

SAUDI INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH AMERICAN TEACHERS AT A LARGE WESTERN
RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

by

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ABSTRACT

The number of Saudi Arabian international students studying at U.S. universities has increased dramatically over the last decade. Existing studies show that many Saudi international students are faced with challenges adapting to studying at Western universities. In this study, Saudi international students' perceptions of their relationships with American college instructors will be examined. Qualitative research and interviews were used to explore how various factors influence Saudi international students' engagement with instructors at a large Western research university in the United States. Specifically, the researcher seeks to understand what Saudi international students experience as helpful or not helpful in their relationships with American instructors. It is hoped that exploring the relationships between students and instructors from the perspectives of Saudi students will give these students a voice and lead to better understanding of student and instructor needs. This information is vital in creating supportive resources and services for both Saudi international students and their American instructors.

Keywords: Saudi international students, Saudi education, American education, instructor/student relationship

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CHAPTER I

Background of the Researcher

Mohamed Al- Romahe received his first degree in respiratory care from Loma Linda University in California. After graduating, he worked as a respiratory therapist, and was certified and registered by the National Board of Respiratory Care. He worked from 1991 to 2008 as a healthcare provider in a military hospital, and the Prince Sultan Cardiac Center in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. After this, he came to the United States for graduate study. He continued in the health sciences field and earned a graduate certificate in health services leadership, and a Masters of Science in health management. He then entered the College of Education in preparation to teach health science. He received his master of arts in curriculum and instruction, and is a candidate for a doctoral degree in education. His academic experiences as a Saudi international student led to his interest in the subject of the dissertation.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a rapid increase in Saudi Arabian college students seeking opportunities for higher education in the United States and elsewhere. The United States leads the world in international student enrollments. Universities in the United States are recruiting international students in increasing numbers, but many institutions of higher learning have found themselves ill-equipped to meet the needs of these students. According to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), in May 2017, there were 1,536,290 international students studying at 8,774 U.S. schools (3).

America's popularity is reflected in the fact that the number of international students in the U.S. is nearly double what it was 20 years ago. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2017), in the 2003-2004 school year there were 3,521 Saudi Arabian international students studying in the United States, and by 2015-2016 the number increased to 61,287. This huge growth will be explained in the next section, Political and Historical Background.

International students bring significant funds into the U.S. economy, and during the 2014 academic year, Saudi students brought \$3.2 billion dollars into the United States (Taylor, C., & Albasri, W., 2014, p. 109). In spite of admitting record numbers of Saudi students, U.S. universities have done little to help Saudi students transition from the institutional and pedagogical norms in Saudi schools to the norms in American university classrooms. Redden (2013) states that Saudi Arabian students in the United States “often arrive on campus with low levels of English and math preparation and with cultural values that can complicate their chances for success in an American classroom” (p.1)

Instructors play a critical role in the success of their students, and this relationship is particularly vital for international students. This study seeks to discover and understand the experiences of Saudi students with their American instructors from the perspective of the Saudi students. The findings will contribute to a better understanding of how American instructors in higher education may improve the learning experience for Saudi international students. The study took a place at a large Western research university and utilized a qualitative research design. Data were collected through a series of in-depth interviews for all participants. Analysis after each interview helped reveal patterns in the Saudi student perspectives of their relationships with their American educators. Findings

from this study will assist educators and students to gain the tools to provide a healthy interrelationship between students and instructors and allow Saudi international students to achieve their academic goals.

Political and Historical Background

After 9/11, Saudi Arabia instituted a study abroad program as part of a strategy to distance its public image from associations with global terrorism. President George W. Bush and late King Abdullah met in 2004 and 2005 to discuss ways in which the two countries could develop more excellent relations in the future. They agreed that person-to-person contact was the most beneficial and efficient way to relieve misconceptions about both cultures.

Given its charitable interests in promoting education as a tool for peace within the Arab region, Saudi Arabia established the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), considered to be the most heavily endowed overseas scholarship program ever offered by a nation-state. Since 2005, over 120,000 Saudi university students have been financed by this scholarship to pursue their university studies abroad. (Hilal & Denman, 2013, 24).

