host community around them, and skill levels are expected to increase their confidence and self-esteem (Yang et al., 2006). The Saudi participants in this study have reported varied results of their experiences interacting within the Australian ESL context.

In general, Saudi students' presence in Australian universities is relatively new compared with other students who are from other nationalities, for example, Asian background students. The experiences of learning for Saudi students in this particular context is not as established as for other ESL contexts, such as in the United Kingdom and the United States, where Saudi students have been studying since the 1950s (Bukhari & Denman, 2013). This different context may present some difficulties for the students and for the universities as well. The researcher felt this when he met the EAP officials and they expressed interest in the topic and in the results. The Saudi participants in this study have produced rich and informative interview results of their social interactions in the Australian context. In the following chapter, the researcher will analyse some of the themes that were highlighted in the participants' interviews.

5.2 Background Information of Interviewees

The researcher interviewed 18 Saudi students ($N=10$ males and 8 females). The background information of the 18 interviewees are presented in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1

Background Information of Interviewees

Interviewee Number	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Level at the EAP
#1	Male	28	Married	Upper-intermediate

#2	Male	30	Married	Upper
#3	Female	22	Single	Upper-intermediate
#4	Male	19	Single	Advanced
#5	Male	26	Married	Upper-intermediate
#6	Female	20	Single	Upper-intermediate
#7	Female	23	Married	Upper-intermediate
#8	Female	24	Married	Upper-intermediate
#9	Male	28	Married	Advanced
#10	Male	27	Married	Advanced
# 11	Male	32	Married	Advanced
#12	Male	38	Married	Advanced
#13	Female	28	Married	Upper-intermediate
#14	Female	25	Married	Upper-intermediate
#15	Female	24	Married	Upper-intermediate
#16	Male	30	Married	Advanced
#17	Female	22	Single	Upper-intermediate
#18	Male	26	Married	Intermediate

5.3 Design of the Interviews

The procedure of interviewing started by contacting the EAP officials and asking them for ethical permission to approach the Saudi students who were studying there. The aim of this step was to create a realistic site for conducting the research: where entry to the site is possible, the researcher is likely to build trusting connections

with participants and the research is carried out and reported ethically (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The researcher was granted access to the EAP centre and this allowed him to see how the Saudi participants were socialising, interacting and spending their free time there. He had the chance to present himself to the participants and to explain to them the purpose of the interviews and the desired results from them. The researcher was interested in meeting them during the break sessions in the places where they always met with their friends, either in the lounge areas or in the EAP centre mosque. The researcher directly contacted the male Saudi students at the EAP centre and he explained to them the aim and purpose of the research. For the female students, he contacted them through distributing an Arabic invitation to participate in the interview, given to them either in the mosque or by one of their Saudi male classmates (Appendix B). With the students that he met and in the invitation paper, the researcher elaborated on their participation and what would be involved in their interview. The researcher sought both Saudi male and female students and sometimes the Saudi participants used their friendship networks to find more participants, either male and female. The current study had no problems recruiting female participants ($N=$ 8 interviewees). As the social

and interaction experiences of language learners are changeable (Cohen & Macaro, 2007), the researcher focused on Saudi students who were studying at advanced levels at the time of interviewing. Presumably, this sample of interviewees would have more experience in their academic and social adaptations to the new environment. Thus, the researcher's aim was to have richer interviews that provided answers to the research questions.

The design of the interviews began with the readings and analysis of the literature of the language-learning studies. These studies provided the researcher with a general picture of the social strategies and their place in the language-learning strategies' body of research. Specifically, the results of the questionnaire, discussed in Chapter 4, furnished the researcher with a solid base from which he could formulate the interview questions. There are two main umbrella questions upon which the interviews were conducted. The first main question addresses the social strategy practices inside the EAP centre and it emphasises the role of the educational environment and how it will help the social interaction of the Saudi students who are studying there. The second main question asks about the role of the outside ESL environment and how the Saudi students are engaging with the Australian socially (Appendix F). Within each main question, there are a number of sub-questions that aimed to elicit more responses from the participants:

Q1: What are the language social strategies you use inside the classroom?

Q2: What are the social language strategies you use outside the class?

5.4 Themes Emerging from the Interviews

The results and analysis of the interviews yielded several themes. These themes varied in their frequency and emphasis from one student to another. The following tables display:

- the emerging themes according to their emphasis by the interviewee

- the emerging themes according their frequency of occurrence

5.4.1 Emerging Themes According to the Emphasis of Each Interviewee

Table 5.2

Themes Emphasised by the Participants

Interviewee Number	Themes Emphasised
#1	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities, accommodation arrangements, family presence, pedagogical methods, lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning.
#2	Difficulties with students from other nationalities, accommodation arrangements, lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning.
#3	Difficulties with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning, hijab and discrimination.
#4	Benefits from working with overseas students, good friendships with native speakers, technology use in language learning, context of learning in Australia.
#5	Difficulties with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning.
#6	Lack of communication with native speakers, benefits from working with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers, prior experience.
#7	Lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning, hijab and discrimination, prior experience.
#8	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning, hijab and discrimination.
#9	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities, lack of

communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning, family presence.

#10	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning, family presence, pedagogical methods.
#11	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning, family presence, pedagogical methods.
#12	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities, having good friendships with the native speakers, technology use in language learning, family presence, pedagogical methods.
#13	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning, family presence.
#14	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning, hijab and discrimination.
#15	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers.
#16	Difficulties in working with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers.
#17	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning, hijab and discrimination, prior experience.
#18	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities, lack of communication with native speakers, technology use in language learning, family presence.

5.4.2 Emerging Themes According to Their Occurrence in Each Main Question

Q1: What are the social language-learning strategies you use inside the classroom?

Table 5.3

Themes According to the First Question

Themes	Number of Occurrences
Benefits from working with students from other nationalities	15 interviewees
Pedagogical methods at the EAP	7 interviewees

Difficulties faced by working with students from other nationalities	5 interviewees

Q2: What are the social language leaning strategies you use outside the class?

Table 5.4

Themes According to the Second Question

Lack of communication with native English speakers	16
Technology use to learn English	9
Prior Experience in English learning	6
Accommodation arrangements	5
Family presence	5
Female students' experiences (hijab and discrimination)	5
Having close relationship with native speakers	3
Awareness of other cultures	4
No interest to interact with the locals	2
Work with other Saudi students and other students from different nationalities	2

5.5 Discussion of Emerging Themes

From the two main interview questions, emerging themes were identified using a frequency measure. These have been presented in tables pages 132-133. The previous tables presented some of the themes that were recurring with the participants' interviews. In the following sections of this chapter, explanations consider each of these themes:

- communication with native speakers

- family presence with the students

- cooperation with students from other nationalities

- accommodation arrangements

- pedagogical methods at the EAP centre

- technology-mediated language learning.

5.5.1 Communication with Native Speakers

Interaction with the locals is desirable if international students are to succeed in their new social and academic environment. However, research shows that in English-speaking countries, the contact between locals and international students is limited (Thomson et al., 2006). The obstacles that the students face in having regular contact with the locals has been explained in the research literature in several ways. Their lack of English language proficiency inhibits them from interacting with the locals to avoid making mistakes and losing face (Yates & Wahid, 2013). There is the difficulty of comprehending cultural aspects of the English language, such as finding suitable topics and the manner of conversing with native speakers. Having interactions with the locals is an integral factor for high levels of satisfaction among overseas students when adjusting to the new learning environment (Hendrickson et al., 2011).

In the ESL context, Saudi students reported having difficulties interacting with locals and building friendships with them. This was documented by a number of studies that explored social experiences of international students. For example, Caldwell (2013) found that a number of Saudi students had good friendships with locals in the ESL context. However, the Saudi participants wanted to have friendships with native speakers when they first arrived in the United States. This was difficult for most of them but was easier once they started to become Americanised and absorbed the American mores. In the United Kingdom, AlQahtani (2015) found that Saudi participants explained that the absence of opportunities to meet native speakers was partly due to accommodation arrangements. This was one of the two main reasons given for the lack of interactions with local counterparts.

In the Australian context, several studies have examined how Saudi students socialise. Midgley (2010) investigated the accounts of a small number of Saudi students to clarify differences of adjustment experiences among them. For some, socialising with native speakers was seen as adopting local behaviours and not being strict about Saudi customs. This group preferred to stay with their Saudi compatriots where they would share the same interests and maintain their cultural practices. On the other hand, there were those who had good connections with Australian native speakers, and they viewed mingling with the Australian English speakers as important for the development of their own English skills. Studies have found that this group are ready to accept some of the cultural norms in their new environment. Groves (2015) investigated the interaction experiences of a number of Saudi students in Australia. The results produced indicate that although these students could interact with the native speakers within their community, they could not establish strong connections with them. The study classified this type of interaction as pragmatic, where the Saudi participants engaged in repetitive and superficial interactions that were limited in time and content. These interactions were exemplified in their daily life by events like talks with salespersons or service providers.

When participants of this current study were asked about their perceptions of Australia and studying English before arriving here, they reported feeling positive because they would be residing in a society where English is the mother tongue and the population is composed of people of a multicultural background. All participants based their perceptions of Australians on their studying in two major cities. So, all contact was in urban context. In general, the Saudi students were found to have positive dispositions towards Western cultures (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia)

and this may have been a contributing factor to their motivation to study in these countries (Hagler, 2014).

Interviewee #5 said:

I think Australia is a good place to learn English. I think many Australians (not all) are easy-going, good and cooperative. Secondly, there are many international students there, so, whatever your language is, you have to speak English with people from different nationalities. This is good to improve your English language, especially when you study at university and communicate more with people who are learning language. (Interviewee #5)

The participants stressed that living in an ESL context improved their English skills. They mentioned their satisfaction with their language study in Australia in general as their IELTS scores improved after studying at Australian universities. Interviewee #1 evaluated his overall experience from learning English in Australia as excellent:

I can say my experience here in Australia is excellent as it has improved my English level a lot. At the beginning, my IELTS score was 4.5 and now I have an overall score of 6 in all skills. (Interviewee #1)

Another student also noticed his improvement in language skills:

I feel the difference after coming and studying in Australia between my previous and present skills in English. I feel I am improving, I am learning new words, I am using the language in my daily life activities. Although this improvement is not big, but I can see that it is good for me. (Interviewee #2)

However, Interviewee #14 had a different opinion of her experience in Australia: Before coming to Australia, I was thinking of the Australian people to be

closer to the overseas students as they have a multicultural society, they are open-minded and they accept the others. (Interviewee #14)

The same interviewee explained this view because she had lived in the United States for some months and she had a positive experience there:

I feel that they [the Australian locals] are not so friendly in the sense that you should be the one who opens the conversation with them. This is unlike other peoples with whom I lived before, such as Americans who may initiate to speak with you. This caused some difficulty for me. (Interviewee #14)

This view was highlighted by another Saudi participant, as he said:

I think it is difficult to form close relationships with the locals in Australia and other English language speaking countries, except the US. I do not know why, but my brother is studying now in the US, and here in Australia, I see the local Australians are very conservative towards the strangers, either a student or anyone else, and when they look at the individuals, they categorise him according to their nationalities, unlike the US where the population is from all over the world, not just from the middle east or China. (Interviewee #11)

Most of the Saudi students in this study were disappointed with the level of social interaction with Australian native speakers as they had limited opportunities to practise their English language:

Although we here in Australia are more advantageous than students who are studying English in Saudi Arabia, I find it difficult to communicate with native speakers outside the language centre. (Interviewee #1)

While another student stated that:

One of the biggest difficulties I face in Australia is how I communicate with the Australian native speakers. (Interviewee #7)

Linguistic factors were highlighted as a main source of difficulty that the Saudi learners of this study faced when trying to have a conversation with Australian locals. The development of English spoken skills is essential for establishing an intercultural relationship (Kudo & Simkin, 2003). In the current study, some interviewees specified a number of linguistic difficulties that increased the gap between them and the local Australians, such as Interviewee #2:

The Australian pronunciation is difficult, very difficult to understand and it is totally different from the American and even the British. This is why when I talk with them and they feel that I do not understand what they are saying, they try to speak slowly or explain it in other words. (Interviewee #2)

Some interviewees referred to the 'cultural differences' as important factors affecting their contact with native speakers in Australia. Interviewee #5 gave an example:

I know that the cultural differences here are important and to know how others communicate, for example, I may call my Saudi friend and ask him to go now and he would say OK, 'let's go'; however, for the Australian, they may say 'my friend I am sorry, let's make it after three days at a specific time'. (Interviewee #5)

In the same vein, Interviewee #1 explained his lack of friendships with native speakers from a cultural practice view:

I am not a social person in the sense of attending parties. Here [in Australia], by social person they refer to a person who attends parties a lot. I noticed that if someone here invites you for a party twice and you don't go, they avoid you. In Saudi Arabia, having parties is not common, but here the society is more open. So, I avoid such parties and I believe that communication can be done not only

with white persons or native Australians, but also with people from other nationalities and with Saudi persons themselves as some of them have perfect English accent and I benefited from them a lot. (Interviewee #5)

Nonetheless, a number of participants in this study mentioned that they had some close friendships with Australian locals. Although these friendships tended to be few, the participants recognised how these relationships assisted them in improving their language learning.

Interviewee #10 started a friendship with a real estate agent who then became one of his acquaintances in the Australian ESL context:

With Australians, I have only one friendship with an Australian who is from an Italian background. She is the manager of the real estate agency that I am renting my apartment from, I can say that our friendship is so strong that she can call me anytime and she visits me at home and brings her family with her, she has one son and one daughter, to meet my family. Even my wife who came to Australia doesn't know any English word, learned some words from these meetings. This friendship started at first from the agency office and, as she told me once, she was comfortable with me and said to me I am like her younger brother. This may be because when I first came here I was a bit lost and I didn't want to communicate with Saudis on a regular basis because I believe that if you communicate with them you will not improve your English at all. She helped me in everything when I first settled here, such as connecting all the utilities to my apartment. The good thing is that she speaks very clearly and slowly [so] that it is easy to understand and follow, and I can say my interaction with her greatly assisted me in my English language learning and promoted my confidence [said in a strong voice]. (Interviewee #5)

Another participant (Interviewee #5) reported he had several Australian friends and he identified how this helped him to improve his language skills and how even the locals communicated with the overseas student:

Surely this helps improving my language because their language is excellent. I try as much as possible to let them speak as a native, so that I can learn from their culture. I don't ask them to simplify their language for me. I have many people whom I can talk with and understand, but I want to see how native speakers talk and express themselves as they are different from us. In general, Australians are isolated from other students, so when they speak with me, they speak as native Australians. So, when an Australian talks with you, he doesn't speak in a simple way like saying 'you go there I will go with you' [the interviewee is speaking slowly], but he speaks in an accent heavier than this. In fact, he speaks normally and he is not aware of this. (Interview #5)

To overcome the gap between themselves and native English speakers, a number of Saudi students preferred to go to places where they had the chance to make contact with locals, such as shopping malls. This kind of interaction was found by Groves (2015) to be an alternative strategy for the Saudi students she studied, although of limited benefit:

I might go to the mall, not just to buy something, but I just want to talk with people. Personally, I benefited from the perfume shops because people there talk with me whether I buy or not, it is merely an experience for me. (Interviewee #3)

The stereotypical images of Saudi females were highlighted by female participants in this study. According to a number of participants, wearing the Islamic dress (hijab or niqab) was an influential factor inhibiting their participation in the Australian ESL setting. Interviewee #3 stated:

People [Australian people] don't like to talk with us, especially as girls wearing

hijab and it is not because of our personality, but because of the reputation of

hijab. Yes, that's it. Indian and Malaysian girls, for example, deal with us

normally because some of them are Muslims and they have an idea about

Muslim girls.

Interviewee #13 clarified why she sometimes felt insecure, especially going out

and communicating with others:

I can say that to some extent I adjusted to academic life in Australia, but not

socially. That's because I do not feel comfortable towards how the Australian

people look at me wearing niqab, sometimes I hear some unpleasant words, they

follow me until my home. (Interviewee #13)

Interviewee #14 expressed her disappointment at the limited interaction with

native speakers in Australia and she felt that her Hijab was an inhibitor between her and

the locals:

Yes, because their accent [i.e., the Australian people] is different from other

English-speaking countries, so I need native speakers to help me in learning the

accurate pronunciation. But I felt it's difficult as not all people accept us, maybe

because we wear hijab. Of course, I cannot generalise that all people are the

same, but some of them, especially with neighbours, no matter what you try to

speak with them, they are somehow closed. I do not see wearing hijab a problem

in my learning of English, but I feel that when I cover my face. I see some girls

face problems regarding this as not all people accept them, but instead they

were mistreated. Personally, I have not faced such things. I notice that people

avoid talking directly to women wearing hijab in public. On the other hand, I

see that when my husband goes to any place, everything goes well with him

because his appearance doesn't reflect his nationality, but when I go with him,

things get complicated. (Interviewee #14)

Although she had not experienced any difficulty while wearing the hijab, when the researcher asked Interviewee #14 about the source of her feelings that she thought she was not liked by others, she replied:

But what made me put this in my mind is that sometimes I go out without

wearing the traditional form of hijab, but instead I wear a cap with a scarf.

When I did so, I noticed that they treat me differently, but not all of them.

Sometimes, on the contrary, when I wear the traditional hijab, some people

accept me more. I noticed that even in the city when I wear a cap, nobody

comments on me. (Interviewee #14)

The same feelings were expressed by Interviewee #3 who noticed the change in the locals' perception of her when she changed the traditional appearance of her hijab:

People chatted with me more and children came in with me and no one avoided

me like when I am wearing hijab. I never ridicule hijab and I wear it and it is

normal for me, but others have their idea about hijab. These difficulties are

faced only by women, but not by men. (Interviewee #3).

Although the Saudi female students did not report experiencing any direct discriminatory action against them by the locals, the feelings that these interviewees expressed are similar to findings in other research studies involving Saudi female students. For example, Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) found that discrimination against Saudi women in the United States is uncommon.

5.5.2 Family Presence with the Students

Family commitments and responsibilities play a vital role in how Saudi students respond to social interactions within their ESL environment. In 1986, AL- Braik

examined the adjustment factors of a number of Saudi students who were living in an

ESL context. He found that married students succeeded more than their single

counterparts in their social and academic adaptation to the environment. However, since

the study was quantitative in nature, it did not explore the degree of involvement of

these Saudi students in managing their ESL context. However, in recent qualitative

studies, for example, AlQahtani (2015), Alhazmi (2013) and Midgley (2010), they

found that marital status could limit Saudi students' participation in their ESL context.

In the current study, five interviewees agreed that being married limited their

engagement with the wider social community.

Interviewee #1 explained the essence of this in his experience when he arranged

for his family to travel back to Saudi Arabia to avoid failing his English course because

he felt that their presence was having a detrimental effect on his language learning.

At first, I came here with my family and I consider this as a mistake in my

language-learning journey. I don't advise anyone to do so. I have two sons, so, I

had to minimise the number of my friends of other nationalities. I also had to

return home early to spend time with my family. My situation was strange. After

six months, I realised that my situation here is not good, so I had to return my

family back to Saudi Arabia. Then, I stayed in a sharing house with a group of

Australians and New Zealanders. I remembered there was also a female writer

from Britain living in the same house. It was a turning point for me which

helped me improving my language skills a lot. (Interviewee #1)

This interviewee highlighted how his choice helped him to develop his language

skills by providing time to socialise with native speakers. He met fellow students who

appreciated he was an overseas student and needed help in developing English language

skills.

However, for Interviewee #10, the presence of his wife was a source of support. He found he could focus and concentrate on his English language learning:

It is OK that my wife is taking care of all the house requirements; however, in terms of practising English, I became more excluded from participation as I spend a lot of time at home. My chances to practise with the native speakers are limited. Yes, I have no chances to learn English with the native speakers, for instance, there is a nice café near my home and most of its visitors are not Australian native speakers, but they are friendly and I came there and I have conversations with them but that was once or twice a month, however, if I were single, I would come there every day. (Interviewee #10)

The researcher asked him if he had tried to build any friendships with Australians to overcome social limitations:

I didn't have a chance to socialise with native speakers and others outside the EAP centre, or in other words, I didn't look for the chance because of my study and family duties. One of the disadvantageous practices of the EAP is that we have a break for two hours and a half, which is supposed to be for studying, revising and doing any other independent work, but the environment here is not encouraging. If I want to finish homework, as I am trying now to write a summary, but I couldn't because, as you can see I'm gathering now with my Saudi friends and we are talking about their life matters, and discussing any other topics or tests, so I think this time is wasted. When I spend most of my time outside the house and I arrived home after eight hours I need time to rest and then stay with my family. So, it's difficult for me to go out, especially if my wife stayed all that I'm alone at home. (Interviewee #9)

A female participant added to this by pointing out that having children and other commitments make it difficult to find time to go out to practise English even with non-native speakers:

> *I did not try because I have other commitments outside the class as you know, my family and my child, so I will not have time to go out and practise what I have learned.* (Interviewee #7)

From the interview of the previous participants in this section on family commitments, it is clear the roles of the man and woman of Saudi social values were affecting their social interactions in Australia. As the man is considered the head of the family and financially supports them, he also must safeguard the honour of his family (Alhazmi, 2013; Al Lily, 2011; Groves, 2015). Midgley (2010) identified how having a wife for some male married Saudi students puts more responsibilities on them. The researcher was aware of this as Saudi wives have grown up in a different social environment, and in Australia they are away from home, families and friends. They depend on their partners as a matter of necessity. This helps to explain the tendency of the male Saudi participants in this study to stay at home and not socialise outside the home to any great extent.

5.5.3 Cooperation with Students from Other Nationalities

The traditional view of language learning largely underestimates the role of peer interaction and does not consider the social context of learning to be of primary importance (Philp, Adams, & Iwashita, 2014). Language learning is centred on the role of the teacher as the facilitator inside the classroom and the transfer of knowledge to their students. However, current theories include not only the influence of the teacher, but also the role played by peer interaction among learners and the teaching process

itself. Peer interaction can be collaborative and mutual in nature, learners exchange ideas and knowledge, and this challenges their language skills.

Saudi students tend to have positive attitudes towards students from other nationalities (AlQahtani, 2015). Their perception of their friendship with others is that it is a window onto a variety of cultures that helps with understanding differences and provides opportunities to present Saudi cultural values and meanings to other students. According to Hendrickson et al. (2011), overseas students tend to form friendships with students from other nationalities because of a certain sense of common purpose between them and because they are not isolated in the new host environment. This makes the relationship less intimidating and can assist in language learning as interactions can be based on shared experience.

In the current study, the results of the interviews highlighted the role of the interaction with overseas students as a means for Saudi students to engage in peer interactions. A number of participants agreed on the advantages of working together with students from other nationalities and they mentioned such collaboration helped them develop their language skills. On the organisational level, it should be noted here that this is a strategy encouraged by the EAP centre inside the classroom. Interviewee #1 stated that:

> *Working together with the overseas students is mutually beneficial for both of us. I have learned from their writing skills, which are better than mine, while my vocabulary was better than theirs. I learned for them how they communicate, how they write and you won't be able to communicate with them except through English.* (Interviewee #1)

Interviewee #15 extended this view and said:

It is helpful and we are helping each other. The other international students in

my classroom are brilliant in some skills and we as Saudis are proficient in

other skills. Personally speaking, I have friends from a specific culture [i.e.,

Asians], they come and ask me to help them and they will help me in return.

(Interviewee #15)

Some students saw the difference and improvement after working with the

students from other nationalities:

I had an interesting experience where I worked after class with a number of

Saudi students. We got together to discuss some materials for the writing exam. I

also did the same thing but with a Chinese student; however, the results were

totally different. The outcomes from working with the Saudi students were

'good' while the results from working with the Chinese were 'extraordinary'.

Although I just studied with him for half an hour, I found the exam easy for me. I

think the reason for this is mainly because of how the Chinese student looks into

the written task. He looks into it as a main topic sentence then brings the other

details. He focuses on things that should be memorised and things just to know.

(Interviewee #5)

While for Interviewee #10:

From the first days at the EAP centre, I wish had known how to read fast like the

Chinese students. In level 4, we used to have a quiz where the teacher gives us a

passage containing 1000 words and I am required to finish it in 5 minutes. At

the beginning, I used to finish just a quarter of the passage while my Chinese

classmate finishes it before 30 seconds. With my training and studying with the

Chinese, with my practice and doing activities with them and looking at how

they identify the key and important words, how they highlight the words that

they intend to return to and make up sentences out of them, I was able to develop my skill in reading fast, I know I am still in the first stage, but it is good I improved.