Accepting this enormous number of students without preparation on the part of the students or the universities at which they study has led to various challenges for the students and the institutions at which they seek degrees. This study will address one component of the issue.

Although there are challenges that come with the rise of Saudi international student populations in American universities, the KASP provides many benefits and opportunities to both countries. From the perspective of U.S. universities "increasing the numbers of international students has several benefits, including diversification of the

student body, higher prestige for the institution, and increased revenues" (Shapiro et al., 2014, p. 1). It is a great benefit to Saudi Arabia to be able to send students to study in the United States. While Saudi Arabia has a tremendous amount of wealth, its educational institutions do not offer the training needed to prepare students to work in the private sector and sustain the country's economic needs. At Western institutions, there are more choices for undergraduate and graduate programs in science and engineering. There is also a tremendous amount of prestige attached to a degree from Western universities. The primary objectives of the scholarship program are to equip students with knowledge and skills needed to be future Saudi leaders, to promote cultural exchange, to foster intellectual development, and to generate qualified professional Saudi staff in the Saudi workforce.

In the 70's, 80's, and 90's, fewer Saudi students were coming to the United States to study than today, and the political climate was quiet and stable. Saudi students who came after 9/11 entered a different political climate than the students who came before 9/11. Students now are faced with fear, uncertainty, and concerns about immigration status that students previously did not have to endure. In 2017, the United States elected a new administration that has brought with it new policies concerning immigration, Muslims, and international students. These changes impact international students and distract them from concentrating academically. Current Saudi students face unique challenges compared to the older generation.

President Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May of 2017 helped to ease tensions between the two countries and continue the commitment to a peaceful relationship established by George W. Bush and King Abdullah after 9/11. Crown Prince Mohammed

Bin Salman visited the United States on March 20, 2018, to further strengthen relationships between the two countries. However, despite the positive political relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, there is still significant discrimination against Muslims and foreign populations overall. Students and instructors are often biased and are often ignorant of the extent of their bias and the implications for Saudi international students.

Statement of the Problem

According to the Ministry of Education (MOE) (2015) the dropout rate of Saudi international students at the bachelor level in the United States, is 29%. Even students that persist and complete their degrees rarely finish within the recommended time frame. Most students extend at least one year, and some need even more time. The high dropout rate, and the high number of Saudi students who need extra time to reach graduation brought the researcher's attention to the seriousness of the problem. For many international students, finances are a primary reason for dropout rates and failure to graduate on time. However, most Saudi international students are sponsored by generous Saudi government scholarships, and finances are not a factor in their persistence rates. Since the researcher has spent nearly a decade studying and obtaining degrees at institutions in the United States, he believes that the problem lies in barriers in the student-teacher relationship. He believes that improving this relationship will lead to greater academic success for Saudi students studying at universities in the United States.

Based on his experience, the researcher believes that most barriers in the teacher-student relationship have their roots in a lack of understanding of the differences between the Saudi educational system and the U.S. educational system, as well as differences in

language and culture. Many of these differences are outlined in subsequent sections about the Saudi Arabian and U.S. academic systems. Differences in teaching styles, expectations, and educational background, as well as differences in language and culture, have an effect on the relationships between Saudi students and their American instructors. Most Saudi Arabian instructors use teaching methods that are less progressive than American teaching methods. Challenges in the relationships between Saudi students and their American educators can create misunderstanding, anxiety, and false assumptions, and it impacts the overall academic success of the students.

Because of the nature and extent of these differences, teachers have a particular role, going beyond just being "nice." In order to support Saudi international students, instructors must be aware of and address specific differences in cultural and academic expectations. It's important to study the relationship between professors and Saudi students and what Saudi students say would meet the challenges presented by those differences.

If instructors understand these differences, and the educational background of their Saudi students, they will be able to help Saudi international students make the adjustment to the U.S. academic system, and find the resources necessary for them to succeed. Hopefully this research can lead to changes that will improve the student-teacher relationship and improve success rates for Saudi international students.