Interacting with students from other nationalities enabled the Saudi students in this study to recognise the differences between students from Asian backgrounds and how this might affect their language skills: Interviewee # 9 explained:

I have been studying at the EAP from last August, 10 months more or less, I can say that I only had one mutual conversation with a Chinese student and it was inside the classroom and about the EAPcentre. On the other hand, I had a Japanese friend and we just went out last night together. It was his second time to study with me at the EAP. In previous classes, I used to have Japanese friends and we used to go out and had lunch or dinner. Inside the classroom, I do not benefit from the Chinese, unlike the Japanese or Colombian friends of mine, where we can practise speaking skills together. Also, I noticed that each nationality tends to use a number of specific English words that are different from the other ethnic groups. I mean a number of words that are easy and used on a daily basis, but they are frequently used by this specific ethnic group. I can say that as Saudi students, we have specific vocabulary we predominately use, or the Japanese for example, although the Japanese students have more vocabulary, and this greatly helps me to learn words from here and there and I think at the same time, they learn from my language at the same level.

The Saudi participants in the current study mentioned how it is important for the other international students to have willingness and eagerness to take part in the discussion:

151

I think there are two factors that I see important for interacting with the students

from other nationalities: the time given by the teacher to engage in discussion

and conversation with our peers and if the Chinese student is eager to

participate. So, if there is a student discussing a topic and he was given a short

answer, that's not enough and unhelpful for practising. (Interviewee #9)

The same point was elaborated by Interviewee #9:

From my experience, I think most of the Chinese students do not want to interact

with you and they want just to take from you and do not respond, they do not

start or initiate. In general, I see them conservative and by chance, in this level,

I saw a Chinese girl and I thought she is a Japanese, because I saw her sitting

with other Saudi female students, although there was a group of Chinese female

students in the class, but she is the only one who frequently comes to the Saudi

female students and interacts with them, as they like to sit together and work

together.

The cultural aspect of meeting and working with other students was more of a

challenge for the Saudi female students. They found the overseas students in their

classes were hesitant to make contact with them at the beginning of the course because

of the cultural dress they were wearing, the hijab or niqab. Interviewee #13 clarified the

difficulty by explaining the meanings of wearing her cultural dress:

I meet difficult situations in the class where the overseas students keep asking

me about my niqab [face covering]. I explain to them what it is and try to

convince them about my reasons behind wearing it and I know some may not

like it, but at the end it is their opinion. I give them some details about my niqab

because they will not know about my religious and cultural reasons to wear it.

However, in general we get along in the class normally. (Interviewee #13)

Interviewee #8 stated:

I speak with the overseas students in my class about my hijab and why I am wearing it, because most of them do not have any idea about why we dress like this, especially for the new students who see us in this dress in the streets and at the EAP but they do not know why we wear it.

When asked if the interaction with overseas students had brought about benefits for Saudi students and Asians, Interviewee #17 said:

They keep asking me why this Saudi female student is covering her face, while another is showing her face and a third showing part of her hair. I see this kind of conversation is beneficial as they come close to our culture and we know more of theirs. (Interviewee #17)

Interaction with students from other nationalities gave the Saudi female students opportunities to express themselves and to clarify some misconceptions about their cultural identities. With developing friendships, students had the opportunity not only to learn about the host culture in which they were living, but also to learn about other cultures (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011).

Nonetheless, there were some difficulties that interviewees faced when interacting with overseas students inside the class. Some of the Saudi participants were selective about what they gained from other students. A few examples are given about the benefits of interacting with other students, and competencies varied across groups. One interviewee commented there did not seem to be a benefit in interacting with the Chinese students as their English proficiency was perceived to be low and this could impact on the levels of language being practised, while another commented that the Chinese students in the EAP centre had advanced writing skills:

Frankly speaking, I see my communication with the Chinese [to be]

disadvantageous. In my opinion, the Chinese benefit more from interacting with

the Saudi and the Arabian Gulf students [such as Emirates, Oman and Kuwait].

However, the Saudi students do not, and this is because they are good in

speaking skills, apart from their English level of the other skills. The Chinese

might be good in reading or writing, but in speaking, the Saudi students are

better. (Interviewee #10)

And Interviewee #3 extended this comment by identifying skills she thought the

Chinese students had:

I only benefited from the Chinese in writing, but their speaking is bad.

(Interviewee #3)

Regarding the same experience, Interviewee #18 clarified:

Students from other nationalities at the EAP like to get the benefit from

practising with the Saudi students, but not the other way around. Our speaking

and pronunciation skills are by far better than theirs, and this is why they want

to practise with you and improve their language skills; so, from my opinion, I

think working with them will impact my skills not to improve them. (Interviewee

#18)

Some interviewees who had experienced studying in a different language centre

could specify particular differences between the overseas students from a variety of

backgrounds. Interviewee #15 explained her experience after embarking on her studies

at the EAP centre:

My interaction with overseas students helped me to develop my language skills

as I used to study in a language college and the students in my class were all

Colombian female students and I was the only Saudi student among them; so, I

had to use English with them in speaking and I made good friendships with them and I saw how my language developed. However, when I moved to study at the EAP, where the majority of the classes are students from China, who have difficult accents and pronunciation to understand, I not feel any improvement and change in my language learning. (Interviewee #15)

5.5.4 Accommodation Arrangements

Accommodation arrangements are important in supporting the social interaction of overseas students in their new environment. According to Marginson et al. (2010), overseas students prefer to live among a large number of their peers, for example, in colleges, to make their adaptation easier and faster. According to Kudo and Simkin (2003), the nature of accommodation appears to influence the intercultural friendship formation among the overseas students within their host environment. So, compared with students who are living off-campus, students who are living in on-campus accommodation are more privileged by frequent contact with local students and with more students from different nationalities. Saudi students were found to prefer living in the homestays in Australia as a means of sharing cultural knowledge and improving their English language skills (Fallon et al., 2009). In the current study, the accommodation place was important for Saudi students to practise their language skills and to build their social relationships. Interviewee #12 explained this by saying:

Yes, I live in a sharing house and I have two Australian friends, some Europeans and some from the US. Living and integrating with them greatly improved my English skills, since we get together on one table to eat and we should use the English language to communicate. (Interviewee #12)

Also, Interviewee #1 who moved to live in a shared house elaborated on this experience:

155

It helped me learning about their culture, forming grammar structure, about their way of pronouncing, naming and thinking of things, their way of handling problems. It is about culture in general. (Interviewee #1)

On the other hand, Interviewee #2 expressed his dissatisfaction at living in shared accommodation in terms of social interaction. He explained, however, that he had been staying in this shared house at the time of interview for just one month. This short period of time might not have been sufficient for him to make more than superficial contact with other students:

I am now living in a sharing house and I think it is OK for me. However, personally speaking, I think the problem resides in me. I am not easy-going in making friendships, this is where I prefer to sit for long time in my room. But the students living with me are very cooperative and sometimes they correct my English and pronunciation. (Interviewee #2)

For the Saudi female participants, the situation was different and they did not emphasise accommodation in their interviews as they had less choice. The female students are from an environment in which the woman is less independent and they need to have support (Midgley, 2010). It is a condition for Saudi female students who study outside Saudi Arabia to have a member of the family accompanying them (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Australia, 2016). The experiences of the female participants in this study highlighted the presence of a parent, husband or brother. Although this was essential and required social support, it limited opportunities to interact with native speakers and others in the ESL context.

5.5.5 Pedagogical Methods at the English for Academic Purposes Centre

The pedagogical methods followed in the EAP centre was another factor that the Saudi students in the study highlighted as shaping their opportunities for social

interaction. Classroom talk and interaction provides a context for the co-construction of language learning between the teachers and students and between students and other students (Walsh & Li, 2016). So, inside the class, the students use language to learn about language and to solve problems. In this context, the role of the teacher is essential and, to a considerable extent, it mediates the opportunities that scaffold language learners' skills (Norton & Toohey, 2001).

In the current study, the Saudi learners stressed the role of the pedagogical methods applied by their teachers in the class. For some students, these methods facilitated their interaction and improved their learning. For example, when the researcher asked Interviewee #1 about the best ways to increase his social interaction with his classmates, he replied:

> *I think working in group to do the assignments makes the students closer to each other. I usually don't know any one of them and it is difficult to communicate with people whose backgrounds are unknown for you. Learning English language was the only common thing between us, so it was better and easier for me to communicate with them by doing assignments and activities together.*
> (Interviewee #1)

This method was emphasised by other students as well:

> *Most exercises are done in pairs and some are in group work. Sometimes if you don't want to work with others, it's up to you and the teacher doesn't force you to do so. It's also acceptable to work in a group of three students instead of working in pairs.* (Interviewee #9)

Another student explained how the journal exercise was assisting him to increase his language skills:

Of course, the college prepares us for the university. One of the advantages at the college is that they teach us how to take the information from other students. It means how to work in a group or a team. When we work in a group, everyone should share his/her idea and this method is called journal writing and we get marks for it. You sit in a group and you are required to take other students' ideas and write them down in your journal. Your ideas alone cannot complete a whole page as an answer for one question, especially that sometimes you have to write at least eight pages on one topic and you cannot do so without taking other students' ideas. (Interviewee #9)

For Interviewee #14, although the teachers were encouraging the class to use the English language, the number of students from the same nationality affected the language used for interactions with the other students at times:

Yes, they [the teachers] force us to communicate inside the class. They ask us to do a group discussion about certain topics. When most of the class are Chinese, some of them communicate with each other in Chinese language. It depends on teachers. Some teachers force them to speak in English but others don't, so I don't understand anything. When I asked them politely to speak in English, firstly they started in English, then they talk in Chinese. I faced such problem in level 2 and 3, but now in higher levels, their English language has improved, so they are more able to speak in English. (Interviewee #12)

On another issue of interaction, four participants stressed that the EAP teaching practices were not adequate in encouraging language interactions in the classroom. They argued that the interactions encouraged and conducted inside the EAP centre were limited to academic purposes and not inclusive of promoting interaction in the broader

social context. When Interviewee #7 was asked about the reason for her lack of communication outside the EAP, she stated:

Another reason might be because in our study of the language, we didn't learn how to communicate with people in public places such as hospitals, restaurants and markets. (Interviewee #7)

Interviewee #3 confirmed the same point, stating:

Teaching methods are very nice, but sometimes they are routine and unchangeable. They don't use methods which are amusing and educational at the same time. There are not also outdoor activities which give students more experience.

She compared the EAP teaching methods with other colleges in her area:

In other colleges, they give students outdoor activities, for example going out to a café and making an order. When students learn a skill visually, it will instil in their minds more. (Interviewee #3)

For Interviewee # 17, although she had been placed in a higher-level class when she started, she thought that the teaching methods at the EAP centre were not helping her to socialise in the wider context of Australian society. Instead, she saw the teaching as confined to university-targeted skills:

I thought that the teachers would explain more, the study is more enjoyable and with more activities, but I found the teachers focus more on the writing skills and how to use the academic words. I know this is important and good for the university in future; however, it will not help you in any other situations. So, you need other sources to learn from.

When asked about the other sources she used to face this difficulty, she replied:

The other sources I used are like watching movies where I can learn how the

English native speakers talk, how they start conversation, or how they order at a

restaurant and may be because I used to travel. These sources may help me to

overcome this difficulty. So, at the EAP, it is good as an academic language,

how to write, how to deal with teachers and professors they teach the basics, but

not any other skills. (Interviewee #17)

However, aside from all these issues and concerns, Interviewee #5 highlighted the importance for him of having a teacher who is a native speaker of English to help with his language learning:

What is important for me is to have a teacher who is native speaker. I had many

experiences, one in Sydney and another here. In Sydney, my teacher was

Russian and here in RMIT, I have a teacher who is Serbian, I think. We usually

ask many questions in class. The problem is that nearly 95% of people don't

master the second language as good as the first one. Only a few people could

master both languages. Therefore, you are most likely to have a teacher who is

one of those 95%. The problem here is that you will ask many questions in class

and the teacher will not be able to answer them or will be embarrassed. You

may also ask about very simple things, but they are complicated for a person

who is not native English speaker. (Interviewee #5)

5.5.6 Technology-Mediated Language Learning

From the pilot interview for this study (Chapter 3), the question of new technologies arose. Therefore, this was added to the interview topics and proved to be a significant emerging theme. The use of technology-mediated applications is becoming a frequent occurrence in classrooms today. The literature has highlighted the role of these applications (social networks and mobile learning) in language learning. They can

mediate and create learning settings for language learners that are beyond the typical

classroom (Almekhlafy & Alzubi, 2016). They can substantiate authentic settings for

language exposure and furnish language learners with opportunities where they can

share information and construct knowledge between them (Lin et al., 2012; Mitchell,

2012).

During the interviews of participants in this study, interviewees highlighted the

role of social media networks and mobile learning in providing opportunities for

interactions for language learning. Access to such media assisted them in compensating

for the need to interact with native speakers. Digital technology has many forms and is

increasing all the time. Although not a preferred option, Interviewee #11 commented on

the presence of websites designed for tutoring purposes:

> *The presence of the websites that provide online tutoring in English is a proof of*
>
> *the difficulty of having interaction and direct contact with native speakers in*
>
> *Australia. If there were enough chances to meet the native speakers, I think*
>
> *students would not use these websites frequently.* (Interviewee #11)

YouTube was a main source of language learning for Saudi students in this

study. The use of YouTube was valuable in language learning as it provided unlimited

resources of authentic texts addressing cultural and social aspects of language

(Balcikanli, 2009). The participants agreed that there were plentiful videos that they

could utilise as learners. Interviewee #4 said:

> *I watch many videos on YouTube.* (Interviewee #4)

And Interviewee #1 added:

> *There are thousands but even millions of videos on YouTube.* (Interviewee #1)

Although Interviewee #17 was familiar with using YouTube for learning English in Saudi Arabia, she also found it a vital and rich source of information for her extracurricular learning:

Now at the EAP, I am not using to listen the TEDs on YouTube as an independent resource for language learning. I tried it and I liked it, especially in my free time. I also like the idea of listening to improve my language, even though I used to use the YouTube in Saudi Arabia to look for anything I do not know about English, so it is not new, the new thing is TEDs. It is beneficial, especially there is a script that you can read and check what is correct.
(Interviewee #17)

Another participant stated he liked to use YouTube for improving his writing, which was his greatest difficulty. Sometimes, the motivation for using YouTube had a specific purpose, as he says:

Since the start of the recent attack against Saudi Arabia, some people advised me to speak in English and show the world who we are and what our culture is since we represent the Saudi people. Yes, there are students who learn language through writing comments on YouTube videos, as people continue replying to each other. Saudi students usually learn by writing these comments. When they start commenting during an argument or a discussion, other people start checking my language and spelling mistakes, making fun of them, saying 'go and correct your mistakes first before commenting'. (Interviewee #1)

Interviewee #10 had a different perspective on using mobile language-learning techniques. He liked to listen to broadcasts downloaded on his phone. He played an example broadcast during the interview and he demonstrated the clarity and ease with which he could understand the speech:

It is good in improving my listening and it is very clear. The speakers use academic words (the broadcast is played during the interview), and it lasts for 30 of 40 minutes. Is it free? Yes, it is free and there are around 50 or 60 broadcasts like these and they are good for language learning. However, some programmes such as Prospect (English Online Tutoring) are good for you at the early stages of your learning. Because when I joined Prospect at the beginning and I had a long contract with them, I find out that it is the same questions they always ask. When [you] call the tutor, he will ask you: where are you from? You will answer I am from Saudi Arabia and I am currently living in Australia. They would say that your language is good and they will give you a compliment. So, from my opinion, you can't rely on the relationship as a friend and talk about different topics, you can't. (Interviewee #10)

WhatsApp messenger was one of the technological domains used by Saudi participants in this study. Barhoumi (2015) found that on the individual level, WhatsApp was a valuable source for his learners, as it helped them to share knowledge, exchange experiences and ideas, discuss various academic and social issues, and seek help and support during learning activities. Some of the general features of this messenger are: instant messaging that facilitates online collaboration and cooperation between students whether they are in class or outside, it is free and easy to use, sharing learning material conveniently through comments, and texting and messaging.

In the current study, Interviewee #9 emphasised the role of the WhatsApp groups created by the teachers so they could interact with their friends:

They discuss some parts of course materials and what we covered in the class and even the Saudi students in the group interact in English. It is a good way to interact in English with our friends. (Interviewee #9)

Also, the same interviewee continued:

The best thing in using WhatsApp groups with my friends is to check the spelling

of my writing and I am using the correct word. (Interviewee #9)

Andujar (2016) found that mobile instant messaging, such as WhatsApp, can assist developing the writing skills of ESL students. It is an educational tool that has great potential for language learners for interacting and for reflecting on their writing production. However, several respondents mentioned there was a lack of benefits in using the WhatsApp application in their classroom experience as not all students took advantage of chatting in English:

We had a group for our class and I entered it but it didn't benefit me a lot

because all students are Chinese and they chat in Chinese language. We notified

them many times speak in English but they didn't respond. But, when I was at

another college, the teacher created a group for the class, and all students were

speaking in English regardless of their nationalities, whether Saudi or Chinese.

(Interviewee #15)

This chapter presented the qualitative results of social strategies used by Saudi students in the Australian context. The themes were important for the students in this study as they were shaping the way they interact socially within the ESL context, both inside the classroom and in the wider social arena. The interviews revealed that interaction with students from other ethnic backgrounds was important for the Saudi students. They used it as a way to develop their language skills and to compensate their lack of interaction with native English speakers. Also, the experiences of male and female Saudi students differed as they each had their own challenges. While the males were more inclined to be aware of their responsibilities and commitments towards their families, the female students were more concerned about the reception of their cultural

164

dress (hijab or niqab), social constraints and how these affected their interactions in the Australian community. In addition, the use of technology to improve their language skills was essential for most participants as they found it a suitable solution to the limited interactions available with most native speakers. In the next chapter, the quantitative and qualitative findings will be combined and discussed in light of the SILL results. The findings from the two sets of data will be used to provide an in-depth description of the social strategies of these Saudi participants in their new ESL context.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Outline of the Chapter

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the study from the quantitative and qualitative data in this mixed-methods research. The researcher in this study sought to understand the language-learning strategies that Saudi students employ while learning English in their ESL context. The justification was the growing number of international Saudi students engaged in tertiary study needing advanced English skills to successfully complete their programmes. Influenced by the earlier work of Oxford (1990), the study explored the social strategies that are chosen and used by the Saudi learners. The research combined methods of data collection to provide rich and different views of students' experience. The survey data has been analysed using descriptive methods with the interviews complementing the findings and extending them. Driven by the qualitative methodology adopted throughout the research, the aim was to provide authentic explanations that mirror the employment of the strategies in this particular context (Cohen, 2011). The quantitative and qualitative findings were presented and

analysed in the previous two chapters, revealing a number of different and shared social

strategies employed by Saudi students in their learning and interaction through the use

of English language-learning strategies in their ESL context. The aim of utilising mixed

methods in this study was to obtain a general picture of the strategies used by these

students and confirm previous research and expand on this picture by gaining in-depth

details about why and how these strategies are used for socialisation in the ESL context

(Griffiths & Inceçay, 2016). The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss the findings

from the combined data and address the main research question of the study and its four

sub-questions. The overarching research question is:

- How does the ESL context encourage the use of effective social language

  strategies to encourage optimal learning?

  The sub-questions are:

  1. What are the language-learning strategies that Saudi students use in a

     particular ESL context?

  2. What are most common used language-learning strategies used by Saudi

     students in the ESL context?

  3. What is the role of social language strategies used by Saudi students in

     the ESL context?

  4. What is the importance of social language strategies in the ESL context?

To answer the main question of this research, mixed methods were applied to

investigate the language-learning strategies of Saudi students and how they use these

strategies for social interaction. The aim of these methods was to triangulate the data

generated from the questionnaire with the qualitative interviews in order to

contextualise the use and choice of the strategies. The SILL questionnaire is composed

of six categories (cognitive, memory, metacognitive, affective, social and compensation

strategies). However, the following sections will discuss the SILL language strategies that are found to be associated with social interaction for these Saudi learners in their ESL context (metacognitive, social, compensation and affective strategies). This is because the significant results emerging from the qualitative findings are presented and in particular new insights into international student interactions with other international students are highlighted. The study has also been able to gain information on the experience of Saudi female students to add to the literature. Technology-mediated language learning was emphasised in the pilot interview and therefore added to the interview protocol and the results suggest this is a growing and significant area for further research.

6.2 Summary of the Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The mixed methods of this research aimed to explore the language-learning strategies of Saudi students in their ESL context. These learners were international students in a language-learning institution in Australia. The importance of these strategies is that they enhance language learning (Cohen, 2011), assist learners to develop their communicative skills (Macaro, 2006) and encourage them to actively participate in their environments (Oxford, 1990). As explained in (Chapter 3), the current study administered the SILL questionnaire in the first phase to 65 Saudi students who were learning English in an ESL context. This questionnaire employed a Likert scale composed of 50 questions. These questions directly measure the use of a strategy that is applied by the learner, such as (I look for people I can talk to in English). The SILL is used to measure six kinds of strategies that are categorised by Oxford (1990): direct strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation) and indirect (metacognitive, affective and social) strategies. The results generated from the SILL in the current study add to the contextualisation derived from the qualitative data, as this study investigated

the influence of the context on the use and choice of the strategy. The second qualitative research method was applied through semi-structured interviews with 18 Saudi participants. The following Table 6. 1 summarises the significant results of the SILL and the interviews findings that emerged from the data collection process in the current study.

Table 6.1

Summary of Significant Results of the SILL and Qualitative Interviews

SILL Results				Interview Results
Strategies	Mean	Percentage	Rank	Benefits from working with students from other nationalities
Metacognitive	3.79	75.94%	1	
				Pedagogical methods at the EAP
Social	3.56	71.78%	2	
Compensation	3.17	66.49%	3	Technology use to learn English
Affective	2.99	59.84%	5	Prior experience in English learning

According to studies that explored language-learning strategies in other ESL contexts, language learners tend to use metacognitive, affective, compensation and social more than memory and cognitive strategies (Alwahibee, 2000; Nguyen & Godwyll, 2010; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Oxford, Talbott, & Halleck, 1990). The use of these strategies could be a result of the need to engage in the ESL context in which the students are learning and their higher level of English proficiency (Carson & Longhini, 2002). These learners spend most of their time in their language institution where they are in a close contact with lecturers and other students, so they need to socialise with them (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). In the following sections, the indirect strategies of the SILL results will be presented and discussed as they are associated in this study with how Saudi students socialise in their ESL context.

6.2.1 Metacognitive Strategies

According to Chamot (2004), language learners who use more strategies in their learning, tend to apply their metacognitive skills to help them understand what the tasks entail, to coordinate the strategies to meet task demands and to meet their learning goals. They use these strategies to enable them to regulate their learning in the classroom and the external environment, which positively develops their academic achievement (Pintrich & Garcia, 1994).