In a study of sixteen Arab international students, Rabia and Karkouti (2017) found that various kinds of social support, from family, other students, university resources, and faculty were a primary factor in the students' ability to adjust and persist at American universities. Out of six findings, the study found that nine of the students

considered faculty support to be “extremely helpful” to their academic success (p. 352). They mentioned instructors being understanding of their challenges with the language, directing them to student success centers, helping them understand expectations about class participation and discussion, and displaying an overall understanding of their challenges as an Arab international student. The research questions addressed these issues from the perspective of Saudi international students.

Research Questions

1. Within the student-teacher relationship, what do Saudi students perceive as barriers to learning and what facilitates learning?
2. How do Saudi student perceptions of their US teacher’s understanding and acceptance of racial and cultural diversity impact their academic performance?
3. What are the factors that lead Saudi students to choose their teachers?
4. What are Saudi student perceptions of the role of teachers in helping them communicate with other students, and in handling prejudice in the classroom?
5. What is the role of teachers in helping Saudi students utilize campus resources to improve their academic success?

Significance of the Study

Due to the increasing number of Saudi Arabian international students being recruited to study in the United States, it is important that U.S. universities understand Saudi student perspectives regarding their relationships with their American instructors. Multiple studies have established the importance of the student-teacher relationship for all students, from elementary to graduate level. Students who feel they are seen by their instructor as an individual are more likely to succeed in class (Jacobson, 2000; Pianta et

al. 1995). Students who are struggling or at risk in any way are more in need of support from their teachers, and are also less likely to reach out for that support (Anderson et al., 2011; Davis, 2001; Ryan et al. 1994).

Saudi international students coming to the United States to study are rarely prepared for the vast differences in cultural and educational expectations that they encounter, and their instructors have very little specific and accurate knowledge about the cultural and educational background of the Saudi international students that they are teaching. This lack of knowledge and information on the part of both students and teachers leads to misunderstandings and barriers in the student-teacher relationship, and hinders the academic success of the students.

Alnawar (2015) found that because of prevalent stereotypes in the media, due to incidents of terrorism and the war in Iraq, Middle Eastern students are particularly vulnerable in the classroom and “might experience difficulties engaging in their classes or lose motivation due to cultural gaps between themselves and their teachers” (p.3). While Alnawar’s study focused on elementary school students from a variety of Middle Eastern countries, the researcher’s experience indicates that these issues extend into undergraduate and graduate classes at the university level. The findings in this study support the important role of the educator in helping Saudi students succeed. The findings show how a positive relationship with the educator is a central issue for all participants.

This study provides a body of knowledge from Saudi students about their experiences with American educators. Results of this study have relevance for the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM), the Saudi Ministry of Education, international student services departments, instructors, curriculum developers, administrators at American

universities and Saudi international students. The information gathered in the study can be used to help universities support international students by developing training programs for instructors and influencing university policies regarding the treatment of international students. The findings of the study can help the Saudi Ministry of Education design preparation programs for Saudi students prior to coming to the United States to study.

Overview of the Chapters

The literature relevant to this study is reviewed and examined in Chapter II. Research methodology is presented in Chapter III. Results of the study are presented in Chapter IV. Findings are discussed in Chapter V. In Chapter VI Recommendations are given.

CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

International students coming to the U.S. for the first time, particularly those from non-European countries, experience a social and academic culture very different from their own. These differences may cause numerous difficulties as students try to adjust to U.S. higher educational and cultural systems. Most international students, Saudi students included, are not aware of how students and instructors should interact. They are unsure of how formal interactions should be, when it is appropriate to ask questions or make comments, or when they should be silent during a lecture. These and many other aspects of classroom engagement and student-teacher interaction can be confusing. It is vital that college instructors better understand the struggles, the needs, and the contributions of international students to help them succeed. This study aims to increase instructors' awareness of the challenges international students face in their classrooms. It also aims to help institutions support their international students and make the most of what an internationalized student body has to offer.

Research on international students began in the 1950's and 1960's and was mainly focused on the reasons international students study in the United States and the adjustment to life in the United States. In more recent studies, the central research issues on international students were English proficiency (Kwon, 2009), discrimination and prejudice (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007), anxiety, depression (Sümer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008), social support (Johnson, Batia, & Haun, 2008; Ye, 2006), and homesickness

(Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). In comparison to the research on international students from countries such as China, and South America, very few studies have addressed the experiences of international students from Saudi Arabia.