Table 6.2

Reported Use of Metacognitive Strategies by Saudi Students

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency of Use
30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	3.67	73%	High
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	3.89	77%	High
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	4.04	80%	High
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	4.04	80%	High
34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	3.57	71%	High
35. I look for people I can talk to in English.	3.85	77%	High
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	3.62	72%	High
37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	3.45	69%	Medium
38. I think about my progress in learning English.	4	80%	High

For the students in this study, the use of the metacognitive strategies (see Table 6.2) assisted them to think about their learning, plan, organise and initiate contact with others to increase their social interaction in their ESL context and to further their learning (Chamot, 2005; O'Malley et al. 1985; Oxford, 1990). The highest percentages from this quantitative data shown in Table 6.2 indicate all the metacognitive questions

were highly reported by the learners. For example, questions 33, I try to find out how to be a better learner of English, and 35, I look for people I can talk to in English, involve planning, setting goals and initiating the strategies to achieve specific goals. From their qualitative interviews, the learners in this study have highlighted that finding optimal opportunities to learn and practise English is one of their general strategies in this context. For example, the presence of the large number of Saudi students at the EAP centre was found by some interviewees as problematic for their English language development. They felt the presence of Saudi learners affected their ability to advance their language skills. However, they did feel that their interactions and social affiliations with students from other countries and native speakers in class and outside the class would be beneficial for their learning (Koehne, 2005). For example, Interviewee #12 said:

> *To learn English and to achieve the goals of your learning, you should avoid mixing with the students who are from your country and speak your own language. You came here for one goal, which is to learn language. However, as it is a foreign country, you need contact with them from time to time. However, I see it a problem as you need to improve your language skills and you should keep contact with your Saudi friends at the same time. I can say that my language developed when I left the formalities and compliments. Seriously speaking, we are here for learning.*

From this quote, it would appear the interviewee was aware of the impact of frequent contact with his Saudi colleagues who share the same mother language and the need to mix with them for his social adjustment in this ESL context. Another student indicated how he managed his learning difficulties by saying:

As my goal here is to learn English, I was sure I will face some difficulties such as drop in your language level, where you have [to] stop and think to change the plan to face these issues. (Interviewee #16)

Another interviewee planned to use the English language inside his home to develop his English skills:

Inside home, I sometimes practise English with my wife. (Interviewee #5)

One of the strategies that a Saudi student in this study employed to develop his English language was to move to live in a shared house:

I moved to live in a shared house to practise English. (Interviewee #3)

In addition, in relation to Table 6. above, question 32, I pay attention when someone is speaking English, was used frequently by the learners in this study. However, through their interviews, the participants depicted in what situations they often pay attention to speakers of English in order to improve their English language, for example:

If you want to listen or benefit from anyone [English speaker], you may find someone on the tram or train where you could pick up a sentence or two sentences. (Interviewee #18)

Or:

I watch YouTube to improve my speaking and listening. (Interviewee #12)

The previous findings are from the qualitative analysis and they confirm the quantitative SILL questions of the metacognitive strategies that are commonly used by

the Saudi learners in this context. The students looked for opportunities to be good

English speakers and learners and they set their goals to achieve this. They evaluated

the strategies they used in this context and which was suitable for their learning

(O'Malley et al., 1985). If they faced problems, they resorted to a solution that met their

needs and goals of learning (Oxford, 1990). Thus, they invested in their learning and

looked for better speakers and partners from whom to learn (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

The literature on Saudi students who are studying in ESL contexts reported that these

students come with higher expectations and motivation to learn English and pursue their

tertiary education (Alkaabi, 2016; Hagler, 2014). This willingness was expressed by

interviewees in this study as well:

To be perfect in English (Interviewee #3); *To learn English* (Interviewee #11);

To be like a native. (Interviewee #14)

So, applying certain strategies to achieve their learning was essential for these

learners. One of these strategies was utilising the time devoted to learning. This factor

helped the Saudi students in this study to apply metacognitive strategies to develop

language skills. In the SILL question 34, I plan my schedule so I will have enough time

to study English, the high reported use of this metacognitive strategy was illustrated by

Interviewee # 14:

I think that here I have much time available to devote myself for learning

because there are no social distractions. So, when I return home, I have nothing

to do and I can listen and study freely. I think this gave me the greatest

opportunity to learn. In Saudi Arabia there are available resources for learning

English, maybe in less number and in a different accent, but I think that I have

much time here.

Another participant added:

The benefit here is Australia is more than learning English in Saudi Arabia as you have time to learn English and you spend your time in English language. (Interviewee #5)

And for another interviewee:

For me, it was a good opportunity to come to Australia in order to learn English as all people here speak English, so you will have to continue speaking English language. Some people acquired the accent, but I think that accent is not important, but what is important is to learn useful things, a new culture and a new language. (Interviewee #3)

The students in this study expressed their motivation in language learning and this encouraged them to evaluate their learning and the strategies they use. For example, in response to the SILL question 38, I think about my progress in learning English, the Saudi learners showed how they could draw plans and set goals to achieve theory learning. For instance, Interviewee #12 reflected on the experiences that the students went through in this Australian context. After facing the difficulties of engaging socially in his ESL context, he started thinking about the origins of the problem and how to solve them:

Before coming here, I thought that I will be perfect in English and I was enthusiastic to learn the language. Although there are colleges in Saudi, I didn't want to study there but I wanted to study abroad as the colleges are better. When I reached the fifth level, there were students who came from Saudi studying with me at this level. I found that their English is better than mine although they only studied English in Saudi. I didn't study English there at all. I started here from the elementary level. It took me a long time to study English

175

here. I have been here for a year and I haven't finished yet. If I studied English

for at least six or seven months, this would save me time. I mean to study at least

for six or seven months in order to have some English background. What I did is

a mistake and I don't advise anyone to do so. If my brother wants to study

English outside Saudi Arabia, I won't let him go. (Interviewee #11)

Facing this difficulty, the student started thinking about problem solving by finding opportunities to develop his English skills, such as online learning opportunities, which was reported by the interviewee later in his interview. These qualitative quotes from the Saudi students in the ESL context indicate how metacognitive strategies influence the employment of certain strategies in order to meet their learning goals. These participants expressed their goal as an interest in improving their language skills, which aligns with the quantitative SILL results.

In this study, the learners were mature and most were sponsored by the Saudi government, placing responsibility on the students to study and evaluate strategies to help meet their learning goals. This finding confirms other studies in ESL contexts (e.g., Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Nguyen & Godwyll, 2010) where the ESL environment may be overwhelming for these learners. Such a situation encourages learners to identify their learning needs, arrange a place for learning, organise materials for L2 tasks or plan for conducting an L2 task, indicating the effective role these strategies can play and how they control other strategies (Oxford, 2011). Meeting needs and goals is of high importance for international students living in ESL countries as they face many academic and social challenges during their sojourns (Andrade, 2006).

6.2.2 Social Strategies

Social language-learning strategies were the second most popular category for the Saudi learners in this research (see Table 6.3). This is mainly a result of the

environment at the EAP centre, which is an important factor in the high use of social strategies in this study. These strategies include learning with others, showing empathy to their cultural differences and understanding them (Oxford, 1990).

Table 6.3

Reported Use of Social Strategies by Saudi Students

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency
45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.	3.73	72%	High
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	3.08	60%	Medium
47. I practise English with other students.	4.06	81%	High
48. I ask for help from English speakers.	3.57	70%	High
49. I ask questions in English.	3.88	74%	High
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.75	71%	High

Table 6.3 indicates that SILL question 47, I practise English with other students, was most frequently acknowledged by the learners. This interaction and collaboration was a result of the EAP environment, which was a main factor in the high use of the social strategies among learners in this study. When language learners engage in problem-solving and knowledge-building activities they assist each other in developing their language skills and general knowledge (Watanabe & Swain, 2007). The benefits from this peer interaction were explicit from the interviews of the participants of the current study and will be discussed later in this chapter. For example, Interviewee #15 explained the language benefits of working with a group of Chinese students:

> *We have some mistakes in spelling. Their grammar also is better than ours. For example, when we write a paragraph in a group, I might write a meaningful sentence, but they correct my grammar.*

The same view was explained by Interviewee #6:

Yes, last semester, I had a Japanese classmate who had a good spoken English and we together noticed that our language developed because of our practice. This can be said on speaking specifically, but also for the other skills, he used to tell me something in reading and I told him about writing or taking notes skills.

On the other hand, this interaction led to another social strategy that was highly reported by the Saudi students—question 50, I try to learn about the culture of English speakers. This finding is reported in other studies that examined Saudi students in an ESL context (e.g., Caldwell, 2013; Hilal et al., 2015; Rundles, 2013). In general, Saudi learners have high expectations and a willingness to accept English culture and learning in tertiary education (Hagler, 2014). However, this context exposes them to the cultures of other international students and the Saudi students in this study clarified that they were open to the cultures of the other international students in their classes, for example, Interviewee #9 explained his experiences of the cultural practices of Chinese students in his class:

I don't really know but I think they are conservative and always stay [with] each other. At the current level, there is a Chinese female student with us. From the first week, I expected her to be Japanese or from any other nationality other than Chinese. This is because I saw her sitting with Saudi female students although there is a group of Chinese female students. So, I thought her not to be Chinese. I was astonished when I asked her and discovered that she is a Chinese. They prefer to work and sit with each other. We also do the same thing, but we don't have any problem to talk with students other than Saudis.

Asking questions was another social strategy reported by the Saudi students. Replies to the SILL questions 45, 46, 48 and 49 suggested that questioning is frequently

used as a strategy in the class. According to Ho (2004), the use of asking questions is common among language learners in ESL contexts. These learners are privileged with the presence of native speakers, lecturers, neighbours and other international students. The English language is important for them as a communication medium that leads to acceptance and acknowledgment in the contexts in which they are situated, for example, the classroom, university, neighbourhood or workplace (Norton & Toohey, 2001). These learners feel the need to improve their language skills and have an intrinsic motivation (explained in the affective strategies) that encourages them to ask questions and look for answers. The use of these strategies is essential for socialisation and contact with other lecturers and international students. According to Packer and Piechocirski (2013), Saudi students in the ESL classroom prefer to build social bonds with others and they like their lecturers to show an interest in them. They tend to participate and talk in class as part of their oral learning practice (Belchamber, 2011; Flaitz, 2003; Shaw, 2009). Figure 1.6 illustrates some of the connections between the quantitative and qualitative results of the students' social language-learning strategies.

SILL Results	Asking Questions	Interview Results
45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again. (72%).

46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk. (60%).

48. I ask for help from English speakers. (70%). | | When we need something, we usually ask teachers inside the class. (Interviewee #7).

I noticed that many students from different nationalities ask me if we can exchange help with each other. (Interviewee #14) |

SILL Results	Cooperating with Others	Interview Results
47. I practise English with other students. (81%)		Working together with the overseas students is mutually beneficial for both of us. I have learned from their writing skills which are better than mine while my vocabulary was better than theirs. (Interviewee #1)

SILL Results	Empathising with Others	Interview Results
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers. (71%)		The other sources I used are like watching movies where I can learn how the English native speakers talk, how they start conversation, or how they order at a restaurant. (Interviewee #17)

Figure 6.1. Examples of quantitative and qualitative social language-learning strategies.

However, because of the intensive nature of the EAP course, the focus is placed

on reading and writing skills, with little emphasis on oral skills (Hong-Nam & Leavell,

2006). The importance of these two skills is undoubtable; however, oral skills are

important for students both inside and outside the class. This finding echoes that of

Yates and Wahid (2013) who found that the teaching practices applied by most English

language centres in Australia are not enough to help international students develop their

oral communication skills. According to the authors, it is enough to place the ESL

language learners in a community where English is the dominant language used for

communication and expect their oral skills to develop without assistance. This view

impacts on the opportunities for social interactions of the Saudi learners in this study.

Interviewee #17 explained this:

> *I found here at the EAP they focus more on writing and how to be a good writer*
>
> *for the university, but not for how to socialise outside the EAP.*

And elaborated by Interviewee #7:

> *I know other colleges outside Australia which create groups for students to*
>
> *allow them to have relationships with native speakers from outside the college.*
>
> *Students might have a friendship with a whole native family with whom they*
>
> *exchange visits. But here at this college, we weren't given this opportunity. They*
>
> *didn't arrange meetings or form clubs to let students have more opportunities to*
>
> *communicate with native speakers.*

This view is supported by (Ranta & Meckelborg, 2013) who explored the social

interaction practised by international learners living in ESL contexts. They found that

receptive exposure, not interaction, is common among these students. The social context

is an integral part of language learning as it provides learners with opportunities

(Mitchell & Myles, 2001). According to Palfreyman (2006), language-learning

strategies are shaped by their situated context and they are more likely to be effective

when this context provides language learners with sufficient and comprehensible input

and supports them in experiencing the language forms and functions. To effectively

interact and engage in this context, learners deploy strategies that best assist them

(Chamot, 2004). The ESL learners tend to use more language-learning strategies for

their learning as a result of their motivation in learning (Riley & Harsch, 1999).

In addition, Alkaabi (2016) and Hagler (2014) identified that Saudi students in ESL contexts were found to have high intrinsic motivation and willingness to learn English, and positive attitudes to ESL culture and its speakers. For students at the EAP centre, academic achievement was more important than spending time looking for opportunities to socialise with others. Interviewee # 9 explained this view:

I see that the English that I study at the college and the university will be enough for me.

According to Shaw (2009), positive motivations and attitudes among Saudi students are important for their adaptation into their new ESL social context. These students arrive in the ESL country with a set of strategies and competencies that they had developed in their home country. Soon, they realise that these strategies are not necessary for their new ESL setting and they need to develop new strategies to ensure their success. According to Shaw (2009), these developed adaptation strategies may be different from those brought with them. This was highlighted by Orth (2105), who explored the social experiences of Saudi students in Australia and found that these students have particular coping strategies to face their language-learning difficulties.

One of these strategies is to engage in intense collaborative learning sessions with students who are from their own cultural backgrounds. Saudi students are more likely to stay with other Saudi students, especially during the first months (Orth, 2015). By doing this, they are able to share experiences and support each other in their new trajectories.

Another reason for a higher use of social strategies among the Saudi students at the EAP centre is that the Saudi government is putting into place tight laws for the KASP programme (Knott, 2016). Academic achievement and attendance are important requirements for these students to meet (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). Even the eligibility

conditions for getting a full scholarship have been tightened, which has led to the expulsion of some of the students, or others having to study on their own. To have a full scholarship they need to finish the English programme and then one year of their tertiary studies. Among the current research cohort, and for the students who are self-funded, the situation is different. In this study, Interviewee #13 was studying on his own. It was clear from his quotes that he was having a different experience than other students. When he was asked about the main problems, he replied:

The difficulties are how to deal with the environment around you, people and the financial matters. If I had known about these before I came to Australia, I would not have faced difficulties at the beginning.

The strategies this learner applied to improve his English were more intense than those of other students who had a scholarship. To improve his spoken English, he was living in a shared house where he had exposure to a number of native speakers and other friends from different countries. In general, Saudi learners who are self-funded tend to be more driven to learn English than other students who have full government scholarships (Alkaabi, 2016).

6.2.3 Affective Strategies

Affective strategies are related to social strategies in that they indicate how the individual has control over emotions and feelings while engaging in real languagepractices (Oxford, 1990). These strategies are important to develop the energy required for learning and to overcome challenges, such as frustration and anxiety, that could affect language learning (Stern, 1983). During their learning trajectories, international students go through psychological and emotional challenges that can affect their language learning (Andrade, 2006; Benzie, 2010; Bianchi, 2013).

Table 6.4

Reported Use of Affective Strategies by Saudi Students

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency
39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3.32	66%	Medium
40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	3.96	79%	High
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	2.51	50%	Medium
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	3.10	62%	Medium
43. I write down my feelings in a language-learning diary.	1.95	39%	Low
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	3.07	61%	Medium

Table 6.4 demonstrates that the students in this study relied on their intrinsic motives to overcome challenges and develop their language skills. For example, the highly reported affective strategy of the SILL question 40, I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake, indicates that the Saudi students in this study were taking the initiative to learn even though they were making mistakes. This suggested their motivation as a driving force, for instance, Interviewee #3 stated:

The key thing is not to be embarrassed when making mistakes even if others make fun of you, you should have the courage to continue and keep fighting. You shouldn't stop.

This strategy was also applied by Interviewee #5:

Inside the class I try to take the opportunities to practise and ask the group of mine.

Saudi students are resilient and motivated in their ESL classes (Hofer, 2009). According to Shepherd and Rane (2012), the special thing about Saudi learners in an Australian context is they do not look for long permanent stays in Australia, unlike most international students. Therefore, academic achievement is important for them in order to meet the sponsor's requirements and this influences their learning activities and develops their language-learning skills, as shown from the previous quotes (Paul, 2016). Also, asking questions without fear of embarrassment can be a result of the cultural background of the students. Saudi students are often known to take the lead and ask questions in the class (Belchamber, 2011; Flaitz, 2003; Shaw, 2009).

Question 42 from the SILL, I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English, can be linked with qualitative quotes from the learners where they expressed their nervousness and worry about interacting with others. For example, Interviewee #10 felt embarrassed in public places such as shops and restaurants when he talked with native speakers:

I really become confused when someone says to me 'pardon' or 'sorry', and when I am asked about a word because I mispronounce some words.

Moreover, Interviewee #17, who wanted to speak well as the native speakers, said:

I have a problem in that when I speak with the native speakers, I like to speak fluently, otherwise they will not understand what I am saying, this is why I prefer to keep silent and not to embarrass myself as long as I am not going to produce correct speech … However, I am trying to teach myself how to make a mistake and correct it, there is no issue in it.

Even the student who tried to change his accommodation for the purpose of interaction with other English and native language speakers could see the problem was

185

partly of his own making because he did not take the opportunity to communicate with others:

> *I am living now in a sharing house and I get the benefit from communication with individuals there, they are from Australia, England and the Netherland, but I think the problems is in me where I do not sit with them regularly. I tend to sit in my room alone for longer and this may affect my communication with them. When we meet in the kitchen, we talk a little.* (Interviewee #2)

English language proficiency is important for the academic and social adjustment of international students in their ESL learning (Phakiti et al., 2013). However, their successful adaptation to their ESL context is not only a condition of meeting their language needs. There are other factors that affect this adjustment, for instance psychological, personal, social and cultural factors. Self-confidence in their English skills is important for their psychological adjustment and for their daily activities in their ESL environment (Yang et al., 2006).

6.2.4 Compensation Strategies

Compensation strategies help language learners to use the new language for comprehension or production despite their limitation in knowledge (Oxford, 1990).

Table 6.5

Reported Use of Compensation Strategies by Saudi Students

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency of Use
24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	3.71	74%	High
25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	2.80	56%	Medium
26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	3	60%	Medium
27. I read English without looking up every new word.	3.14	62%	Medium

| 28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English. | 3.20 | 64% | Medium |
| 29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. | 4.07 | 81% | High |

As shown in Table 6.5, the most frequently used strategy is: If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. This may be caused by the EAP environment where Saudi students meet with other international students, mostly Chinese. The Saudi students mentioned in their interviews that understanding the spoken English of the Chinese students was one of the difficulties they encountered. For example, Interviewee #4 said:

Take Chinese students for example, their speaking skill is bad, while their

writing is better than ours.

According to Alwahibee (2000), the higher level of proficiency and the difficulty of the spoken English accent can lead Saudi students to use compensation strategies such as guessing meaning and using gestures. This includes avoiding communication with others partially or completely (Oxford, 1990). Interviewee #5 was interested in interaction with his neighbours to improve his English and wanted to be included in the wider social context. However, the difficulties in the Australian context he faced led to a move to live next to Saudi families where he had some people to talk with:

I used to live in a house and my neighbours were an Asian and Indian. They

were nice, but we only had a little chat on things that are not important, such as

the car park, mail, or if they had an occasion, such as one of them had a new

baby and he brought me some candy. Although these were good, it is hard to

make me them stay longer and chat for more. They are always busy.

(Interviewee #5)

187

In an extreme version of this avoidance, Interviewee #15 expressed her interpretation of the way people looked at her and her cultural dress in the street. This forced her to avoid interaction within her social context:

Because of the way that some people on the street look at me. Sometimes, I hear them criticising me and they even chase me until my house. (Interviewee #15)

The finding of this study that compensation strategies are in the middle position has been reported by other scholars who examined the use of language-learning strategies in an ESL context (Nguyen & Godwyll, 2010). The reason for this could be that learners in this ESL context have ample opportunities to experience and practise language learning (Lee & Oxford, 2008). A study that explored the language-learning strategies of more than 1000 Korean EFL learners found that these learners tended to use compensation strategies more than any other categories. According to Lee and Oxford (2008), the reason behind this is that learners try to compensate for the knowledge they miss in their EFL context of learning.

The previous discussion of the four strategies (metacognitive, social, affective and compensation) explained the role of these strategies in shaping the social experiences of Saudi students in their ESL context. Here, it is important to suggest that memory and cognitive strategies are essential and language learning would not happen without them. However, as the SILL questions of these two categories are not directly associated with the social experiences of the learning in this study, they were not discussed here.

The quantitative and qualitative results of this study referred to how Saudi students invested in their learning strategies to socially interact within the ESL learning context. For example, as the strategies of language learning are goal-driven and problem oriented, their ultimate aim is to achieve communicative competence (Ellis, 1994;

Oxford, 1990). The Saudi learners in this study reported they engaged in online learning platforms to overcome the difficulties they faced in their ESL context. They reported that this social strategy was to solve the problem of increasing their English-speaking skills at the EAP centre. This strategy enabled them to interact with other English speakers, either native or not, share their ideas and experiences, and express their opinions and arguments. Online interactions have the potential to develop linguistic, pragmatic and cultural knowledge, which are essential to language learning (Thorne, 2010; Vandergriff, 2016). For a language learner, investment in their learning entails the understanding that they will obtain access to a wider range of symbolic and resources that will in turn develop their cultural knowledge (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). This concept explores the relationship between the learners of English and the desires of their learning in the light of social and cultural situated learning.

Linking the quantitative and qualitative findings together, the study found two significant findings related to the social experiences of these Saudi students and how they impacted on their utilisation of social strategies. These were their interactions with students from other nationalities and the use of technology in their language learning. The third finding was the social experiences of the Saudi female students who were learning English in the ESL context and had different experiences directly related to observance of practices associated with being a Saudi female. The current study confirms previous research and adds some valuable nuances from this particular group of students, an area that is attracting the interest of some researchers in the ESL context. The following sections will discuss the following findings:

– Interaction with students from other nationalities

– Technology-mediated language social strategies

– Saudi female students' social experiences.

6.3 Interaction with Students from Other Nationalities

Interaction with other students is one of the influential contributors in language-learning settings (Norton & Toohey, 2001). The advantages of having a social network of peers do not just concern language learning, but also social affiliation (Philp et al., 2014). In this context, learning is associated with learners' participation, engagement, and co-construction of knowledge, where the learners rely on language as a mediating tool (Jang & Jiménez, 2011; Walsh & Li, 2016). Inside the EAP centre, the Saudi students enjoyed friendships with their peers from other nationalities. One of the main social strategies of the SILL questionnaire was question 50, I try to learn about the culture of English speakers, which was reported with a mean value of 3.75. However, as these students were reflecting on their social experiences at the EAP centre, their answers to the previous question indicated they had close contacts with international students. With this strategy, the Saudi students were learning about the other international students' and their own cultures. Interviewee #14 explained her personal view:

> They [Chinese students] are closed-minded to the extent that some of them haven't heard about Saudi Arabia and have no background about it. So, I had to explain to them that we are together in Asia. Even our appearances are considered strange by them. They asked me, where you are from? You are neither white nor black.

The same view was explained by another student who thought studying with students from other nationalities helped her to reflect on her own beliefs and values:

> I did not think they will be like this before I studied with them, but then I found out they accept us very quickly as Muslims. The way they think is different but they are not a copy and paste population as I used to think of them. (Interviewee

#17)

Some studies have identified how Saudi students take advantage of social interaction and cooperation with students from other nationalities (AlQahtani, 2015; Rundles, 2013). They see it as a stress reliever in that there is another group of students who share with them the concerns and problems of the new environment and they can learn from each other. According to Koehne (2005), international students construct their subjectivities through 'difference, or through shared experience and sameness' (p. 110). In this situation, the overseas students considered themselves part of a community that shares some commonalities and they have specific goals to achieve.

The pedagogical methods used for teaching at the EAP centre were one of the factors that facilitated the learning of Saudi students and differentiated them from other international students. For example, according to several students, the use of the journal was a very effective way of generating ideas. For this, they would meet with their classmates, discuss a certain topic and then start to build their essays from their ideas. Interviewee #17 stated:

> *Sometimes you have an answer for a particular question and you are not able to write the answer, so if you have different ideas from different students, you can write a sentence that gives you're the start your answers.*

Interviewee #9 explained more about this strategy:

> *When we work in a group, everyone should share his/her idea and this method is called tutorial and we get marks for it. You sit in a group and you are required to take other students' ideas and write them down in your journal. Your ideas alone cannot complete a whole page as an answer for one question, especially that sometimes you have to write at least eight pages on one topic and you cannot do so without taking other students' ideas.*

According to Interviewee #12:

The team-work method is followed by some teachers here, and two or three

students work together to finish a specific task.

In addition to cultural perspectives, the Saudi students stressed the benefits of

learning English from working with students from other nationalities. This was evident

through their answers to SILL question 47, I practise English with other students (mean

4.6), and the recurring qualitative theme, benefits from working with students from

other nationalities, which was mentioned by 83% of the participants (15 students).

According to the statistics of international students at the Department of

Education and Training, Chinese students are the largest numbers of all the nationalities

in Australia (DET, 2016b). In September 2016, there were 31,601 Chinese students

enrolled in Australian English language institutions, and 11,295 students in Victoria,

where the current study was conducted. These figures show the dominance of the

Chinese students in language institutions such as EAP centres; in the Saudi students'

situation, interaction with the Chinese students was unavoidable.

On the other hand, the situation of Saudi students is different from that of

Chinese students because most Saudi students who study in Australian universities are

sponsored by government bodies. Almost all Saudi students in Australia aim to develop

their English skills and obtain an academic degree for a better option in their home

country (Shepherd & Rane, 2012). They do not intend to stay permanently in Australia

after graduation, which is a preferred option by many other international students, for

example, the Chinese. With the time constraints on their sponsorship, Saudi students

tend to be selective in how they socially interact with others and use their time for

learning. Also, Saudi students have found that international students tend to be more

open, cooperative and willing to meet with them compared with native speakers (Giroir,

2014). Heyn (2013) and Shaw (2009) found that Saudi students are motivated and resilient learners, and they show the ability to use strategies to achieve their goals. One of these strategies is increasing their intercultural competence and this was found in the current study. The Saudi students found the presence of the Chinese students can be a source of learning to develop their language skills. They highlighted the language skills development that resulted from their cooperation with other overseas students, especially the Chinese. Interviewee #12 reinforced this view:

We will have to use English for communication in order to learn the language. So, if we are from the same national background, such as Arab, it will be difficult to improve your English skills, but when they are from different nationalities, it is good.

After working with a Chinese student in the class, a Saudi student commented on his experience. Interviewee #10 stated:

I was able to accelerate my reading speed through sitting and practising with them and learning how to get the key words and read the essential words. I still have a problem in reading but I am now much better than before.

Another student gave the same view:

I have experienced studying writing with my Saudi classmates after class and it was good. On the other hand, I experienced the same thing with my Chinese classmates and it was very excellent. I remembered that I studied with a Chinese student half an hour before the exam and it was easy. I think the reason behind this is that their minds don't make excuses like we do. (Interviewee #4)

In addition, the social experiences at the EAP centre enabled the Saudi students to be aware of their strengths regarding the English language. The majority of the

students agreed they had an advantage with their speaking skills, which tended to be better than those of the Chinese students. Interviewee #5 explained:

In fact, Saudi students have good speaking skills, which are better than those of Chinese, but there are many aspects where Chinese are better than us. In general, you can benefit from them in other aspects.

While Interviewee #14 stated:

Yes, the Chinese, for example, are very good in writing and spelling, while we, the Saudis, are good in speaking. They find difficulty in pronouncing some words.

This feature of Saudi students' spoken language is often reported by teachers of Saudi students in an ESL context (Belchamber, 2011; Flaitz, 2003). Researchers reported that they have better listening and speaking skills compared with their writing and reading skills. The reason for this could be their previous English lessons in Saudi Arabia where the focus is on the rote memorisation and grammar, with a little focus on reading and producing written texts (Shaw, 2009). But, from the perception of peer interaction, Watanabe and Swain (2007) demonstrated that the level of proficiency among ESL learners is not an influential factor when learners engage in collaborative learning activities. This transfer of knowledge takes the form of expert–novice where the learners engage in language activities that develop their own weaknesses.

In general, writing skills is one of the major difficulties that international students face in the Australian context, including Chinese and Saudis (Sawir, Marginson, Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, & Ramia, 2012; Tran, 2010). As English language students in China, Chinese students are trained more on mastering reading and grammar skills (Zhang & Mi, 2010). The students tend to prefer to engage in a larger variety of group work activities in Chinese universities and they work effectively if they are in

homogeneous groups where all members are from China. Regarding oral skills, speaking and listening impose challenges for these students as they lack the social context that provides them with the optimal resources for these skills (Briguglio & Smith, 2012). This was exemplified by Saudi students who were collaborating with Chinese students in their daily activities inside the EAP. Interviewee #3 stated:

> *When a Chinese student speaks, it's difficult to understand him and even if you understand him, this will not benefit you in talking with native speakers because the Chinese mispronounce words. Therefore, I believe that they don't benefit me but I benefit them.*

Saudi students are not an exception when it comes to language difficulties in an ESL context. It is one of the most influential factors that determines their adjustment to the new environment (AlQahtani, 2015; Al Remaih, 2016; Caldwell, 2013). Grammar-teaching methods are prevalent in Saudi Arabia with little focus on communicative skills (Elyas & Al Grigri, 2014), and they tend to have difficulties when they go to university in ESL countries (Orth, 2015). However, at the EAP, the prior experiences that Saudi students bring with them to the class may be the reason for their higher level of English speaking. A number of the Saudi students were professional workers and they used English in their work for communication:

> *As a nurse, my communication skills were good but I had a difficulty in grammar and basic structures. In general, I had difficulty in writing and grammar and it was a difficulty not only for me, but also for all the Saudis here. My speaking and listening skills were excellent and better than my colleagues from other nationalities.* (Interviewee #1)

Another student stated:

I used to work in a bank and as you know banks in Saudi Arabia use the English language as their main communication medium. So, I thought when I came here my English is better than other students. (Interviewee #12)

Some students had experienced studying English in other ESL countries, such as the United States. Interviewee #14 clarified her difficulties within the Australian social environment:

But I feel that they are not so friendly in the sense that you should be the one who opens the conversation with them. This is unlike other peoples with whom I lived before such as Americans who may initiate to speak with you. This caused some difficulty for me.

As prior experiences are seen to be important for international students' learning (Tran, 2013), this may give Saudi students an advantage as speakers of English over their peers in the class. This feature of learning is mostly not preferred by the Chinese students inside the classroom (Lu et al., 2012). Prior experiences of language learning can shape the strategies that the language learners adopt in their new learning (Oxford, 1990).

On the other hand, according to the Saudi students in this study, the difficulties that the Chinese students faced in their spoken English could be traced back to their prior experience:

I have visited China three or four times before coming to Australia. Speaking the English language there doesn't help you at all although I was in a big city called Guangzhou, the third largest city in China, but the English language is not used except in hotels and big companies. Even when you go to a restaurant, for example, McDonald's, you cannot use English for communication.

(Interviewee #10)

Another student explained the advantage Saudi students have in their speaking skills:

Our mother tongue (Arabic) assists us to learn and speak other languages unlike any other languages. (Interviewee #2)

This participant's view can be clarified by a recent study on how the Arabic language impacts language learning among Arab ESL learners in Australia (Ata, 2015). In their learning of English, these learners show some common mistakes that are associated with this particular group of students. For example, on the phonological level, the Arabic language does not include some letters that are part of the English phonology, such as /p/ and /v/. Also, on the grammatical level, the students tend to confuse the verb and subject agreement sentences, verb tense and infinitive forms. On the semantic level, learners have difficulties in differentiating between the meanings of words in relation to collocation. Reflecting on the previous statement of the Saudi learners, these are some factors that shaped his view of their better speaking skills.

The difficulty with oral skills among the Chinese students cannot be entirely explained by the cultural background of the learners themselves (Tran, 2013). In addition to cultural factors, there are other factors that could contribute to difficulties encountered among this particular group of students: the educational environment of the institution, the workload and the teaching methodology, as well as other contextual factors related to their learning. In this study, the approach to learning was an essential part of the students' experience. As some informants in this study stated and previously discussed, the EAP centre focuses on developing writing skills among its students with little focus on their oral skills. Interviewee #16 explained this:

I think the EAP should allow to have some activities that include some real-life situation where we can interact and communicate with others outside the class.

The same point was elaborated by Interviewee #7, who stated:

I know other colleges outside Australia which create groups for students to allow them to have relationships with native speakers from outside the college. Students might have friendship with a whole native family with whom they exchange visits. But here at this college, we weren't given this opportunity. They didn't arrange meetings or form clubs to let students have more opportunities to communicate with native speakers.

This issue has been mentioned by Yates and Wahid (2013) who suggested that this can greatly shape the spoken proficiency of international students in the Australian context. According to these authors, this may deprive the students of opportunities to develop their confidence in their language abilities and this will affect their academic and social adaptations.

For some Saudi students, the prejudgment from their class teachers regarding their speaking skills adversely affected the way they were treated compared with Chinese students. In these cases, students did not like the behaviour of some their teachers when they perceived their focus was entirely on the Chinese students and they ignored the Saudi students. This idea was clearly explained by Interviewee #5 who said:

The problem is that teachers here [EAP] say that you speak well because you are Saudi and you don't have credit as all Saudi students are good at speaking, not because you study hard. I wonder why they don't say the same thing about Chinese students and they applaud their writing skills. I don't say that this is a racist idea, but teachers think that I am a careless student and my speaking skill has improved just because I always chat and kid with my classmates, while they think that Chinese students study hard, but they are shy to speak and couldn't improve their speaking skills.

The same situation was conveyed by another student:

Sometimes the teacher pays more attention to a certain student if he likes his topic. For example, I remember a student from an Asian background once started talking about the islands in his country, so the discussion turned to be only between the teacher and the student and I stayed just as a spectator.

Interviewee #1 also observed these actions from his personal view:

The teaching strategy used was more suitable for Chinese students, rather than for me.

Teaching styles have been documented as a challenge for Saudi students during their sojourn in their ESL context (Rundles, 2013). In this study, the Saudi students were mainly dealing with lecturers and other students who were mostly from Asian backgrounds. For students who are from a collectivistic society, such as Saudi Arabia, the teacher's role is as an expert who generates knowledge, and the students' role is to receive it; it is essential for teachers to set the rules for students (Razek & Coyner, 2013). In this learning environment, the students' individual insights are not valued and they must conform to the group. According to Packer and Piechocirski (2013), Saudi students prefer personal independence and they tend to keep social ties and connections with others. Showing interest in them and giving them feedback on their work is an essential strategy for their success inside the ESL classroom. So, talking in the class is a skill that they are familiar with and the teachers in the ESL classrooms should capitalise on this skill to develop other aspects of the English language (Flaitz, 2003). As the Chinese students also come from a collectivistic society, the lecturers may be able to seek similarities and develop inclusive strategies for these groups.

6.4 Technology-Mediated Language Social Strategies

This social strategy emerged as a major finding from the pilot interview and was then developed in the interview protocols of this study. Technologies contributed to the social experiences of the Saudi students. The participants stated that they used some technology-mediated resources to develop their language skills. In this study, the Saudi participants had shown their willingness to use the technological tools at hand to socialise within their ESL context. The use of technology was applied and supported by the lecturers of these learners inside and outside the classrooms. The lecturers also used technology to provide information to their students, for example:

> *When I ask a question, most teachers try in any way to answer it, even if it takes effort and time. I remember that I once asked a teacher to summarise the cause-effect language. She wrote an exercise via Google Drive and shared it with all students. Then, in the next class, she arranged the sheet better and added more examples and sentences.* (Interviewee #9)

Or students used email to communicate with their lecturers:

> *They give us their email. and if you have any questions, or you have there is a difficult skill, they can help. Sometimes the assignments are done through emails and this has an advantage in that the email will show you the spelling mistakes before you send it through.* (Interviewee #18)

Regarding the benefits of using technology, the students expressed their interest in using the online environments for their learning, for example:

> *It's really very excellent. It helps me to easily communicate with native speakers. In my point of view, having many speaking programmes like Prospect is an evidence that it's not easy to make friendships and to communicate with native speakers.* (Interviewee #12)

And from another student who was preparing for IELTS:

Yes, they are very useful. I took an IELTS test and used these programmes for

preparing. Although I didn't get the score which I want, but I benefited a lot

from these programmes. I have learned writing strategies and reading strategies

such as scanning. (Interviewee #15)

Or, they could use mobile phones to help them in their language learning:

There is here a broadcast programme which is very good to practise listening.

Firstly, the speech is clear, simple and academic. The length of each recording

is 35 or 40 minutes. Yes, of course. It also includes about 50 or 60 videos or

audios. (Interviewee #10)

The use of technology by Saudi students in their ESL contexts has been

documented by other studies (Binsahl et al., 2015; Rundles, 2013). Research has found

that the use of technology-mediated tools as strategies for socialising among

international students can shape their sojourns in ESL contexts (Lin et al., 2012;

Mitchell, 2012). In the current study, findings indicate that Saudi students are inclined

to use these technological tools in their language learning. They aim for these strategies

to help them in their self-regulation and social adjustment. YouTube is one of the SNSs

that is mostly used by the Saudi participants in this study. The main aim of applying this

technological tool in this context is to combine the information from the formal

classroom with other information taken from the YouTube videos to develop their

English language skills. According to Interviewee #12:

In Australia, I sometimes speak with the owners of the shops, but I benefit from

YouTube more than anything else. The good thing here in Australia is that

English is used in everything, so I have to learn English and I benefit from this. I

see YouTube is a treasure full of many things. I try to improve my writing and

speaking skills.

Another participant, Interviewee #14, commented on YouTube about her

language learning:

It is very effective and I benefit from it a lot, especially in speaking and

improving certain skills. I focus more on YouTube where I learn a lot from

English teachers on YouTube. Yes, there are many channels. Sometimes, for

example, when I don't understand a grammar lesson well in the class and I need

more explanation, I refer to YouTube to have another teacher explaining the

same rule in English as well. Other times, I refer to YouTube to learn additional

skills I want to learn, such as speaking or something like this. My main focus is

on YouTube ... Sometimes when I am confused about something in grammar or

something else, I surely refer to the YouTube. (Interviewee #13)

The learners in this study adjusted their use of YouTube to include specific

purposes such as studying and preparing for the IELTS tests:

Yes, most of the programmes I use are related to IELTS. I actually don't now

need an IELTS score, but these programmes benefited me a lot in writing. They

are very useful. I took an IELTS test and used these programmes for preparing.

Although I didn't get the score which I want, but I benefited a lot from these

programmes. I have learned writing strategies and reading strategies such as

scanning. (Interviewee #15)

These findings are consistent with studies arguing for the usage of YouTube in

language learning. According to Brook (2011), the authenticity of tasks on YouTube

increases motivation and learning as users interact with each other and construct

meanings from the videos. In addition, the expansion of general knowledge was one of

the objectives of using YouTube by the participants in this study. So, for example, channel TED (Ideas Worth Spreading) is one channel that is often recommended by teachers in the class and the students were taking advantage of this channel:

> *YouTube is one of the tools that I use the most to develop my language skills. It is vast, just search any piece of information or topic and you will find many videos on it. It is good for my listening. You can watch channels such as TED.* (Interviewee #12)

For Interviewee #17, this channel was a new experience and informative for her:

> *Before coming to the EAP, I haven't had any idea on TED's channel, but now I spend sometimes when I go home listening to their videos even if it is not related to the class materials, just watch the video and listen. They recommend it as an extracurricular source for our learning, and I liked the idea to get used to how the English words are pronounced.*

The YouTube platform is a source for language learning with uncountable resources for learners to use from different genres (e.g., education, music, news, documentaries) (Balcikanli, 2009). For other students, the purpose of using YouTube was to develop their writing skills. This was explained by Interviewee #1 who stated:

> *I use YouTube for writing replies as it is broader and wider than Twitter, for example, where your comments might disappear, while replies on YouTube last and people continue replying to each other. Yes, there are students who learn language through writing comments on YouTube videos as people continue replying to each other. Saudi students usually learn by writing these comments. When they start commenting during an argument or a discussion, other people start checking their language and spelling mistakes, making fun of them, saying 'go and correct your mistakes first before commenting'. So, students benefited*

from these comments and corrected their mistakes. Then they go to another

YouTube video, there are thousands but even millions of videos on YouTube.

The use of YouTube to support language learning was similarly suggested by Mayora (2009). The author indicated the potential of YouTube in supporting language learners by providing access to authentic writing materials. The authentic writing on YouTube is characterised by three features: a) it occurs for communication purposes, b) it is intended for an audience, c) it is usually integrated with other receptive skills (Vandergriff, 2016). According to the example mentioned by Interviewee #1 here, the student engaged in this writing task to develop his English writing skills (communication purpose) by writing on a specific comment on a video that was integrated with other skills such as listening to what is said in the video and reading what others had commented on previously.

The genres that these Saudi students engaged with in using YouTube were explained by the participants in this research. In addition to the educational videos mentioned above by interviewees, the cultural affairs genre was highlighted as one of the most watched videos of interest:

For communication, since the start of the recent attack against Saudi Arabia,

some people advised me to speak in English and show the world who we are and

what our culture is since we represent the Saudi people. (Interviewee #1)

There are several aspects of YouTube that are valuable to language learners. One embedded aspect in this use of the technology in language learning is the intercultural interaction that occurs within these platforms. According to Godwin-Jones (2013), cultural knowledge is shared by language learners on YouTube in which the posted videos create a discourse between multilingual users who can share ideas and transmit opinions. The results of this study align with these other studies indicating the

importance of the use of YouTube for Saudi students' language learning and as a main technological source of learning content (Aifan, 2015; Kabouha & Elyas, 2015).

In addition, online tutoring websites are another source of SNSs that the Saudi students used in this ESL context. The only aim of using this strategy was to develop the oral skills that would help them in their social interaction inside and outside the classroom. SNSs enabled the students to interact and to communicate with native speakers in this ESL context. Interviewee #10 stated:

In addition to the curriculum, I try to use applications to practise English such as Prospect. It's an application for speaking with a monthly subscription.

And Interviewee #13 explained about the same website:

It's really very excellent. It helps me to easily communicate with native speakers, in my point of view, having many speaking programmes like Prospect is evidence that it's not easy to make friendships and to communicate with native speakers.

These websites have the potential for language learners to connect with native speakers in order to practise the language skills in authentic situations (Liu et al., 2014; Thorne, 2010). In these environments and from their interaction with the experts in the language host (teacher, tutor, students), the learners gain an ability to acquire linguistic, pragmatic and cultural knowledge (Balcikanli, 2009). The advantage of the use of this strategy was introduced by an interviewee in this study who drew an analogy between learning English in his current ESL context and learning English with online tutoring in Saudi Arabia. For him, with the absence of opportunities to socially interact with English speakers in the ESL context, the use of these websites was a basic essential for a language learner in Saudi Arabia to learn English without the need to leave the home country:

I think that online language learning is very effective and I think the student can learn without the need to travel outside Saudi Arabia or to go and study in a native English country. They can learn the language literally as long as they are getting good language course there and outside the class, they can use these online resources to engage with the native speakers of English. (Interviewee #5)

This could explain the degree of the use of this learner of online tutoring and his active engagement in the activities offered to develop his language skills:

In my real-life situations when I talk with native speakers, I want them to correct my speech and show my mistakes. I found this feature in the websites tutoring where I ask the tutor I would like to have a conversation and I want you to tell me my mistakes to correct them. (Interviewee #5)

He appreciated the feedback from the tutors that assisted him to construct his knowledge and develop his language skills (Liu et al., 2014). However, the use of these SNSs is not as common among Saudi students as the use of YouTube. The preference of YouTube could be because learners often do not prefer to have a live conversation with a stranger over a video call (Liu et al., 2014). This feeling was expressed by Interviewee #9 who stated:

I benefited from them only at the beginning but later I didn't benefit because they repeated the same speech without changing. You are not able to chat with Prospects' teachers as friends and talk about a lot of things. Yes, they always ask you these known questions. Where are you from? Are you in Australia? Then, I would say. They say: After that, they tell you that your English is good. All teachers will flatter you and say the same thing.

While Interviewee # 9 stated:

There are prepared topics for discussion.

For the learning to be more effective on the SNSs websites, a level of comfort is essential because some learners find it hard to establish friendship bonds with others who are not intimate (Harrison & Thomas, 2009). Also, the materials for teaching in these SNSs may increase interest among learners to participate and engage in learning (Brook, 2011). Interviewees in this study were selected for their higher proficiency levels (upper-intermediate and advanced), and the competency level of their language skills may have contributed to their infrequent use of these websites. As stated by the participants themselves, they found that the language contents were repetitive and prepared discussions were not necessarily effective. According to Liu et al. (2014), language learners who are at higher levels tend to spend less time using SNSs to learn English. This is because their language skills have developed to the extent that they do not need more preparatory skills to learn. As Interviewee #10 mentioned, the development of his language skills was noticeable and SNSs and websites were useful when he was at the beginning levels. This fits with Cohen's (2011) suggestion that the more proficient language learners may use fewer strategies in their language learning but these strategies will be effectively operationalised and approached as part of their strategic competence.

The issue of required payment from tutoring websites was a concern by one student who stated:

> *However, they [the websites] have problems such as the financial issues where you have to pay to register in the website for amount of money and they will take the money even if you do not use it. I just discovered this issue and I cancelled my membership with them.* (Interviewee #5)

Financial issues are sometimes part of the challenges faced by language learners engaging in online tutoring websites (Liu et al., 2014). Unlike YouTube interaction,

video communication could also be seen as challenging for students who are shy and introverted. However, as the learners in this study were from a large cohort of international students who were learning English in this ESL context, the need to develop their oral skills was a priority for them. This points to the need of most international students to cater to their communication skills to develop within the ESL environment (Yates & Wahid, 2013).

The use of smartphone applications was one of the technological platforms that the Saudi learners used in this study to mediate their language learning. The idea of putting the mobile phone and its applications into the English mode was suggested by learners to help them develop their language skills. According to Interviewee #18, his mobile phone and the applications installed were all English and this assisted him to practise his English:

> *My advice for other students here is to put your mobile phone on the English mode and use it for chatting. It is very useful especially in chatting.*

The learners found the use of the smartphone applications beneficial in learning vocabulary and spelling:

> *Yes, every class here has a WhatsApp group and we communicate in English. I really find it helpful in spelling words. As I know how to say the words but not to spell it.* (Interviewee #14)

Interviewee #9 stated:

> *Yes, it [WhatsApp] benefits me a lot, especially before the exams and even the Saudi students speak English in the group.*

For Interviewee #10, mobile applications were used to improve his listening skills where he listened to downloaded broadcasts:

The broadcast there is here a broadcast programme which is very good to practise listening. Firstly, the speech is clear, simple and academic. The length of each recording is five-thirty or 40 minutes. Yes, of course they are free. It also includes about 50 or 60 videos or audios.

However, language-learning mobile applications are limited in their advantages to language learners compared with other SNSs (Vandergriff, 2016). Petersen, Divitini and Chabert (2008) found that it is often hard among mobile groups members to establish common ground among them so they can share and collaborate their ideas and opinions. The sense of a shared community is not present among the participants.

However, the degree of social interaction with other students who are from differentcultural backgrounds may anticipate the degree of interaction with the smartphone in in this study. For Interviewee #12, who was living in a shared house and had some friends and native speaker connections, he found he was continuously using WhatsApp to communicate with them and this greatly assisted his written English:

I often use WhatsApp, because I want to go back and say those who are living with me in the house sharing, I have their numbers and if I need something I sent them where I use English. (Interviewee #12)

Also, in the same vein, Interviewee #4 stated:

Yes of course. My mobile and my laptop are in English. I even chat with my friends in English. It is not only about knowing new people to talk with them and improve my English, but I live the language.

On the other hand, the lack of practice in the WhatsApp group was another reason for the absence of beneficial use of this technology for some in this study:

We had a group for our class and I entered it but it didn't benefit me a lot because all students are Chinese and they chat in Chinese language. We notified them many times, speak in English but they didn't respond. (Interviewee #15)

While Interviewee #3 stated:

I think they start chatting [in English] maybe just when they first make the group, but then they feel bored and the group become silent ... Even in the groups we created, they all speak Arabic, we tried with them to speak English only, but with no results, the group are all Saudis.

It might have been the workload of the classroom that inhibited the learners to engage in these chatting groups to discuss class content:

I can say that the benefit from this group is limited and we as students do not intend to practise in our chatting what we had learned in the classroom, to be honest with you. (Interviewee #2)

For language learning through SNSs to be effective, well-structured activities should be applied for the students to ensure their participation and engaged interaction (Lamy & Mangenot, 2013; Lin et al., 2016). The studies involving Saudi students have shown that they have positive attitudes towards mobile-mediated language and they use their applications to support language learning (Barhoumi, 2015; Jaradat, 2014). However, the limited use of mobile applications in this study could be because these chat rooms are initiated by the teachers and left for the students to communicate in as part of their informal learning. Consequently, there are no obligations or structured materials provided for the students to follow, nor any participation or feedback required. Lamy and Mangenot (2013) argued that although the SNSs have some degree of informality and openness in their interactions, there is a need for task-based learning,

assessments, deadlines and tutoring for participants to have some control over the process of learning.

The cultural background of the smartphone users may impact on their interactions with others through the use of the applications (Cho & Park, 2013; Thorne, 2010). Saudi students have developed their positive attitudes and cultural point of views towards other cultures through online discussions (Al-Jarf, 2006). The Saudi students in this study engaged with the other international students on online chatrooms. Although these students were their friends and they met them on a regular basis, there were other cultural factors that inhibited their interactions. For example, the Chinese students have their own established problems in how to form friendships in the online environments and they may find it hard to add friends unless they are family members or intimate friends (Cho & Park, 2013). As the cultural differences are part of the students' interactions in their physical classroom (as discussed previously), these differences might also be present in the online environments as well. Technology- mediated language-learning environments were used in this study by Saudi students to increase social interaction. Technology was utilised to improve language skills and this knowledge would, in turn, elevate the self-esteem required to motivate these international students in the ESL context. The positive effect of such an improvement will positively shape the social and academic sojourns of these students.

6.5 Saudi Female Students' Social Experiences

In the current research, eight participants (44%) of the interviewees were females and their experiences were significantly related to their gender and religious practices. The qualitative findings contributed to new perspectives and nuances regarding how these students employed their social interaction in the ESL context. The results are varied and they differ from one individual to another. These differences were

indicated by Belchamber (2011), who stated that Saudi students in general who are studying in ESL contexts, such as Australia, tend to respond to this new environment in very different ways. Although these students come from a deeply conservative and religious society (Hilal et al., 2015), some of them tend to keep the same religious and cultural practices that are observed in Saudi Arabia, while other students 'relax them to varying degrees' (Belchamber, 2011, p. 3; Groves, 2015; Midgley, 2010).

The Saudi female students were learning English in a de-segregated teaching institution and were surrounded by a relatively large number of Saudi individuals. So, for them, as a group who come from a gender-segregated, collective society, they tended to keep cultural and religious harmony by following the traditions of their society; they mostly wore the hijab or niqab in order not to violate these rules. The experiences that are associated with their cultural dress have been reported by other students in different ESL contexts (e.g., AlQahtani, 2015; Al Remaih, 2016; Caldwell, 2013; Hofer, 2009; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). In the current study, the difficulty of being judged in terms of their appearance was a challenging aspect that Saudi female students reported in this ESL context:

> *I meet difficult situations in the class where the overseas students keep asking me about my niqab. I explain to them what it is and try to convince them about my reasons behind wearing it, but I feel they do not get my point. This is why I tell them about some superficial issues regarding my hijab as they will not understand why I am wearing it. The good thing is that I meet new students and students every five weeks [the duration of the level at EAP centre].* (Interviewee 13)

In this study, although traditional dress was an essential aspect for the female students' social interaction in their ESL contexts, they did not mention these difficulties

when interacting with male students at the EAP centre. Interviewee #8 felt relaxed enough to sit with non-Saudi students and explain her dress customs:

I sit with the Chinese students, talk with them about my religion and hijab, why I am wearing it. Because some of them, especially those who recently started, they do not know about why I dress like this. (Interviewee #8)

Another student found an opportunity to answer the curiosity of some of the international students and to explain to them some cultural and religious aspects of the Saudi culture. In Interviewee #7's words:

They keep asking me why this Saudi female student is covering her face, while another is showing her face and a third showing part of her hair.

In a review of the experiences of the Arab and Muslim female students who were learning in an ESL context, Mrayan and Saleh (2016) found that in some cases wearing the hijab was not the issue itself. Instead, the curious queries that these students received were related to the rules and regulations that govern the traditions of this practice. This reflects what most female participants in this study experienced, where their situation necessitated their interaction with other students who have never met Saudis before. So, the degree to which the Saudi female student adheres to her traditional dress determines, to some extent, the level of social involvement in their ESL context (AlQahtani, 2015; Groves, 2015). Although challenges were reported by both male and female Saudi students, the female students who wore the niqab tended to report more difficulties:

Some students avoid helping me in the class or having discussions with me. (Interviewee #13)

According to Belchamber (2011), the difficulties in the class tend to be greater for Saudi female students who cover their faces, because in language-teaching classes

the veil could be a barrier to developing their communicative and social skills. Body language and facial expressions are important communication tools for language learning. As these students do not show their facial expressions to others, this can influence the quality and the context of their communication either in the class or outside (AlQahtani, 2015; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). When Interviewee #13 was asked about her social connections at the EAP, she referred to her limited social connections with them. She replied:

> *I mean not to make many friends from all nationalities, especially if you have your family with you.*

On the other hand, students who wore headscarves tended to be sociable and they enjoyed more social engagement at the EAP. For example, Interviewee #17 stated:

> *I have many friendships from the Asian background and I sit with them during the breaks and I go out with them.*

Interviewee #3 added:

> *Another thing is to be a social person with people. You have to push yourself to them because no one will come to you. It is not enough to stay at home and only attend classes.*

According to Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006), international students are liable to discrimination because of the visible differences they display in the host society. Their appearance, accent and language spoken can indicate their countries of origin and their cultural backgrounds. So, for them, adapting some aspects of their appearance could be a strategy to avoid discrimination actions against them. This was reported by participants #3 and #14 in this study who changed some of their cultural dress to increase their interaction in their ESL context. It should be highlighted here that the Saudi Ministry of Education encourages Saudi students to avoid possible causes of

discrimination that may lead them to become characterised and visible because of their religion or culture. This information was introduced to the pre-departure courses for the scholarship students. Therefore, Saudi students who had attended pre-departure courses tended to have less stressful experiences and be better prepared to face challenges in their ESL experiences compared with students who had not (Al Musaiteer, 2015).

Gender segregation is practised in almost every part of Saudi social life, including education (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, the Saudi woman wear the abaya (a black cloak that covers her body) and the hijab that covers her hair and face (Al Lily, 2011). When they move to mixed-gendered environments, such as the EAP centre, interaction with other male students imposes an unavoidable challenge for these learners and sometimes it could be a 'threatening and scary experience' (Alhazmi, 2013), especially if they are studying in a mixed-gendered space, such as the EAP centre. According to Alhazmi (2013), in Saudi society, females are taught from an early age to avoid mixing with males and to consider this a source of threat to them. In the ESL context, interaction with other males is a social problem that could influence academic learning. For example, Alanazy (2013) found that female students prefer online discussions to face-to-face discussion when working with males in order to give them more comfort and more freedom to express themselves. Also, as indicated by Groves (2015), the gender segregation of Saudi society is practised by Saudi students even in their ESL context. In this study, there was a favoured pattern of female friendships among the female participants. Interviewee #15 explained her successful experiences of having female friendships with international students, which helped her develop her language skills:

At the beginning of my learning, this helped me because students were from

Colombia and most of them were female students and I was the only Saudi

215

student in the class. So, I had to form friendships with them and this helped me developing my language.

However, she went on:

But at the academic level, there were no Colombian girls in the class, but most students were male and female Saudis. So, this actually affected my English.

Interviewee #14 also highlighted the same point:

So, a female student asked me to sit with them as a group to help them in pronouncing words while they assist me in correcting my writing. It was really a nice cooperation and I benefited from them as they explained things with examples.

On the other hand, working with Saudi male students was preferred by a female participant in this language centre. She believed it was better than working with other international students to help her develop her language skills. According to Interviewee #7:

I think it's better for the language learner at first to speak with a person with whom he/she is comfortable in order to communicate easily. For example, I may have Chinese friends, so I feel more comfortable when speaking with them. However, if I sit with another student, I may not have a conversation with them.

In ESL contexts, the Saudi female students tend to avoid collaborating with males in general and the Saudi males in particular (Al Morshedi, 2011). Nonetheless, this current student highlighted this point in her interview to indicate the need to improve her English oral skills, which were one of her weaknesses at the EAP centre.

The traditional role of the Saudi woman was found to influence the social involvement of the students in the current study (Al Remaih, 2016; Alwahibee, 2000). For example, Interviewee #7, who was in Australia with her husband and one child,

found difficulty in balancing her responsibilities between studying and family requirements.

> *I actually didn't have the chance to do so. As you know, I have other responsibilities to do outside the college, so I usually don't have time to go to other places to communicate with native speakers. I tried to have a conversation in the class, but this didn't benefit me because sometimes the teacher didn't give us feedback on our speaking.* (Interviewee #7)

Saudi students are family oriented and this may influence their motivation to learn English in ESL contexts (Packer & Piechocirski, 2013). Interviewee #7 found it difficult sometimes to engage in outside classroom activities with the aim of increasing language skills. Interviewees #3 and #15, who were both single, had more opportunities for social engagement and friendships:

> *When we go out together with foreign friends, it is better, at the beginning, to listen then to start speaking like them.* (Interviewee #3)

And:

> *Yes, I have relations with Colombians. We are still in touch although we are not at the same college now, but we still hang out together. I don't see them a lot. We use this chance to practise English, but at the same time we are friends and we even visit each other at homes.* (Interviewee #15)

Also, part of Saudi tradition is that a female student who intends to study in any country, either for English or university studies, is required to be accompanied by a *Mahram* (a male guardian). According to the conditions of the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Canberra (2016), a *Mahram* is a must for every female student for as long as she is in the country to study. From the Islamic and cultural traditions in Saudi Arabia,

the *Mahram* is a male guardian who should accompany the woman, either single or married (AlMunajjed, 2009; Al Remaih, 2016). For example, Interviewee #6 said:

I am here with my brother.

And Interviewee #14:

I came here with my husband.

While for Interviewee #17:

I am living here with my father.

Single female students are accompanied by their family members, while the married students by their husbands. As they socially interact more within the EAP centre, the presence of the *Mahram* is not physically needed.

On the other hand, discrimination incidents are often discussed with the Saudi female students living in ESL contexts. According to Caldwell (2013), discrimination against Saudi students in ESL environments varies from perceptions to explicit acts. In this study, these perceptions of discrimination were more expressed to female students (5 interviewees). The common factor between these learners was that their 'cultural appearance' attracted negative perceptions of them among others. According to Interviewee #14:

I feel that when I cover my face. I see some girls face problems regarding this as not all people accept them, but instead they were mistreated. Personally, I have not faced such thing. I notice that people avoid talking directly to women wearing hijab in public. On the other hand, I see that when my husband goes to any place, everything goes well with him because his appearance doesn't reflect his nationality, but when I go with him, things get complicated.

In another participant's words:

People don't like to talk with us, especially as girls wearing hijab. It is not

because of our personality, but because of the reputation of hijab. (Interviewee

#3)

In the Australian context, discriminatory acts are rarely reported in the ESL

environment. In another qualitative study in Australia, Orth (2015) did not find

discriminatory actions affecting the adjustment experience of Saudi students who spent

more than one year in Australian universities. In this study, the fact that these students

were in close contact with the EAP students and staff distanced them from the real

social experiences in which they might be exposed to discrimination (Rundles, 2013).

The only discriminatory action that was witnessed in this study was expressed

by Interviewee (#13). This female student wears a niqab in the EAP centre and when

she goes out in public. According to her:

Because of the way that some people on the street look at me. Sometimes, I hear

them criticising me and they even chase me until my house. They attacked me

saying, 'why did you come here?' and something like this. So, I started fearing

for my safety on the street or in the library and I am deprived of some things.

For these reasons, the social situation is the worst thing for me.

Her difficulty of her social experience was explained thus:

To some extent, I adjusted to academic life in Australia, but not socially.

(Interviewee #13)

Although this female student was excelling in her language studies and she was

at a higher level at the EAP centre, the social experience of acceptance was greatly

influenced by her cultural dress. In some situations, the English language difficulties are

just one of the factors that shape how students become socially involved within their

ESL context (Phakiti et al., 2013). In her interview, Interviewee #3 mentioned her worry of the depiction of her cultural dress in the Australian media:

> *You know the news and what is said and this is why I want to save myself from*
> *the new friendships. I can develop my English with new friendships.*

According to Hebbani and Wills (2012), most negative experiences that occur for Muslim students are off-campus. They agreed that Muslim women in Australia are negatively represented in the media and this affects the quality of their daily life. Especially for a woman who wears the niqab, such as Interviewee #3, these individuals are more liable to have negative experiences and be alienated by society. In this way, the Saudi female students have a different experience to their male counterparts. This account confirms findings by several scholars (AlQahtani, 2015; Al Remaih, 2016; Caldwell, 2013; Hofer, 2009; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015) and it has implications for current host institutions to increase the students' social engagement in their environment. The departure advice from the Saudi government for females and the role of the host universities may change the public opinion of the Saudi female in ESL contexts.

This chapter has presented a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative findings of the mixed methods utilised in this research. The discussion has shown the importance of social context as a main factor in determining the use of language-learning strategies in this research. This was clarified through the explored experiences of interactions with other international students inside the language-learning environment in which the Saudi students were learning. In addition, the role of technology as a social strategy that facilities the involvement of Saudi students was introduced in this chapter. The importance of this emerging theme in current educational settings will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Technology-Mediated Language Learning and Language Learning Strategies

Outline of the Chapter

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Technology Environments as a Social Strategy

7.3 Technology Environments and Language Skills Development

7.4 Technology Environments and Intercultural Communication

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore the use of technology as a social strategy that the Saudi students used in their ESL context. This strategy has emerged from the qualitative findings and was reported on in Chapter 6. The use of these technologies is part of the social context of the learners in this ESL environment and previous research has found Saudi students tend to use the technological environments for language learning (Alzahrani, 2016). According to Alzahrani, the chances of using online learning tools for Saudi students are more frequent in ESL than in EFL contexts. In this study, the use of technology in learning was supported by the language-teaching institution, which is an integral part of the Australian university. The learners were encouraged to communicate with their lecturers through emails if they required assistance and they were allowed to spend their breaks at the ILC. Students were able to gain access to computers, which provided ample opportunities for them to work and practise online. This advantaged the students as the availability of the online facilities enabled them to enhance their social interactions and language learning. In keeping with the theoretical frame of this thesis, the students' use of technology has been viewed in the light of activity theory (Engestorm, 1987). The students' use of technology within

the study provided new insights for language learning research and adds to our understanding of the tools available. Further research will be needed to explore the potential of technology as a language learning strategy.

The pilot interview and subsequent interviews revealed online learning as a significant topic for international students that has emerged since the development of the questionnaire SILL. As the potential of online learning is increasing rapidly, this is an area of study to be incorporated into present knowledge and explored in the future. The following sections discuss three significant topics of how Saudi students socialise in their language class: a) technology environments as a social strategy, b) technology environments and language skills development, and c) technology environments and intercultural communication.

7.2 Technology Environments as a Social Strategy

The learners in this study were away from their home country and their social affiliation formed an essential part of adjustment experiences in the new environment (Koehne, 2005). As discussed in the Chapter 6, there was limited opportunity for Saudi students to interact and practise within their ESL classroom. It is often assumed to be advantageous for learners who are learning English in the ESL context to be exposed to natural, authentic settings of the language (Duff, 2010). This is often not the case as students' social context and interactions depend highly on other social and cultural factors. It is noteworthy that, except for the lecturers, all their fellow students were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

As the strategies of language learning are goal-driven and their ultimate aim is to achieve communicative competence (Oxford, 1990), the Saudi learners in this study opted to engage in using technological strategies to overcome the difficulties they faced in their ESL context. This fits with the aspect of choice of language strategies found in

the definition of *language strategies* provided by Cohen (2011), presented in Chapter 2. According to Cohen, language-learning strategies are 'thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalised by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance' (Cohen, 2011, p. 7). The choice is an essential aspect of strategy as it differentiates between the actions that are strategic from the non-strategic. By choosing to engage in a technology-mediated environment, these students were conscious of their learning, the purpose of their actions and their abilities to evaluate these actions (Anderson, 2002).

The development of learner autonomy is one of the key aspects in an online environment (e.g., SNSs) in second language learning (Blake, 2013; Lamy & Hampel, 2007; Yang, 2016). According to Little (2004), learner autonomy is postulated by three principles: first *the learner empowerment*, and this requires 'learners to assume responsibility for their own learning and giving them control of the learning process' (p. 22). This means that the learners have control of their learning and build on what they already know about the language they are learning. In this process, previous experiences may play a major part in the process and, in some cases, they may constrain it. In the current study, the Saudi learners were using their previous experiences in English learning to enable them to improve their language skills. The students reflected on their experiences of English language in their EFL Saudi context and understood the need to develop essential skills, such as writing. Online learning empowered them to seek sources and look for better strategies to develop and extend their learning.

The second principle is linked with *the learners' reflection*, which is to help learners think of their learning at a macro level and a micro level (Little, 2004).

According to their interviews in this study, these learners could differentiate these levels and types of experiences in their use of the SNSs in this ESL context. At the macro level, the feedback received from their online tutors was found by one of the interviewees to be effective in to utilising the online environments. He emphasised that this aspect of learning was not found or available in the formal classroom. In terms of the micro level, the learners could evaluate and review their experiences through the use of SNSs and understand what worked for them. Some reported technological tools were beneficial and instrumental for them to develop further their limited language skills and at the same time increased their interaction with native English speakers. However, for one participant, the use of the SNSs assisted him at the preparatory levels only.

The third principle is the *appropriate target language use.* This principle requires a facilitator, such as a teacher or native speaker, to ensure that the learners are able to use the acquired knowledge for communicative purposes. Although it is not in the scope of this current study to explore if the learners used the target language (English) correctly, the constant use of emails to communicate with their teachers and the collaborative online tutoring discussion with native speakers helped the students to extend their learning and acquired knowledge within the context. These principles align with the sociocultural perspectives of language learning, where the learners exercise some forms of responsibility in their learning and this is a sign of psychological development resulting partly from interactive mediated experiences through SNSs (Blake, 2013; Little, 2004).

The higher use of metacognitive strategies by Saudi students in the ESL environment in this study reflected all three principles of learning autonomy. Research has also indicated that ESL learners utilise more metacognitive strategies (Abu Shamis, 2003; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Nguyen & Godwyll, 2010). Living in a new

environment, students have higher reliance on metacognitive skills in order to plan, set goals and evaluate their learning (Che Wan Ibrahim et al., 2014). For the students in this study, their highly reported use of the SILL strategies, I try to find many ways to use English, and I look for people I can talk English with, can be explained by their adaptation to the technology as a strategy for socialisation in their language learning. In using these strategies, the learners were interacting with others in their context—students and lecturers— by using emails, mobile applications or the SNSs, which aimed to improve their English language skills.

Relying on metacognitive strategies to plan, initiate and determine their needs, the Saudi students were investing in their learning and expanding their knowledge (Norton & Williams, 2012). The choice of a particular digital tool over another, for instance, YouTube, or Twitter, and whether to conduct oral or written communication, over the computer or a mobile device, is an exercise of agency. The learners apply a set of strategies that indicate they are in control of their own learning. After initiating their goals and specifying their needs, learners engage in activities that address the weaknesses they perceive and try to improve them. To achieve this end, they use a strategy to approach the language content and some of the learners will apply superficial strategies and others deep strategies to learn from that content (Vandergriff, 2016).

7.3 Technology Environments and Language Skills Development

The potential of learning and teaching a foreign or second language in online environments is well established (Lin et al., 2016). There are rich resources that learners can use to enhance their language skills. In an age of information, these online tools have challenged the traditional perspectives of language learning and teaching (Lamy & Mangenot, 2013). Instead of the rule-governed and static methods of language teaching, the more dynamic, fluid and social practices that are interwoven into the individuals'

daily practices (Chen, 2013) become possible. They allow teachers to combine formal

classroom materials with informal knowledge beyond the classroom in order to develop

the language skills of the learners. For learners, the opportunities for language learning

are various and teachers can tailor these opportunities to meet specific needs of the

students. For example, online learning can provide learners with opportunities to

practise their oral skills through live videos (e.g., Skype) where they can practise their

English, engage in live conversations with native speakers and interact with them to

develop their oral skills (Liu et al., 2013). The advantage of these interactions is that

they support the learners' confidence in their language skills (Lin et al., 2016). The

participants in this study stressed their use of online environments to develop their oral

skills.

In addition, the use of the online environment can be utilised to improve the

writing skills of ESL learners (Balcikanli, 2009; Mayora, 2009; Ynuus et al., 2005)

Also, as writing skills are one of the significant challenges for ESL international

learners (Tran, 2010; Arkoudis & Tran, 2010), online environments that can support

language learning in this skill are valuable. For example, YouTube offers language

learners an opportunity to practise their writing by replying to posted videos and

commenting on their contents. The use of these SNSs can develop pragmatic skills

among ESL learners (Chen, 2013). To engage in a conversation with a native speaker of

English, learners sometimes need greeting words to open the conversation.

Ishihara and Takamiya (2014) found that Japanese learners developed their

pragmatic knowledge after studying outside Japan; using online blogs, they improved

their pragmatic knowledge of the English language. This was in their use of address

terms, gendered particles in a sentence and shifts between the regional dialects. In this

study, the use of emails between the Saudi students and their lecturers was mentioned.

This practice entails the use of the pragmatic usage required in writing a message through email correspondence, such as the greetings, address terms and closing of letters.

The use of mobile devices in language learning was highlighted as an important tool in language learning in this study. Studies conducted on Saudi students have shown Saudi students have positive attitudes towards mobile applications and their use in language learning (Al-Shehri, 2011; Barhoumi, 2015; Jaradat, 2014). A mobile assisted language-learning application that was used in this study was the chat rooms initiated by the teachers and left for the students to communicate through as part of their informal learning. Reviewing the perceptions of learners on the affordances of mobile applications in their learning, Steel (2015), found that 'students found mobile applications fast, easy to use, portable and accessible anywhere and anytime. Using applications reportedly helped students to more routinely engage with their language by fitting it in around their life worlds' (p. 241).

When using these applications, there are no obligations and no structured materials for the students to follow and participate in. Lamy and Mangenot (2013) argued that although SNSs have some degree of informality and openness in their interactions, there is also a need for task-based learning, assessments, deadlines and tutoring to have some control over the process of learning. However, the benefits of the use of mobile devices was shown by Ma (2015), who found among university students in Hong Kong that mobile technology could help learners regulate their learning and improve their cultural skills. To acquire general and subject knowledge and to improve their English language, Ma (2015) contended that the mobile applications enabled students to access learning resources easily. In the current study, it was affirmed that tablets, online dictionaries and mobile applications were highlighted by the Saudi

learners as instrumental tools for their language learning, and these tools compensated for any lack of opportunity for learning in the class.

The strength of using the online tools for language learners is the easy and open access to reach authentic language materials and resources, and students can learn at a time that is convenient for the learners (Liu et al., 2013; Thorne, 2010). The online environment provides learners with plenty of opportunity to interact with their peers, language experts (e.g., the teacher/tutor) and other students who have a higher level of language proficiency. All these strategies are pragmatic and valuable for promoting linguistic and cultural knowledge (Balcikanli, 2009). To address the shortage of learning opportunities, students who are exposed to online environments daily can further develop their linguistic and communicative language skills. However, the influence of SNSs applications on learners' linguistic skills has limited impact on their development. According to the research conducted by Golonka et al. (2014), findings indicated that the benefits and affordance of language learning through online spaces do not suggest an actual increase of language improvement. Online environments are complex in their contexts, their designs and teaching materials, and for learners as social learners. For some researchers, such as Kurata (2010), it is important for second language learners to use out-of-class learning materials, such as SNSs, as this helps them to be aware of intercultural sensitivity, and at the same time it builds their self-confidence and creates a positive learning process.

7.4 Technology Environments and Intercultural Communication

Language learning entails the learning of some of its cultural meaning as well. In the formal classroom of language, cultural aspects of language are provided to the learners in textbooks with inauthentic examples of language (Godwin-Jones, 2013). These examples may be simple and straightforward, and they may be misunderstood by

228

the learners. On the other hand, online interactions help learners to develop their intercultural communication (Thorne, 2010). In this study, the intensive mode of language learning for the participants helped the learners to be immersed in their learning of English in an ESL context at the language-teaching institution. Learners were able to develop practical understanding and sensitivity towards the English language and culture. The presence of a diverse group of students enabled the students to communicate effectively with each other and other users through the use of SNSs and online tutoring websites. These applications enabled students to communicate with native speakers through video conferencing (Kurata, 2010). Technological advancement in handheld mobile devices has provided increased social interaction. Other advantages such as the development of cultural knowledge have materialised through blog writing and shared participation (Godwin-Jones, 2013).

The influencing factors of the different cultural backgrounds of the participants can have an impact on the ways they interact and communicate in the online environment (Cho & Park, 2013). The students in the class in the current study came from collectivistic cultures and societies. Consequently, their differing identities and values have resulted in various understandings and the formation of friendships across cultures. For example, the Chinese SNSs users tended to be conservative in their approaches to friendships. They preferred not to disclose their identities unless the other person was a close friend or a member of their family (Cho & Park, 2013). As for the Saudi users, they preferred to have double accounts of the SNSs, in which they disclosed their information in the main and formal accounts, while hiding the personal information in the second account (Aljasir et al., 2014).

In one study that included Saudi students and other international students in online discussions, Al-Jarf (2006) found that online discussions assisted students to

have common interests and points of view regarding global and cultural issues. This facilitated the development of positive attitudes towards other cultures and respect for cultural differences. Chapter 6 explained the differences between and benefits of the interactions between the students in the classroom; these differences might be present in the mobile phone environment as well. In SNSs, relationships are often built according to the request and acceptance of users. For Saudi learners, who come from a very conservative and collectivistic society, it may be hard for them to accept adding more friendships on their SNSs platforms. The Saudi students in this study commented on some of the difficulties of understanding the cultural norms of their peers in the formal class (discussed above). In an online environment, cultural differences are reflected in the differentiated use of technological applications and practices (Thorne, 2010) and this may further divide the gap between the different cultural learners.

One of the observations of this study was that there were different uses between the male and female Saudi students in their SNSs and smartphone applications that assisted their language development. The male students used more varied SNSs, for example, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter, online digital dictionaries, online tutoring and broadcasts, while the female students used applications such as YouTube and WhatsApp. The variations in the use of online tools can be traced back to a number of cultural traditions and values that have shaped the female students' use of technology in Saudi society. Al-Saggaf (2011) contends that the use of SNSs has increased widespread social interactions among Saudi women within their society and has also built confidence. Integral to Saudi society, the use of online platforms for Saudi women is guided and restricted by cultural traditions (Al Lily, 2013). For example, adding male friends into a Saudi woman's SNSs' profile is unacceptable and this may not be welcomed by husbands. In general, the Saudi woman's use of the web is affected by

cultural traditions in which she has limited choice of websites to visit and whom to chat with online (Oshan 2007). However, the female Saudi students who studied in the ESL context had different attitudes towards these traditions and some chose to add male colleagues from the classroom (Alsaggaf, 2015).

The use of SNSs assisted the female Saudi students to form new friendships and keep in touch with close friends in Saudi Arabia and other friends in the ESL context (Binsahl et al., 2015). This was found to assist them in their social adjustment to the new environment in which they were learning. However, posting their photos is restricted to their family members or close friends. Alanazy (2013) found among her female Saudi participants, especially the married participants, that the level of comfort using online discussions in ESL classes was greater for them compared with face-to-face discussions. The Saudi female students who are studying in ESL contexts tend to be familiar with male acquaintances from their classes and they have no issues adding these males in their SNSs list of friends (Alsaggaf, 2015). The female participants in this study did not express dissatisfaction about this when they talked about their experiences with other international students. AlSagri and AlAboodi (2015) found that Saudi female participants on SNSs tend to use more privacy measures than do men. Their awareness is greater in this area and they tend not to disclose their personal information except to significant others (family members or close friends) (Aljasir et al., 2014). In the current study, the female Saudi students accepted having male friends in their WhatsApp chat rooms that were created by their teachers.

From the language-learning strategies research, individual differences can be found in digital language learning. Individual characteristics among learners could determine the degree of use of technological environments and applications in their language learning (Abd Halim et al., 2011; Alomyan, 2004; Foroozesh-nia, 2015). As

explained in Chapter 2, individual differences, such as learning styles, can shape how learners approach their learning. Oxford (2003) argued that teachers can attune their instruction to a preferred style of learning. However, in online environments, the accommodation of these individual characteristics is different, especially regarding the websites. Nevertheless, with the advancement of mobile devices and their potential, a learning shift is occurring and moving towards students having more autonomy, and learners will be more capable of accommodating their own learning needs through the use of these applications (Chen, 2013).

In summary, this chapter has further discussed the qualitative findings regarding using technology as a social strategy employed by the Saudi students in their ESL learning environment. Potential for individual learning was commented upon and it has been demonstrated that the online environment can provide social support through maintaining relationships with close friends and significant others while also compensating for lack of access to a wider variety of native speakers. The chapter has shown how language-learning strategies are shaped by the goals and actions of the learners, which are associated with the social context in which they are living. Chapter 8 will conclude the thesis by reflecting on the research questions and presenting the implications and limitations of the study.

Chapter 8: Reflections on the Questions, Implications, Limitations and Conclusions

Outline of the Chapter

8.1 Reflections on the Questions

    8.1.1 Main Question: How Can the Australian English as a Second Language Context Encourage the Use of Effective Social Language Strategies to Support Optimal Learning?

    8.1.2 First Subsidiary Question: What are the Language-Learning Strategies that Saudi Students Use in this Particular English as a Second Language Context?

    8.1.3 Second Subsidiary Question: What Are the Most Commonly Used Social Language-Learning Strategies of Saudi Students in the English as a Second Language Context?

    8.1.4 Third Subsidiary Question: What is the Role of Social Language Strategies Used by Saudi Students in the English as a Second Language Context?

    8.1.5 Fourth Subsidiary Question: What is the Importance of Social Language Strategies in the English as a Second Language Context?

8.2 Implications of the Study

8.2.1 Theoretical implication of the study

8.3 Limitations of the Study

8.4 Directions for Further Research

8.5 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the language-learning strategies that Saudi students use in their ESL context. The research specifically addressed the social strategies category of the language-learning strategies to investigate how these learners socially interact in their ESL learning environment. This choice was justified because social interaction has come to be considered one of the most significant factors in second language learning. To achieve the aim of the study, quantitative and qualitative research methods were adopted to explore the social and cultural experiences of Saudi students in the ESL context. Mixed methods enabled the researcher to gain an overview of students' use of social language strategies and explore their experiences in more detail through interviews. After reporting the findings in the discussion of the qualitative and quantitative data presented in the previous two chapters (6 and 7), this is the concluding chapter of the thesis.

8.1 Reflections on the Questions

The study addressed the following overarching question and four subsidiary questions.

The main question:

– How can the Australian ESL context encourage the use of effective social language strategies to encourage optimal learning?

The subsidiary questions:

1. What are the language-learning strategies that Saudi students use in a particular ESL context?

2. What are the most common social language-learning strategies used by Saudi students in the ESL context?

3. What is the role of social language strategies used by Saudi students in the ESL context?

4. What is the importance of social language strategies in the ESL context?

8.1.1 Main Question: How Can the Australian English as a Second Language Context Encourage the Use of Effective Social Language Strategies to Support Optimal Learning?

The research data suggested the Saudi students in this study came from their home country with high expectations and strong motivations to learn English in their ESL context. This came through clearly in the interview answers (Chapter 5) and the students were open in the answers they gave about their experiences. However, as the context is essential to provide the language learners with resources that support them in their language learning strategies (Palfreyman, 2011), the students in this context found that the limited interaction with English speakers in their learning environment was a serious problem for them. This has been a finding in previous research and has implications for universities establishing designated English classes for international students in terms of the language background of the students, cultural approaches to learning and pedagogies adopted. The students looked for channels that could help them increase their interaction and develop their language skills. These students were learning in an EAP programme and this context supported a number of social strategies that shaped their social interaction. Driven by their need to develop social interaction, the higher use of the social strategies reported by the SILL results, compared with the interview results, was due to questions that related to their contact with English speakers inside their classrooms (teachers, students and staff). This contact contributed to the development of their language skills and their cultural understanding. For other participants, this contact was very limited.

The SILL questions do not reflect the context of the learner, they are somewhat limited because they do not give the opportunity to nuance answers (Chapter 4; Gao,

2004). The interviews gave participants room to explain further, as most of the interview questions were derived from the SILL. It also became clear that there were other social strategies that the learners chose to use outside the classroom to support their formal classroom learning (e.g., the use of technology). The findings of this study have highlighted the importance of the social context in language-learning strategies. The comparison between the qualitative and quantitative data, while supporting each other, supported the statement that a study of context is underrepresented in the research on language-learning strategies (Cohen, 2011; Griffiths et al., 2014). The results of this study contribute to the knowledge of how context is important in the choice and use of language-learning strategies among learners and the role that context plays in encouraging learning attitudes like motivation. The students' choices were driven by their constructed knowledge, which was socially and culturally shaped before they arrived in their new ESL context (Jang & Jiménez, 2011), and the extent to which the new environment was compatible with previous experience (Chapter 2).

The ESL context in this study was representative of classroom environments in most Australian universities, that is, they were designated English classes for international students from countries where English was not the main language. These classes were designed to provide specific language skills to students intending to enrol in mainstream tertiary programmes as fee-paying international students. These English classes are a profitable and useful support for the international student market and thus they provide a learning environment with specific characteristics. In this case, the Saudi learners had the opportunity to interact with students who were from different cultural backgrounds, especially with students from China. This enabled the Saudi students to present themselves and their culture to others in the class, discuss the cultural differences between them and develop their own language skills. Learning from other

students was a social strategy that was highly appreciated by the Saudi students, as represented by their SILL questionnaire answers. What supports this interactive strategy is that in their interviews the learners expanded on how this strategy was employed and what they felt the benefits and drawbacks were of socialising with their peers who were from different cultural backgrounds. The classroom discourse was essential in constructing knowledge between the Saudi students and their peers, and this exchange assisted them to share ideas, express opinions and improve their language skills (Storch, 2002; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). Being able to express an opinion is considered higher order language use and the mixed social and cultural environment encouraged the expression of ideas. While much of the literature supports the value of having native speakers as exemplars, being in a multicultural classroom enabled the Saudi students to become close to the other students and explain to them religious and social practices of the Saudi society. These environments are necessarily multicultural and they may provide advantages that have not been emphasised in previous research, which tends to focus on opportunities to interact with native speakers. In this research, the qualitative data provided a rich picture of these interactions.

Also, in this study, the experiences of the female Saudi students were found to be different from their male counterparts. These findings add to the growing literature and studies exploring the experiences of female Saudi students in ESL contexts (Alanazy, 2013; Al Remaih, 2016; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Szilagyi, 2015). Coming from a very conservative, religious, strict society where gender segregation is dominant (Al Lily, 2011), the female students had different experiences from their male compatriots. This was especially the case regarding how they communicated with other male students and questions of religious compliance. Moreover, the visibility of their dress, marking them as Muslim, presented some

challenges. For these students, the cultural dress (the hijab or niqab) was a main factor in defining social interaction in the ESL context, whether inside or outside the classroom. In particular, the female student (only one) who chose to wear the niqab (full face cover), reported much more limited social contact. The female students reported they were liable to experience acts of discrimination, especially outside the classroom environment (Chapter 5). However, in general, the female participants in this study were satisfied with their experiences and the social strategies assisted them to explain to other students why they would choose to wear this cultural dress. As this is an ongoing issue for female Saudi international students, the host universities probably need to be aware of how to support such choices both within the classroom and in the wider social milieu.

Another aspect of the learning experience that emerged from the qualitative data was the use of the technology-mediated language-learning resources among learners in this environment. This was emphasised in the pilot interview (Chapter 3) and was therefore included in the interview questions as an issue of importance that has grown since the SILL was first developed. Technological tools are an integral part of the lives of this new generation and, for these learners (Vandergriff, 2016), the use of technology is not only fundamental for the increase in their language skills but also has become a major way of learning in all areas. From the interviews, we know that the Saudi students in this ESL context were motivated to learn English and to meet English speakers with whom they could practise English. In an attempt to combine classroom materials and informal learning over the online platforms, they used this strategy to improve their language skills, especially oral skills, to increase their general knowledge and/or to develop their writing skills. In their social interaction with other users in these online

environments, the Saudi learners reported they could develop their overall linguistic, pragmatic and cultural knowledge (Balcikanli, 2009; Brook, 2011).

However, it seems that cultural factors also affect the learners' interaction with technological tools, such as SNSs (YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp), where self-disclosure and friendship is not easy with strangers and/or distant friends (Aljasir et al., 2014; Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Liu et al., 2014). The researcher has found that the Saudi students in this study tended to use these SNSs to assist them in their adjustment to social and academic life in their Australian environments (Binsahl et al., 2015). For example, many of the interviewees reported that a major use was to maintain contact with families and close friends in Saudi Arabia and this helped them feel motivated and comfortable in a strange environment (Chapter 6). Contact with other international students was also useful for study. The findings of the current study confirm that using these technological platforms as a resource for learning will assist learners in their adjustment through their study trajectories. The changing nature of the technological environment also means this is an area that has enormous potential for supporting language learning and study more generally. If this research were commencing now, the SILL would be adapted to explore this growing area of teaching and learning. This will be a significant direction for further research.

8.1.2 First Subsidiary Question: What are the Language-Learning Strategies that Saudi Students Use in this Particular English as a Second Language Context?

The SILL results (Chapter 4) have shown the Saudi students in this study to be high to medium users of language-learning strategies. Their most used language-learning strategies are presented in this table:

Table 8.1

Reported Use of Language Learning Strategies by Saudi Students

Strategies	Mean	Percentages	Rank
Metacognitive	3.79	75.94%	1
Social	3.56	71.78%	2
Compensation	3.17	66.49%	3
Cognitive	3.14	62.47%	4
Affective	2.99	59.84%	5
Memory	2.78	55.78%	6

This supports other studies conducted in the ESL context that also found the use the metacognitive and social strategies to be higher among participants than those of compensation, cognition, emotional and memory strategies (e.g., Abu Shamis, 2003; Nguyen & Godwyll, 2010; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). The learners who participated in the current study were living in an environment where English was the dominant language and they needed this language to communicate with other speakers in the environment. So, to address their learning needs in this overwhelmingly English-speaking environment, they tended to use metacognitive strategies to plan, initiate and evaluate their own learning. For example, the current study found that these learners planned and used the technological opportunities provided in their environment to overcome the shortfall in their language learning. This is another argument for the importance of technology.

In a study of Saudi students, Alwahibee (2000) used the SILL questionnaire to examine the language-learning strategies of Saudi students in an ESL context and he found that the compensation strategies were the most highly used by his participants. According to his study, Saudi learners have difficulties interacting socially with English speakers and they tend to use metacognitive strategies to compensate for meanings in

English speech, such as guessing the meaning of a statement and using verbal and non-verbal behaviour, like gestures. In contrast, this current study has found the common use of social strategies that assist the learners to adjust to their academic and social trajectories in the ESL environment was the first one chosen by these participants.

However, as the SILL is more associated with classroom activities (Carson & Longhini, 2002), the results of this research represent a situation where the learners spend more of their day interacting with others in a more open adult environment than the formal classroom and this may have influenced the answers to the questionnaire.

8.1.3 Second Subsidiary Question: What Are the Most Commonly Used Social Language-Learning Strategies of Saudi Students in the English as a Second Language Context?

Table 8.2

Reported Use of Social Strategies of Saudi Students

Strategy	Mean	Percentage	Frequency of Use
45.If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.	3.73	72%	High
46.I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	3.08	60%	Medium
47.I practise English with other students.	4.06	81%	High
48.I ask for help from English speakers.	3.57	70%	High
49.I ask questions in English.	3.88	74%	High
50.I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.75	71%	High

According to the SILL questions, the three social strategies that were most highly reported by the Saudi learners were asking questions, practising with other students and learning about the culture of English speakers. These three social strategies tended to occur mostly inside the classroom, where asking questions, for example, was

a commonly used strategy to establish meaningful interactions between the learners and their teachers. Peer-to-peer cooperation was one of the pedagogical methods followed by the teachers in the EAP class, and through this strategy the Saudi students felt motivated to learn and had the confidence to use their English with the other students. However, the qualitative findings have added more depth to the SILL results and have revealed that a number of other social strategies were frequently used among these learners. For instance, these learners reported that they could take risks in their learning and they felt comfortable asking questions without fear of making mistakes or being embarrassed when they got something wrong. With their peers in the class, through their collaborative dialogue, they could focus on specific skills in order to develop and work on these skills (e.g., reading or writing). Learning about the English culture was done through watching movies and TV shows and learning how language is used and the different purposes of communication. One student (Interviewee #1) expressed a preference for English movies as he liked the pronunciation of the English—he did not find the American accent so aesthetic. The use of these strategies was primarily to increase language skills and then to socialise with English speakers. The reported differences between the qualitative and quantitative data and the discussion of risk taking are important because the ability to take risks is a significant part of second language learning and these students were able to see the value and identify the environment in which they felt comfortable.

8.1.4 Third Subsidiary Question: What is the Role of Social Language Strategies Used by Saudi Students in the English as a Second Language Context?

The use of social strategies revealed in this study indicated the various social resources that Saudi learners use in their ESL context. According to Palfreyman (2006), the social context provides learners with various resources for learning. In this study,

these social resources shaped and enhanced the language-learning experience of Saudi students. By applying social strategies, the Saudi learners showed their engagement with the wider community of ESL learners and the Australian community (Duff, 2007). This socialisation was important for them as they needed to communicate with others around them, that is, fellow international students, lecturers and native English speakers.

Communication can lead to a sense of social belonging, which enhances the experience of studying abroad for international students as their contact with others is unavoidable, specifically in their ESL context, and if this is positive it will support learning. Shepherd and Rane (2012) found that Arab students, such as Saudi learners, are selective and deliberate in the choices they make about how to respond to the ESL cultural context. The social strategies in this study facilitated this choice, which is essentially a reflection of the individual differences among the learners and their adopted strategies (Cohen, 2003). Some Saudi participants, for example, Interviewee #4, reported using a number of social resources to improve English and general knowledge. Interviewee #4 said he had many native speakers as friends as well as friends from other nationalities. He said he preferred to engage in actual socialisation over learning on the online platforms. On the other hand, other students, for example, Interviewee #10, found there were challenges mixing within the Australian context and reported using the online tutoring websites to develop their spoken language skills and increase social affiliation within the new environment. For some female participants in this study, the limited access to social opportunities was mainly a result of the cultural and religious traditions of Saudi society, especially for the married students.

The choice of social strategies had the potential to equip these learners with the capacity to convey sociocultural meanings and interpret practices in the ESL context. As seen through the experiences of Interviewees #4 and #10 cited above, and the

position of the female students, it would appear that individual preferences, approaches to learning, circumstances and even their own personalities influenced the choices made. This last point was very clear in the choices the females made about their compliance with Saudi dress codes and the importance of facial expression in the new environment. Only one student chose to wear the niqab and she acknowledged she was aware that she was creating a communication barrier between her and her fellow students by making this decision. Between Interviewees #4 and #10, there was a distinct difference in the way they communicated with others in the ESL context. Interviewee #4 wanted to learn from others on the social plane initially, while Interviewee #10 liked to use the online environment to prepare himself first. Such choices indicated that students will incorporate a diversity of selections and the more opportunities to exercise choices, the more supportive the context.

8.1.5 Fourth Subsidiary Question: What is the Importance of Social Language Strategies in the English as a Second Language Context?

According to Moores and Popadiuk (2011), social support is one of the only factors that will be a primary predictor of the successful adaptation among international students when negotiating the new learning and teaching environment. Adopting a sociocultural view of language learning (Duff, 2007; Lantolf, 2000), this current study found that social strategies appeared essential for these Saudi language learners in their ESL context. Through asking questions and seeking correction when they did not know something or felt they made a mistake, they aimed to gain the knowledge that help to addresses gaps in their learning. The development of their language skills was partly shaped by how they engaged with other students. This was an important part of the experience and dominated the answers to the interview questions to an extent (Chapter 5). In these interactions, the language learners supported each other by creating

collaborative dialogues that could expand their linguistic knowledge and allow them to organise, rehearse and self-regulate their learning (Donato & McCormick, 1994). The intercultural knowledge that they sought from their friends in the class from different cultural backgrounds assisted them to expand their horizons and reflect on their own culture as well. Vygotsky (1978) commented on the value of learning another language to understand how your own language works. These students were not only exploring their own language and beliefs through learning English but had the opportunity to share the experience with students from other language backgrounds attempting the same task. The diversity among the students enhanced the use of social language strategies. As stated, this diversity and its potential has received less attention in previous research than the difficulties of communicating with the native speakers.

8.2 Implications of the Study

This study provided several practical implications regarding how these Saudi students socialised in their ESL context. The students were motivated and confident in their language learning and this encouraged them to use available social strategies to increase their language learning. It was stated in other studies that Saudi students have adequate speaking skills inside ESL classrooms (e.g., Flaitz, 2003; Shaw, 2009). This finding was supported by the learners in this study as well. The teachers could capitalise on this skill to develop other parts of the students' language learning, as well as employ differentiated skills as a resource for students to explore specific, different patterns of competence. However, some students across the whole student group, who had difficulties, needed to ask for extracurricular activities outside the classroom in which they could practise their English learning skills with English speakers, which was not done for this group of students in this study. The opportunity to do this is recommended

in the research literature. This was suggested by Groves (2015) and mentioned by an interviewee in this research:

> *I think at my college, there is shortage of opportunities to communicate with native speakers. I know other colleges outside Australia which create groups for students to allow them to have relationships with native speakers from outside the college. Students might have friendship with a whole native family with whom they exchange visits. But here at this college, we weren't given this opportunity. They didn't arrange meetings or form clubs to let students have more opportunities to communicate with native speakers.* (Interviewee #7)

The study found that the classroom discourse influenced the learning strategies of the Saudi students (Philp et al., 2014). The interactions between Saudi and other peers had shaped and developed some of their linguistic and cultural skills. The Saudi learners took advantage of this interaction to help them focus on the skills that needed strengthening. This interaction was reciprocal, where the other learners were also learning from the Saudi students and their own cultural traditions. As suggested in the discussion on the questions above, the knowledge of international students' classroom discourse could be usefully investigated as it would appear it has the potential to be a rich context for learning and teaching. One of the factors that contributed to this interaction was the teaching method applied by lecturers inside the EAP class. However, it seemed that the focus of the course was on introducing skills that would prepare these students for study and for skills that are required for university studies (i.e., reading and writing) (Yates & Wahid, 2013). For the Saudi students, the important focus was on their oral skills, as these are essential for their social interaction inside and outside their learning institution. Given that the Saudi students considered their oral skills a strength, a concentration on this area of language development while in a

supported environment would have the potential to improve their overall study experience and encourage ongoing friendships with fellow students.

In addition, technology was found to be a main source for learning among the Saudi students in this context and presumably for the other students. The high use of SNSs by the Saudi students to improve their language skills was an indication of their utilising new and ever-expanding opportunities that could be categorised as offering different ways of exploring social strategies for language learning. For example, the use of YouTube was important for the students and they reported they used it frequently for their learning. This online platform could be utilised by their teachers to find how they can scaffold their students' learning. The YouTube environment is an open source and it is free of charge. All universities have online management systems these days as well.

Systems like Blackboard, the system provided for the students in this study, can be used to access classroom materials or post personal videos on a certain topic. Peers could reply in written English or produce another video. In this case, the classroom can become a context of learning that goes beyond the classroom walls using a number of receptive skills for reading, writing and listening. It is also a closed and trusted environment, and that is important here. For these activities to be effective and to ensure the benefits from these trusted online activities, teachers should have control over these activities and try to assess their students on a regular basis (Lamy & Mangenot, 2013). That mobile technology is rapidly changing and that applications are an important part of a teacher's job in the world of today, means constant professional development provided by the university is an essential part of supporting the work of teachers. Teachers can conduct self-directed online professional development and such activities can be encouraged for students. For example, there are applications that can be used to

target the language skills of Saudi learners to develop their spelling and writing skills, such as writing chat applications.

In addition, the experiences of the female Saudi students reported in this study have revealed a different story of social integration within the EAP class. The challenges encountered by the female students confirm findings in other studies. The cultural and religious factors that structured their participation in the EAP class has been observed in other studies that examined the female experience (Al Lily, 2011) and need serious consideration. If these particular students choose to wear their cultural dress, they are highly visible. To abide by the cultural and religious conditions of Saudi society means there are restrictions on interactions with others.

Inside the EAP classes, the study found these students were using the opportunity to learn from female peers, either Saudis or others from different nationalities. However, in some cases, cultural dress created a barrier between them and their peers inside the class, and limited the use of social strategies that developed their own learning. This was particularly the case of the student who chose to wear the niqab.

Undoubtedly, with the presence of these challenges inside the classroom, the classroom environment could be unwelcoming for these students as their peers judge them according to their dress. In the case of the niqab, this causes cultural problems as the face is essential for communication in most cultures. This has the potential to affect students' academic and social involvement in the classroom. It is recommended for teachers at the start of each level to introduce the classmates to each other and to introduce the cultural background of each student to the class and define what the limitations might be. The aim of this practice is to show what important aspects of cultural traditions need to be respected in the classroom and how personal relationships can be developed within these confines. This is also an issue the Saudi government can

acknowledge when supporting female students to study abroad. The dyadic interaction between the students is important and effective in constructing knowledge.

The implications of this study can contribute to the work of organisations like the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Canberra. Saudi students in the research highlighted the importance of the pre-departure intensive English course to help make the best use of their time while studying English in Australia.

> *I mean to study at least for six or seven months in order to have some English background. What I did is a mistake and I don't advise anyone to do so. If my brother wants to study English abroad, I won't let him go. But I will advise him to study English in Saudi for six or seven months to finish half of the period and then he can travel to study abroad.* (Interviewee #11)

According to a number of participants who took an intensive course in Saudi Arabia, the duration of their study in the EAP class was reduced to a few months compared with many students who start from preparatory levels and spend up to 15 months in the specialist class. The advantage of the intensive course in Saudi Arabia is that it equips learners with language skills that will make their academic journeys more successful, with less stress and anxiety (Al Musaiteer, 2015). An emphasis on the social journey would also be valuable to include in this pre-departure course as this research has highlighted not only the importance of social strategies to enhance second language learning but also the significance of particular social strategies for particular populations. To sum up, the implications that have emerged from this research include:

- the importance of personal preferences and learning styles

- the role of classroom discourse

- the potential of the multicultural classroom

- teaching methods and the focus of teaching—university and student needs

- the use of SNSs—individual and as a classroom practice

- the need to cater for restrictions on female Saudi students in the learning environment.

8.2.1 Theoretical implications of the study

The study probed some aspects of the sociocultural theory in ESL learning. It has shown that how the language learners appropriated their learning to manipulate the second language contextual tools that meet their communicative purposes (Van Compernolle, 2015). The activities that Saudi learners engage in this context have shaped the way they socialise and the language learning strategies they could utilise. In this sense, the study adds that language learning strategies are used in their context in light of social and historical factors that shape this usage (Griffiths & Inceçay, 2016; Oxford & Schramm, 2007). Also, it was evident that the learners made their choice in preferring a number of strategies to other and these choices were deliberate and clearly explained in their interviews (Chapter 2, Cohen, 2011). Their choices indicated the new orientations that they adopted in how to approach English language and learning and critically analyse their own learning. Additionally, on the methodological level, this study informs the research examining language learning strategies. It has found the qualitative framework are more deep in explaining the actual strategies, not necessarily pre-defined by other researchers, that meet learners' learning goals (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014).

8.3 Limitations of the Study

The current thesis recruited 65 students for the first phase of the quantitative results and 18 participants for the second phase. The aim of this research was to produce in-depth information about the Saudi students' experiences. The triangulation of the methods (questionnaire and interviews) used in the qualitative approach gave the results

depth in descriptions and discussions. This allowed the researcher to compare the results

with other studies conducted on Saudi students. Also, the students in this study were

from one single language-teaching institution in Australia. This makes this language-

teaching facility a specific context for this group of students with its constructed

learning and teaching methods. The results of this study may not be applicable in

another ESL context, either inside or outside Australia, and contextual differences were

mentioned by some interviewees who used to study in different language centres. These

were within certain programmes and the similarities were greater than the differences.

As explained in Chapter 2, the variables that influence the choice and use of the

language-learning strategies can be the learners' age, gender, level of proficiency, style

of learning and cultural background (Cohen, 2011; Ellis, 1994; Gao, 2010; Oxford,

1990). The current study considered the cultural background of the Saudi learners and

the context of their learning. So, the findings of this study are limited as they may be

influenced by other variables. The interviewees possessed high proficient levels of

English and this may have given them the ability to use more strategies to socialise with

others in this context. Conversely, students who possess lower levels of English may

have their own social strategies that reflect their level of proficiency.

Regarding the methodological level, researchers have highlighted the challenge

of finding the proper research method to investigate language-learning strategies

(Cohen, 2011). In this study, the mixed method of using the SILL questionnaire and the

semi-structured interviewers was employed to gain a bigger picture of the strategies

used in this context by the Saudi learners. While each method generated informative

results, each method also had limitations. The limitations of the SILL were presented

and discussed in Chapter 4. Semi-structured interviews provided the personal views of

the participants and the subjectivity of the interviewer might intervene in the data they

produce. The theoretical approach of this study was SCT, which assumes that knowledge is socially and culturally produced in a specific context (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The use of other methods is encouraged and supported by scholars of language-learning strategies (e.g., Griffiths & Inceçay, 2016).

8.4 Directions for Further Research

The current study has presented some new insights into the language-learning strategies body of knowledge and how these strategies are used by Saudi students in their ESL context. The qualitative approach of the study allowed the researcher to explore the participants' perceptions and discuss different social strategies that they engaged with to meet their needs. These findings can enrich future research and suggest questions that may be explored in future research.

Future research may use more extensive research methods to explore language-learning strategies and the context of Saudi learners. For example, longitudinal research is suggested for exploring the academic and social adjustment of international students in their ESL contexts. This is because adjustment to the new environment changes over time, and with exposure to the language students will become more familiar with and adapt to the cultural norms of the language. With time, conscious strategies are used and may become subconscious (Jang & Jiménez, 2011). The technology documented in this study can influence future research and may explore how these digital tools assist Saudi students in their adaptation journey in their ESL context. In addition, cultural tradition influences the use of these strategies for male and female Saudi students; how these differ in their application of the technology-mediated language-learning tools is important (Norton & Williams, 2012). Of interest may also be the idea of perfect English accent as mentioned by interviewee #5 as this is a complex issue in the context of a multicultural country with significant number of international students.

8.5 Conclusion

This study explored Saudi language learners and their social interactions in the ESL context at an Australian university. The study used the SCT framework to interpret the experiences of these learners and the meanings they make from the interaction in this context. It used a mixed method to collect data in which a SILL questionnaire was administered to 65 Saudi students who were attending a language-teaching institution in Australia. The results have shown that Saudi students are using language-learning strategies in the following order: metacognitive, social, compensation, cognitive, affective and memory. The second phase of the study included conducting qualitative interviews with the 18 Saudi students of the same institution. The interviews have revealed more results and expanded the questionnaire's findings. The most significant results indicated a lack of opportunity to practise social interaction in this social context. The students were relying on learning with other students in their class to improve their language skills. This collaborative relationship supported their cultural understanding and learning about other cultures. The interviewees described a number of strategies that they used in this ESL context to develop their language skills. One of these was the use of technology-mediated language-learning tools, which were used to address their oral and writing skills. The findings of this study demonstrate how the social context of language learning is essential, and provide a picture of the opportunities and challenges that exist for students in an ESL class.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Approval of Ethics

RMIT UNIVERSITY

Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN)
Sub-committee of the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee   (HREC)

<u>**Notice of Approval**</u>

Date: **01 September 2014**

Project number: **CHEAN B 0000018748-06/14**

Project title: **Social Language Strategies of Saudi Students in an ESL   Context.**

Risk classification: **Low Risk**

Investigator: **A/Professor Berencie Nyland and Ahmed Ghazzai Alharbi**

Approved: **From: 01 September 2014   To: 31 July 2016**

I am pleased to advise that your application has been granted ethics approval by the Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network as a sub-committee of the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

Terms of approval:

1. **Responsibilities of investigator**

   It is the responsibility of the above investigator/s to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by the CHEAN. Approval is only valid whilst the investigator/s holds a position at RMIT   University.

2. **Amendments**

   Approval must be sought from the CHEAN to amend any aspect of a project including approved documents. To apply for an amendment please use the 'Request for Amendment Form' that is available on the RMIT website.

   Amendments must not be implemented   without first gaining approval from CHEAN.

3. **Adverse events**

   You should notify HREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the   project.

4. **Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF)**

   The PICF and any other material used to recruit and inform participants of the project must include the RMIT university logo. The PICF must contain a complaints clause including the project number.

5. **Annual reports**

   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. This form can be located online on the human research ethics web page on the RMIT   website.

6. **Final report**

   A final report must be provided at the conclusion of the project. CHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of   completion.

7. **Monitoring**

Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by HREC at any time.

8. **Retention and storage of data**

   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

In any future correspondence   please quote the project number and project title.

On behalf of the DSC College Human Ethics Advisory Network I wish you well in your research.

Suzana Kovacevic

Research and Ethics Officer

College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University

Ph: 03 9925 2974

Email: suzana.kovacevic@rmit.edu.au
Website: www.rmit.edu.au/dsc

Appendix B: Letter to Invitation

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دعوة للمشاركة في بحث

أخي الطالب..

أدعوك للمشاركة في بحث الدكتوراه المعنون له:

الاستراتيجيات اللغوية الاجتماعية التي يمارسها الطلاب السعوديون في بيئة

تعتبر اللغة الإنجليزية فيها لغتهم الثانية.

الغرض من البحث:

إن الهدف من هذا البحث هو التعرف على الاستراتيجيات اللغوية الإجتماعية التي يمارسها الطلاب السعوديون عندما يدرسون اللغة الانجليزية في بيئة تعتبر اللغة الإنجليزية فيها لغتهم الثانية، استراليا على سبيل المثال. إن المعرفة بهذه الاستراتيجيات يساعد على فهم بعض المعضلات التي يواجهها الطلاب السعوديون عندما يدرسون في مثل تلك البيئات. لذلك، فإن المعرفة بهذه الاستراتيجيات تساعدهم على تطوير لغتهم الانجليزية بشكل عام وعلى التواصل مع الغير للتحاور وابداء آرائهم بشكل خاص.

المطلوب منك:

يتطلب البحث منك أخي الكريم المشاركة في تعبئة استبيان لمعرفة تلك الاستراتيجيات التي تمارسها في دراستك للغة. ومن ثم، سوف يتم إجراء مقابلة مع الباحث للسؤال عن تلك الاستراتيجيات. المقابلة ستكون لمرة واحدة ويمكن أن تقسم المقابلة إلى عدة لقاءات. وسوف أكون متواجد في مبنى اللغة لجامعة RMIT خلال الأوقات والمكان الموضحة في الجدول التالي:

المكان	الأوقات	الأيام
ROOM 13 الدور العاشر	12.35 – 10.35	Thursday & Friday
ROOM 15 الدور العاشر	2.35 – 12.35	Thursday & Friday

علما أن المقابلة تتم حسب الوقت والمكان المناسبين لظرفك وسعة وقتك.

ماذا ستستفيد:

تعتمد هذه الدراسة على النظرية الثقافية الإجتماعية لدراسة كيف يمارس الطلاب السعوديون الاستراتيجيات الإجتماعية أثناء دراستهم للغة الإنجليزية في استراليا. لذلك فإن مشاركتك ستفيدك كثيراً في استعراض تجربتك لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية في استراليا. كما أنها ستثري البحث في هذا المجال وخصوصاً في ما يتعلق بالطلاب السعوديين الدارسين للغة الانجليزية في استراليا.

عند الموافقة:

سوف أقوم بشرح كامل عن البحث وأهدافه، وما هو مطلوب من مشاركتكم، كما ان جميع المعلومات الشخصية ستكون سرية وخاضعة لأنظمة البحث وأخلاقياته في الجامعة. يمكنك الإنسحاب من البحث في أي وقت تشاء دون مبررات.

للتواصل: الباحث: أحمد غزاي الحربي Email: s3443243@student.rmit.edu.au

</div>

Appendix C: Research Information Sheet

The Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF)

Project Title: The Social Language Strategies of Saudi Students in an ESL Context.

Researcher: Ahmed Ghazzai Alharbi. PhD Candidate, School of Education, RMIT

University, Email: s3443243@student.rmit.edu.au.

Supervisors:

Associate Professor: Berenice Nyland,

Contact details: RMIT University, School of education, Bundoora West Campus,

Building: 220 Level: 4 Room: 17, Tel: +(61 3) 9925 7805, Email:

berenice.nyland@rmit.edu.au,

Dr. Josephine Ng,

Contact details: RMIT University, School of Education, Bundoora West Campus,

Building 220 Level 3 Room: 16, Tel: + (61 3) 9925 7861, Email:

josephine.ng@rmit.edu.au.

Dear student,

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by a student of

RMIT University. Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand

its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the

project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?

The participants involved in this research are Saudi students who are studying English in the Australian context. The research is being conducted to identify the social language strategies they use while studying in Australia. The researcher is specialised in teaching English language in Saudi Arabia. The research is supervised throughout all its stages by Associate Professor: Berenice Nyland and Dr. Josephine Ng.

Why have you been approached?

As international students studying English in Australia, Saudi students need to communicate with their friends, teachers and neighbours. They need a number of language learning strategies to make their communication meaningful. Therefore, this research will focus on what social language strategies that Saudi students use while they learn English in Australia. This aims to enhance their academic and social experience of learning in Australia. It will approach Saudi participants who are studying at RMIT English Worldwide centre (EAP). The students will be contacted by the administration of the EAP and it will make the initial contact with them.

What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?

The research will investigate the social language strategies of the Saudi students who are studying English in Australia. These strategies are important for language learners because they involve interactions between learners and native language speakers. Research has shown that language learning strategies have a great potential to enhance language learning and performance among students.

The study will address the following questions:

1. What are the language learning strategies that Saudi students use in an ESL context?

2. What are the most common used language learning strategies used by the Saudi students in an ESL context?

3. What is the role of the use of social language strategies in by Saudi students in an ESL context?

4. What is the importance of social language strategies in the ESL context?

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to fill in a questionnaire that aims to measure your use of the language learning strategies in general. Filling out this questionnaire normally takes about 20 minutes. The questionnaire stage will be used to see what kind of social language strategies used by the Saudi students studying in Australia. Then, you will be asked to participate in a one-to-one in-depth interview that will deeply elaborate topics and ideas raised from the questionnaire answers. The interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed. The interview will take around 40 minutes and it will be located according to the time and place that you will decide and prefer. Here are some questions that will be asked in the interview:

– What have you found most difficult in your learning of English language in Australia?

– What kind of barriers do you think are affecting your communication in the class?

– What kind of factors that enhance your communication with others inside the class?

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

The participation in this research includes activities that are free of risks to the participant: filling out a questionnaire and interviewing. However the participant is welcome to can contact the supervisors, contact details provided.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

There are no direct benefits of participation in this research. The research generally aims to enhance the academic and social experience of studying in Australia.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Your personal information will be anonymous during all the stages of the research. The information gathered from your participation will be confidential. Data collected from the questionnaire and interviews will be saved and locked in a cabinet on the RMIT campus (Bundoora West). The digital records will be saved on a personal computer on the RMIT campus, with a password. The results of the research may be published in academic journals and presented in conferences.

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from participation at any time,

- The right to request that any recording cease,

- The right to have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant,

- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any question, you can contact my supervisors on the following con acts: Associate Professor Berenice Nyland & Dr. Josephine Ng and their consent information are provided above.

Appendix D: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM:

1. I have had the project explained to me and I have read the information sheet,

2. I agree to participate in the research project as described,

3. I agree:

o To be contacted by the EAP administration and the researcher for the purpose of this research,

o To complete a questionnaire and to be interviewed,

o That my voice will be audio recorded and transcribed.

4. I acknowledge that:

   a. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.

   b. The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.

   c. The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.

   d. The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to the supervisors. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant _____ Date: _____

(Signature)

Appendix E: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) (Arabic Version)

استبيان حول تعلم اللغة الانجليزية

أخي الطالب/ أختي الطالبة:

يهدف هذا الاستبيان الى معرفة الاستراتيجيات التي تستخدمها لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية، كل ما عليك هو قراءة العبارة التالية ووضع دائرة على العبارة التي تتطابق مع حالتك حيث أن:

- لا تنطبق، نادراً جداً ما تنطبق على حالتي،

- احياناً، تنطبق على حالتي (تقريباً أقل من 50%)،

- الى حد ما تنطبق على حالتي تقريباً 50%)،

- غالباً، تنطبق على حالتي (أكثر من 50%)

- دائماً تنطبق على حالتي.

عليك ان تتذكر أنه لا يوجد هناك اجابة تعتبر صحيحة او خاطئة بين هذه العبارات بل إن اجاباتك هي انعكاس لتجربتك الشخصية في تعلم اللغة الانجليزية يستغرق اكمال الاستبيان من 10 الى 15 دقيقة.,

معلومات شخصية

- العمر:

- الجنس: ذكر   أنثى

- تخصصك الأكاديمي:

- مدة دراستك للغة الانجليزية في استراليا:

* أقل من ثلاثة أشهر

* أقل من ستة أشهر

* 12 شهر فأقل

* أكثر من سنة

أخرى:

- مدى رضاك الشخصي عن تجربتك لدراسة اللغة الانجليزية في استراليا:

* راض تماماً،

* راض إلى حد ما،

* غير راض الى حد ما،

* غير راض تماماً

دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق أو نادرا	الاستراتيجيات	ت
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	احياناً	لا تنطبق	أفكر في العلاقات بين ما أعرفه أصلا والأمور الجديدة التي أتعلمها في الانجليزية	1
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	استعمل الكلمات الانجليزية الجديدة في جملة كي اتذكرها	2
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	احياناً	لا تنطبق	اربط ما بين صوت الكلمة الانجليزية الجديدة مع صورة أو رسمة للكلمة لتساعدني على تذكرها	3
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	احياناً	لا تنطبق	اتذكر الكلمة الانجليزية الجديدة من خلال صنع صورة ذهنية لموقف قد تستخدم فيه الكلمة	4
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	احياناً	لا تنطبق	استخدم الموقع الموسيقي لتذكر الكلمات الانجليزية الجديدة	5
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	احياناً	لا تنطبق	استخدم بطاقات لكتابة المفردات الجديدة كي اتذكر الكلمات الانجليزية الجديدة	6
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	أقول بتمثل الكلمات الانجليزية بشكل حركي	7
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	أراجع دروس اللغة الانجليزية بكثرة	8
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	اتذكر الكلمات أو العبارات الانجليزية الجديدة عن طريق تذكر موقعها في الصفحة أو على السبورة أو على اللافتات في الشارع	9
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	أقوم بترديد أو كتابة الكلمات الانجليزية عدة مرات	10
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	أحاول التحدث مثل الناطقين باللغة الانجليزية	11
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	اتمرن على نطق أصوات اللغة الانجليزية	12
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	استخدم الكلمات الانجليزية التي أعرفها بطرق مختلفة	13

دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق أو نادرا		
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	احياناً	لا تنطبق	اشاهد البرامج التلفزيونية وأذهب لمشاهدة السينمائية الناطقة بالانجليزية	14
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	احيانا	لا تنطبق	**أقرأ الكتب الانجليزية من أجل التسلية والترفيه**	15
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	احيانا	لا تنطبق	أقرأ الكتب الانجليزية من أجل التسلية والترفيه	16
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	احيانا	لا تنطبق	استخدم اللغة الانجليزية في تدوية الملاحظات والرسائل والمراسلات والتقارير	17
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	احيانا	لا تنطبق	عند قراءتي للنص باللغة الانجليزية أقرأه للمرة الاولى بسرعة والثانية بتمهل وعناية	18
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	احيانا	لا تنطبق	أبحث عن كلمات في اللغة العربية مماثلة لتلك الكلمات الجديدة التي تعلمتها في اللغة الانجليزية	19
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	أحاول البحث عن أنماط (قواعد) في اللغة الانجليزية	20
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	أجد معنى الكلمة الانجليزية عن طريق تقسيمها الى مقاطع يسهل على فهمها.	21
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	احاول تجنب الترجمة الحرفية	22
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	أقوم بإعداد ملخصات للمعلومات التي اسمعها أو أقرأها باللغة الانجليزية	23
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	احاول فهم الكلمات الانجليزية التي لا أعرفها عن طريق تخمين معانيها	24
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	عندما لا أجد الكلمات المناسبة اثناء التحدث باللغة الانجليزية استعيض عنها بالإشارة	25
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	أقوم باستخدام كلمات جديدة تعبر عن المعنى المراد ان كنت لا أعرف الكلمات الصحيحة لذلك في اللغة الانجليزية	26

دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق أو نادرا	الاستراتيجيات	ت
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	احياناً	لا تنطبق	أقوم بالقراءة باللغة الانجليزية دون البحث عن معاني جميع الكلمات الجديدة	27
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	أثناء التحدث باللغة الانجليزية أحاول التنبؤ بما سيتحدث به الطرف الآخر	28
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	احياناً	لا تنطبق	إذا لم استطيع تذكر كلمة انجليزية ما، أحاول استخدام كلمة أو عبارة قريبة لها في المعنى	29
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	احياناً	لا تنطبق	أحاول قدر الامكان ايجاد عدة طرق لاستخدام لغتي الانجليزية	30
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	احياناً	لا تنطبق	احاول ادراك اخطائي في اللغة الانجليزية كي اتداركها واحسن من مستواي	31
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	احياناً	لا تنطبق	اصغي بانتباه لمن يتحدث باللغة الانجليزية	32
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	احاول ان اجد ما يجعلني متعلماً أفضل للغة الانجليزية	33
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	أعد برنامجي الدراسي بحيث يتوفر لدي الوقت اللازم لدراسة اللغة الانجليزية	34
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	ابحث عن أشخاص يمكنني التحدث اليهم باللغة الانجليزية	35
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	ابحث عن فرص للقراءة باللغة الانجليزية قدر الامكان	36
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	لدي أهداف واضحة لتحسين مهاراتي في اللغة الانجليزية	37
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	أفكر بالتقدم الذي أحرزه في تعلم اللغة الانجليزية	38
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	احاول تهدئة نفسي كلما شعرت بالخوف من استخدام اللغة الانجليزية	39

دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق أو نادرا		
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	اشجع نفسي على التحدث بالانجليزية حتى لو كنت خائفاً من أن اخطئ	40
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	اكافئ نفسي كلما اصبحت أفضل في اللغة الانجليزية	41
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	ادرك إن أصابني التوتر خلال دراستي أو استخدامي للغة الانجليزية	42
دائماً	غالباً	إلى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	ادون مشاعري في مفكرة خاصة بتعلم اللغة الانجليزية	43
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	اتحدث الى شخص آخر عن شعوري عندما اتعلم اللغة الانجليزية	44
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	اذا لم أفهم بعض ما يقال باللغة الانجليزية أطلب من المتحدث أن يبطئ في الحديث أن يعيد ثانية	45
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	اطلب من الناطقين باللغة الانجليزية تصحيحي عندما اتحدث	46
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	امارس اللغة الانجليزية مع طلاب اخرين	47
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	اطلب المساعدة من الناطقين باللغة الانجليزية	48
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	طرح اسئلة باللغة الانجليزية	49
دائماً	غالباً	الى حد ما	أحياناً	لا تنطبق	احاول أن ا تعلم عن ثقافة الناطقين باللغة الانجليزية	50

قد تثير اجابتك على هذا الاستبيان الرغبة في اجراء مقابلة مع الباحث للتعرف على العوامل التي تؤثر على استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة الانجليزية لديك ان كنت ترغب في اجراء المقابلة يتوجب عليك الموافقة وتزيد الباحث بالايميل الشخصي وسيتم التواصل معكم فيما بعد

* موافق

* الايميل الشخصي

Appendix F: Interview Protocols

Interview Questions Guide

The interview will start with some background information:

Name:

Age:

English learning background:

Duration of living in Australia:

English level:

Academic major:

Introductory questions:

How do you see your learning of English in Australia?

What do you think of Australia and Australians before coming?

- What have you found most difficult in your learning of English language in Australia?

- Have you studied English in Saudi Arabia? If yes, what are the different learning strategies that you used in Australia and why?

The First Question: What are the language social strategies you use inside the EAP?

Prompt questions:

- As the students at the EAP are from different cultural backgrounds, how do you see working and cooperating with them inside/ outside the class? Do you think this cooperation improve or hinder your language learning?

- What kind of factors that enhance your communication with others inside the class?

- Are there any barriers that affect your communication with other classmates? What are they?

(How you faced them and …)

- How about teachers, how do you perceive their communication at the EAP?

- Do you see the EAP teaching methods influencing your learning of English in Australia? Why or Why not?

The Second Question: What are the social language strategies you use outside the EAP?

Prompt questions:

- How do you see your social relationships outside the class? (Friends/neighbours?)

- What about your relationships with Australian native speakers? Do you have many of them or not? Why?

- Do you think living and studying English in Australia provided you with resources enabling you to use difference learning strategies than Saudi Arabia?

- In Australia, what are the most used learning strategies you rely on in order to learn English?

- What is the main motivator for you to learn English in Australia?

- What are the best ways to develop your communication with others in order to improve your overall English skills?

- Do you use the new technological spaces for learning English e.g. mobile, Ipad. Chatting apps.)? How can you evaluate their use in language learning?

- In general, what do you think the best way/s to enhance and improve your English learning in Australia? (e.g. planning, setting goals, …).

Appendix G: List of the Study Contributions

Parts of this study are accepted in the following conference personations:

Alharbi, Ahmed. (2017). A study of international students use of digital technology to assist in second language learning. *International Conference on Education and E- Learning (ICEEL), Brisbane, Australia, May 4-5, 2017*. (This paper has been accepted and it is in the proceedings of the conference).

A study of international students use of digital technology to assist in second language learning

Abstract— This study was designed to explore the sociocultural experiences of Saudi international students studying English as a second language in an Australian tertiary institution. The research adopted a mixed method approach and from the qualitative data emerged the growing importance of the digital technology for these students as a means for improving language learning and social inclusion. Eighteen students volunteered for interviews and described the use of technology mediated resources to develop their language learning. The following are examples of technology supported inside and outside the classroom: emails, applications on mobile phones, YouTube, online tutoring and the university software management system. Findings suggested these students had positive attitudes toward online interactions and felt they enhanced learning and assisted in developing meaningful intercultural communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

Looking at the mobility trends of international students worldwide, the majority are studying in English native speaking countries (e.g., Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States). For the international students, studying English in countries, like Australia, that have well-developed educational facilities and English language is the dominant language there is an advantage compared to students who learn English in non-English speaking countries [1]. English language proficiency in this globalised world has become essential and an important commodity [2].

Students intending to study in English speaking countries, for whom English is not the first language, are required to meet specific English language criteria to be able to enroll in education institutions in the host country [3]. Studies have shown that while

English language abilities can influence the international student experience (e.g. [4]), there are

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also cultural and social practices that have been part of the background experience for these students and these aspects of experience could make their adaption to the new environment easier, or inhibit them from having a smooth transitional experience [5]. On the other hand, the educational and learning environment of the university could contribute to these challenges, where for example, the teaching styles and the workload are overwhelming for international students and may impact on social adjustment to the new environment [6], [7]. This research has found that digital technology is important for the students' experiences in their second language learning.

II.   The Research

-   *Technology and second language learning*

The technological environments [such as Social Network Sites (SNSs), tutoring websites, smartphone applications] are increasingly becoming an integral part of the education settings in our current time [8]. In this sense, they are becoming part of the social context of the learners and in some learning situations, they can be used as active learning strategies by students [9], [10].

The history of the use of technology and language learning pedagogy goes back as far as the 1960s [11]. However, in recent years, language teaching pedagogy is witnessing a state of transition from specifically designed language and teaching sources on the computer to the use of online technologies that are embedded in the daily lives of teachers and learners [12]. The advantages of the use of these technologies are associated with the direct learning of language skills such as building vocabulary, improving speaking skills or writing (e.g. [13]), or indirect skills where they support the language learner's autonomy, agency and motivation in learning language [14], [15]. The positive uses of technology in language learning and teaching in our time has led Vandergriff [16] to argue "the technology use for language learning and teaching is now promising than ever because the social web with its power to connect people, along with the social turn in SLA (Second Language Acquisition), have created favorable conditions for leveraging the power of new media (p. 19)".

Technology has made it easier than ever before to find and access instructional language materials of different types that can be used to develop specific skills [17]. However,   the rapid development of handheld technology and the increasing availability of the mobile internet have created new spaces, and greater access and possibilities for communication and collaboration for education purposes [18]. The strength of these SNSs as learning environments is that cultural learning is included in

these interactions [19]. When users who are English language learners engage in dialogue in these environments, they are exposed to authentic texts of the English language.

The use of the SNSs has been positively associated with academic and social experiences of international students in their new trajectories. In these environments, the learners can enjoy face to face contacts and build friendships [20]. SNSs friendships is mostly related to their family members and their close friends in their home countries [21]. Having these virtual bonds with their home-based friends and family members facilitates the formation of new connections in their local environments (friends from their cultural background, or co-cultural and the new English language environment). In

an empirical study [22]1 investigated how the interaction on the SNSs with English native speakers can shape the adjustment experience of international students. It was found that the longer the international students stay online with the local English speaker the better social experience they will have. This is an indication of the intercultural knowledge that arises from collaborative dialogue on SNSs [19].

Theoretical framework

The social turn in second language (L2) research was introduced by an influential paper by Firth and Wagner in 1997. These scholars criticised the approaches that had dominated the exploration of the second language research as they identified the social practices that language learners engage with in their daily lives. The sociocultural theory (SCT), which originated from the writings of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky, provided an alternative in considering language use in real world situations as fundamental to learning language [23]. From this view, language was not considered an input in itself, but a source for participation, where learners could use symbolic mediation to engage in different kinds of activities in daily lives. This theory has language as its central focus and it views language as tool of thought [24].

The main argument of this theory is that human mental activities are mediated through social mediation with individuals and structured environments. The foundational basis of this theory is that the higher psychological developments of the human (such as language) are mediated by cultural constructed artefacts or mediational means [25]. Language is the most influential and pervasive artefact that enables individuals to interact with their external world [26]. The L2 research as development among the L2 learners is not just about the acquisition of second language, but on how this acquisition mediates the development of their communication abilities, their conceptual thinking, perceiving and representing things in their external world [27]. The process of internalisation is not just the mastery of the language structures, but how to gain the capacity to manipulate the L2 artefacts in order to achieve the user's communicative purposes (appropriation). L2 learning is open to semiotic resources that can be used by learners to regulate their mental and communicative activities. For instance, the learners may opt to diverge from the idealised native speaker norm of language and manipulate their own form in order to meet their communicative and interpersonal needs [27].

Another important principle of this theory is that mediation can take the form of joint activities with other humans. The collaborative dialogues and activities between contextual experts and novices create the metaphorical space of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) where the development of higher psychological functioning is

located [26]. This social interaction results in the cognitive development of learners, where these functions are internalised and then reappear on the social plane (intrapersonal or interpersonal). For the L2 learners, the presence of an expert (either a teacher, or a peer) allows them to experiment with language by repeating, correcting, guessing and restoring knowledge. In expert-to-novice joint activities, the L2 learners can practice their language by gaining more control over it. According to Lantolf [28] "it is in the ZPD that individuals are able to perform at higher levels of ability than they

[1] Lin

can alone, and in so doing eventually internalize the mediation provided by their conspecifics, which results in enhanced development" (p. 32). Researchers [29]2 found that the development of the ZPD may change with the level of different types of mediation (i.e. more implicit or explicit) and this may influence the control of language learned.

This draws the attention of some language researchers to the influence of language socialisation inside and outside the classroom and how this could assist learners' cognitive, academic and social development [30].

Pilot interview

An interview was conducted with a Saudi participant who was studying at the EAP (The English for Academic Purposes Language Centre), where students were studying English as a second language. The aim of this pilot interview was to refine the use of mixed methods and to test the interview questions and get feedback from the participant that could help in refining the main interview questions [31]. This interview also gave the researcher an opportunity to present himself to the learner in the chosen setting and explain the aims and desired objectives of the research [32]. The interviewee was a Saudi student who had studied English in Australia for one year and was at an advanced level. The participant stated that he used some technology mediated resources to develop his language skills. This emerged as a major finding from the pilot interview and the researcher looked into how these technologies contributed into the social experiences of other Saudi students in the ESL context.

Participants

The researcher has chosen purposive sampling for selecting the participants of this study. This sampling technique is to look for participants with specific characteristics [33]. It enabled the researcher to obtain rich data and insights on the phenomenon of this group of students and their impression of events in the Australian study context [34]. The study succeeded in recruiting 18 students (10 males and 8 females) Saudi students who took part in the semi-structured interviews. In this research, interview data can assist the researcher in eliciting meanings and perspectives toward the individuals' experiences and how these experiences can be categorized according to their importance or impact [33]. The interviews were conducted in Arabic the students mother language and then translated from Arabic into English and the main then the main themes were analysed.

[2] Aljaafreh & Lantolf

III. Results

From the interviews of participants in this study, interviewees highlighted the role of social media networks and mobile learning in providing opportunities for interactions for language learning. Access to such media assisted in compensating for the need to interact with native speakers. Interviewee #13 commented on the presence of websites designed for tutoring purposes.

> *The presence of the websites that provide online tutoring in English is a proof of the difficulty of having interaction and direct contact with native speakers in Australia. If there were enough chances to meet the native speakers, I think students would not use these websites frequently.*

YouTube was a main source of language learning for the Saudi students in this study. The use of YouTube was valuable in language learning as it provided unlimited resources of authentic texts addressing cultural and social aspects of language [35]. The participants agreed that there were plentiful videos they could utilise:

Interviewee #5 said:

> *….. I watch many videos on YouTube.*

Another participant added,

> *There are thousands but even millions of videos on YouTube.*

Although interviewee #17 was familiar with using YouTube for learning English in Saudi Arabia, she also found it a vital and rich source of information for her learning.

> *Now at the EAP, I am not using to listen the TEDs on YouTube as an independent resource for language learning. I tried it and I liked it especially in my free time. I also like the idea of listening to improve my language, even though I used to use the YouTube in Saudi Arabia to find look for anything I do not know about English, so it is not new, the new thing is TEDs. It is beneficial especially there is a script that you can read and check what hear is correct.*

317

Another participant stated he liked to use YouTube for improving his writing, which was the area he experienced most difficulty. Sometimes, the motivation for using YouTube had a specific purpose, as he said:

> *Since the start of the recent attack against Saudi Arabia, some people advised me to speak in English and show the world who we are and what our culture is since we represent the Saudi people. Yes, there are students who learn language through writing comments on YouTube videos as people continue replying to each other. Saudi students usually learn by writing these comments. When they start commenting during an argument or a discussion, other people start checking my language and spelling mistakes, making fun of them, saying "go and correct your mistakes first before commenting* (interviewee #1).

Interviewee #10, had a different perspective towards using mobile language learning techniques. He liked to listen to broadcasts downloaded on his phone. He played an example broadcast during the interview and he demonstrated the clarity and ease with which he could understand the speech.

> It is good in improving my listening and it is very clear. The speakers use academic words (the broadcast is played during the interview), and it lasts for 30 of 40 minutes. Is it free? Yes, it is free and there are around 50 or 60 broadcasts like these and they are good for language learning. However, some programs such as, Prospect (English Online Tutoring) are good for you at the early stages of your learning. Because when I joined Prospect at the being and I had a long contract with them, I find out that it is the same questions they always ask. When call the tutor, he will ask you: where are you from? You will answer I am from Saudi Arabia and I am currently living in Australia. They would say that your language is good and they will give you a compliment. So, from my opinion, you can't rely on the relationship as a friend and talk about different topics, you can't.

WhatsApp messenger was one of the technological domains used by Saudi participants in this study. Reference [363] found that on the individual level WhatsApp is a valuable source for his learners as it helped them to share knowledge, exchange experiences and ideas, discuss various academic and social issues and seek help and support during learning activities. Some of the general features of this messenger are: instant messaging that facilitates online collaboration and cooperation between students whether they are in class or outside, it is free and easy to use, sharing learning material can be done conveniently through comments, texting and messaging.

In the current study, interviewee #9 emphasised the role of the WhatsApp groups created by the teachers, so they could interact with their friends,

> They discuss some parts of course materials and what we covered in the class and even the Saudi students in the group interact in English. It is a good way to interact in English with our friends.

Also, the same interviewee went on,

> The best thing in using WhatsApp groups with my friends is to check the spelling of my writing and I am using the correct word.

It has been found that mobile instant messaging, such as WhatsApp, can assist in developing the writing skills of ESL students [37]. It is an educational tool that has a great potential for language learners for interaction and to reflect on their writing. However, a number of respondents mentioned there was a lack of benefit in using the WhatsApp application in their classroom experience as not all students took the advantage of chatting in English.

> *We had a group for our class and I entered it but it didn't benefit me a lot because all students are Chinese and they chat in Chinese language. We notified them many times speak in English but they didn't respond. But, when I was at*

[3] Barhoumi

another college, the teacher created a group for the class, and all students were speaking in English regardless of their nationalities whether Saudi or Chinese (interviewee #15).

IV. Discussion

The digital technologies contributed to the social experiences of Saudi students in their ESL context. The participants in this study stated that they used some of the technology mediated resources to develop their language skills. They have shown their willingness to use the technological tools at their disposal to socialise within their ESL context. The use of technology is applied and supported by the lecturers of these learners inside and outside the classrooms. This confirms findings of other studies looked at Saudi students in their ESL contexts [38], [39]. Research has found that the use of technology mediated tools as strategies for socialising among the international students can help shape the experiences of the international students in ESL contexts (e.g. [20], [22]). In the current study, findings have shown that the Saudi students are inclined to use these technological tools in their language learning. They aim to gain help with self- regulation and social adjustment in their ESL context. A main aim of applying technological tools in this context is to combine the information from the formal classroom with other information from the YouTube videos to develop their English language skills. The main themes emerging from this study are divided into the following categories:

- Technology environments as a social strategy.

- Technology environments and language skills development.

- Technology environments and intercultural communication.

Technology environments as a social strategy

The development of learner autonomy is a key aspect in an online environment, e.g. SNSs, in second language learning [14], [15]. Learner autonomy is postulated by three principles: first *the learner empowerment* and this requires "learners to assume responsibility for their own learning and giving them control of the learning process" (p. 22). This means that the learners have control of their learning and building on what they already know about the language they are learning. In the current study, the Saudi learners were using their previous experiences in English learning to enable them to improve their language skills. The students reflected on their experiences of English

language in their EFL Saudi context and understood their need for essential skills, such as writing. From this perspective, it empowered them to source the best strategies to develop and extend their learning such as SNSs.

The second principle is linked with *the learners' reflection* which is to help learners think of their learning at a macro level and micro level [40]. From their interviews in this study, these learners were able to discuss the levels of their use of the SNSs in this ESL context. At the macro level, the feedback received from their online tutors was found by one of the interviewees to be effective for him. He emphasised that this aspect was not found, or available, in the formal classroom. In terms of the micro level, the

learners were able to evaluate and review their experiences through the use of SNSs and understand what worked for them. According to some of the participants the technological tools were beneficial and instrumental for them to further develop their language skills and at the same time increase their interaction with native English speakers. However, for one participant, the use of SNSs assisted him only at the preparatory level.

The third principle is the *appropriate target language use.* This principle requires a facilitator, such as a teacher or native speaker to ensure that the learners are able to use the acquired knowledge for communicative purposes. The current study found that constant use of Emails to communicate with their teachers and the collaborative online tutoring discussions with native speakers helped these students to extend their learning and acquire knowledge. These principles align with the social-cultural perspectives of language learning, where the learners exercise some form of responsibility in their learning and is a sign of their psychological development resulteing from the interactive mediated experiences through SNSs [14], [40].

Technology environments and language skills development

The potential of learning and teaching a foreign or second language in the online environments is well established by many researchers [8]. There are rich resources that learners can use to enhance their language skills. In an age of information these online tools have challenged the traditional perspectives of language learning and teaching [41]. Instead of the rule-governed and static methods of language teaching more dynamic, fluid and social practices can be interwoven into the individuals' daily practices [42]. They allow teachers to combine formal classroom materials with informal knowledge in order to develop the language skills of the learners. For learners, the opportunities for language learning are various and they can be tailored by teachers to meet specific needs of individual students. For example, they provide learners with opportunities to practice their oral skills through live videos (e.g. Skype), where they can practice their English, engage in live conversations with native speakers and can interact with them [43]. The advantage of these interactions is that they support the learners' confidence in their language skills [8]. The participants in this study stressed their use of online environments to develop their oral skills.

In addition, the use of the online environment can be utilised to improve the writing skills of ESL learners [35], [13], [44]. Writing skills present significant challenges for ESL international learners [7], [45] and there are online environments specifically designed to support written language learning. For example, YouTube offers language learners an opportunity to practice their writing by replying to posted videos and commenting on the contents. The use of these SNSs can develop pragmatic skills among ESL learners [42]. For example, to engage in conversation with native   speakers

of English they need greeting words to open the conversation. Researcher [46]4 found that Japanese learners developed their pragmatic knowledge after studying outside Japan and using online blogs, they improved their pragmatic knowledge of the English language. There were noted improvements in their use of address terms, gendered particles in a sentence and shifts between the regional dialects. Similarly, this study found the use of Email between the Saudi students and their lecturers was important.

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4 Ishihara &Takamiya

The practice of emailing entails pragmatic usage required in writing a message through correspondence, such as greetings, salutations and closing valediction.

On the other hand, the use of the mobile in language learning was highlighted as an important tool for language learning in this study. There are studies done with Saudi students that have shown the Saudi students have positive attitudes toward smartphones and they are confident in using their applications in language learning [36], [47], [48]. The mobile assisted language learning applications used in this study were encouraged as are part of the chat rooms initiated by the teachers and left for the students to communicate as part of their informal learning. Reviewing the perceptions of learners on the affordances of the mobile in their learning, it is asserted that, "students found mobile applications fast, easy to use, portable and accessible anywhere and anytime. Using applications reportedly helped students to more routinely engage with their language by fitting it in around their life worlds" (p. 241) [49].

In this, there are not obligations or structured materials for the students to follow and achieve. Although the SNSs have some degree of informality and openness in their interactions, there is a need to engage in task-based learning, assessments, deadlines and tutoring to have some control over the process of learning [41]. However, the benefits of the use of mobile devices is shown by [50], who found among university students in Hong Kong that mobile technology helped these students to regulate their learning and improve their cultural skills. In addition, the use of mobile applications provides access to learning resources that helps to acquire general and subject knowledge in English language [50]. In the current study it was affirmed that the use of the IPad, online dictionaries, university software management system and mobile applications were highlighted by the Saudi learners. This study found that these tools were instrumental for their language learning and compensated for shortfalls in the class, especially in relation to being able to practice English with native users of the language.

The strength of using online tools for language learners is easy and open access to reach authentic language materials and resources and they can learn at a time that is convenient [19], [43]. The online environments provide learners with plenty of opportunity to interact with their peers, language experts e.g. teacher/ tutor and other students who have a higher level of language proficiency. All these strategies are pragmatic and valuable to promote linguistic and cultural knowledge [35]. The findings of this study add to the previous literature that these strengths influenced the Saudi students to use digital technologies to promote their language learning.

Technology environments and intercultural communication.

Language learning entails the learning of some of its cultural meanings as well. In the formal classroom cultural aspects of language are provided to learners through textbooks with inauthentic examples of language [52], [53]. These examples may be simple, straightforward and may be misrepresented by the learners. On the other hand, online interactions help learners to develop their intercultural communication [19]. In this study, the intensive mode of the language learning for the participants helped the learners to be immersed in their learning of English in an ESL context at the language teaching institution. Learners were able to develop cultural understanding and sensitivity toward the English language cultural practices. The presence of a diverse group of students enabled the students to communicate effectively with each other   and

other users through the use of the SNSs and online tutoring websites. These applications enabled them to communicate with native speakers through video conferencing [43]. The advancement of technological advancement in handheld mobile devices has provided increased social interaction through SNSs application. Other advantages such as the development of cultural knowledge has materialised through writing blogs and shared participation [53].

The influencing factors of different cultural backgrounds of the participants can have an impact on the ways they interact and communicated in the online environments [54]. The students in the current study came from collectivistic culture and societies. Consequently, their differing identities and values have resulted in various understanding and formation of friendships across cultures. For example, the Chinese SNSs users tended to be conservative in their approaches to friendships. They preferred not to self-disclose their identities unless the other person is a close intimate friend or a member of their family [54]. As for the Saudi users, they preferred to have double accounts of the SNSs, in which they disclosed their information in the main and formal accounts, while hiding the personal information in the second account [55].

A study [56] found that online discussions assist students to have common interest and point of view toward global cultural issues; the focus group comprised of international students including Saudi students. This facilitated the development of positive attitudes towards other cultures and the respect for cultural difference. There are differences and benefits in the interaction between the students in the classroom and these differences are also present in the smartphone environment. In the SNSs relationships are often built according to the request and acceptance of users. For the Saudi participants who come from a very conservative and collectivistic society it can be hard for them accept adding more friendships on their SNSs platforms. The Saudi students in this study commented on some of the difficulties in terms of understanding cultural norms of peers from other backgrounds inside the formal class. Thus, in the online environment cultural differences are reflected in the differentiated use of technological applications and practices [19]. These factors may further divide the gap between learners from different cultures in terms of establishing effective and close interaction over the mobile applications.

One of the observations of this study was that there were different uses between the Saudi male and female students in their SNSs and smartphone applications that assisted their language development. The male students used various SNSs, e.g. YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter, online digital dictionaries, online tutoring, broadcasts while the female students used more applications such as YouTube and WhatsApp. The variations in the use of online tools can be traced back to a number of cultural traditions and values that shaped the woman's use of technology in the Saudi society. Research indicates that the use of SNSs have increased widespread social interactions among Saudi women within the society and has also built confidence [57]. But, Integral to Saudi society is that the use of online platforms for female Saudi women are guided

and restricted within cultural traditions [58]. These traditions could be one of the reasons of the limited use of the digital resources by the Saudi female students in this study.

The use of SNSs assisted the Saudi women who are learning ESL to form new friendships and to keep in touch with close friends in Saudi Arabia and others friends in the ESL context [39]. Online contact was found to assist them in their social adjustment

to the new environment. However, constraints include posting photos which are restricted to family members or close friends. Also Saudi female participants, especially the married students, the level of comfort using the online discussions in ESL classes was higher compared with face to face discussions [59]. The Saudi female students who are studying in ESL contexts tend to be familiar with male acquaintances from their classes and they have no issues adding these males to their SNSs list of friends [60]. The female participants in this study did not express any kind of dissatisfaction when they talked about their experiences with the other international students. Their awareness is greater in this area and they tend not to disclose their personal information except for significant others family member or close friends [55]. However, in the current study, the female Saudi students did not show any dissatisfaction in terms of having male friends in their WhatsApp chat rooms that were created by their teachers.

Individual differences can be found in digital language learning where characteristics of the user determine the degree of use of the technological environments and applications in their language learning [61, [62], [63]. Individual differences such as learning styles can shape how each learner approaches their learning. Some argued that teachers can attune their instruction to a preferred style of learning for an individual within the group [64]. However, in the online environment, the accommodation of these individual characteristics is not possible, especially with websites.

In summary this study found that all participants used digital technology to assist in their language learning. Usage varied and this depended on issues of current knowledge, individual preferences, learning styles, gender and family circumstance. In general, with the advancement of mobile devices and their potential for catering to different learners there is a shift towards greater student choice and access to a wider range of materials so learners will have more autonomy to accommodate to their own needs by adopting a range of these applications [42].

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Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the language learning strategies that international students, particularly Saudi students, employ in learning of English in an English as a second language (ESL) context such as Australia. Saudi students come from a social and cultural background that differs greatly from the societies they encounter as international students and features of Saudi society, like gender segregation, also makes them a unique group within the international student population. This study used a mixed method approach to explore the language learning strategies of Saudi students in an Australian tertiary institution.

The theoretical approach also consisted of two approaches. Research of language learning strategies originated from cognitive theory and the established research instrument the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning [SILL] was used to compare the Saudi students' use of language learning strategies with previous research in this field. A sociocultural frame was then adopted to examine the learner's social experiences in detail, their choice of language strategies and how the social environment mediates learning through relationships and meaning-making that is developed within the social context with peers and teachers. In this research sociocultural theory has been a means to identify how learning is situated. This means that any learning is situated within a certain social and cultural context, at a particular time and place and involving specific individuals. In this study the two theoretical frameworks provide different insights that have been combined to explain the importance of context for a specific social group. 65 Saudi participants volunteered to complete the SILL questionnaire and 18 Saudi participants (10 males and 8 female) took part in semi-structured interviews.

The SILL results of this study indicated that the most common language learning strategies used by the Saudi ESL students in this context were metacognitive, social,

compensation, cognitive, affective and memory strategies. However, the qualitative results generated from the semi-structured interviews informed the quantitative findings, contextualised them and explained why some strategies are preferred to others. The interviews emphasised the role of the social strategies in this context and how they assisted the learners to adapt to the academic and social life in the Australian context. Implications arising include the role of gender for Saudi students, increasing the presence of digital technology in the student language learning experience and benefits of studying English with a diverse student cohort who have English as a second language.