There has been a significant increase in Saudi students studying in the United States since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but Saudi international students have received limited attention from researchers regarding their campus and classroom experiences. Within the available studies there is very little mention of the quality of Saudi international students' relationships with their educators and the unique problems they encounter when studying in U.S. classrooms. This study seeks to give voice to Saudi students and the experiences they face at U.S. universities, particularly how their relationships with instructors impact their adjustment and learning. It is important to understand how factors, such as the differences between Saudi and American education and culture, and issues of discrimination and bias affect Saudi students' relationships with their instructors and how this, in turn, affects their academic performance, particularly in light of changes in the political climate since 9/11 and during the Trump administration.

When Saudi students come to American schools, they are typically underprepared for the new academic culture that they are entering, and some schools are not adequately prepared to meet the unique educational needs of their international student body. There are only a few studies specifically about the experiences of Saudi international students, and even fewer about Saudi students in the U.S. classroom environment (Rabia & Karkouti, 2017; Alnawar, 2015; Razek and Coyner 2013; Shaw, D. 2010). Existing studies on international students address more general problems with studying abroad (Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Alkhelaiwy, 1997; Hassan, 1992; Midgley, 2009),

general academic problems (Gauntlett, 2006; Al-Shehry, 1991), cultural adjustment issues (Jammaz, 1972; Midgley, 2009; Shabeeb, 1996), perceptions of achievement (Al-nusair, 2000; Shaw, 2010), motivation (Gauntlett, 2006), engagement (Midgley, 2009), or housing and accommodations (Fallon & Bycroft, 2009). These studies are not specific to the Saudi student population, and do not address the student teacher relationship.

A large body of literature has established the importance of the student-teacher relationship in the academic success of students. Jacobson (2000) emphasizes the importance of getting to know each student as an individual. This process can begin by something as simple as learning the student's names and allowing them to share some information about themselves (p.55). Pianta, Steinberg, and Rollins (1995) found that positive teacher-student relationships, defined as "warm, close, communicative," can be correlated with successful adjustment and successful academic performance (301). According to Anderson, Nelson, Richardson, Webb, & Young (2011), teachers who are able to effectively convey a caring and supportive attitude can play a significant role in the academic success of students who are at risk for "academic failure, social isolation, and school dropout" (269). Unfortunately, it is the students who are already successful and well-adjusted socially and academically that are more likely to form these kinds of relationships with their instructors, and therefore are more likely to benefit from positive student-teacher interactions than students who are at risk (Davis, 2001; Ryan, et. Al., 1994).

Educators play a key role in identifying and correcting misperceptions, misunderstanding, bias or discrimination in the classroom. In a survey of 1,747 undergraduates, Boyson, Vogel, Cope, and Hubbard (2009) found that one half of

students alleged classroom bias, with 22% seeing themselves as the target of overt discrimination in the preceding year (224). In the same study, the authors found that instructor perception of bias was inconsistent with that of their students. Although this study was not about Saudi students, it demonstrates that instructors are often unaware of behaviors and statements that their students perceive as biased and judgmental. The study addresses perceptions of students and teachers, but it relies on quantitative surveys and does not address the relational dynamics between Saudi international students and their instructors.

Alnawar (2015) used questionnaires to interview teachers at elementary schools in the United States where there was a high population of Middle Eastern students. She found that teachers were open and interested in learning about the cultural and academic backgrounds of their students and were only hindered by lack of opportunity and time constraints (p.32). Because of a lack of knowledge, many teachers fell back on stances of politeness, respect, and carefulness in regard to their Middle Eastern students, one teacher expressed not wanting to “accidentally offend someone with my lack of knowledge about their culture” (p.31). Alnawar states that “many teachers have insufficient cultural awareness and training of the Middle Eastern cultures, which could negatively reflect on their abilities to communicate and engage students from this area” (p.3). These students are often particularly at risk for stereotyping and marginalization because of stereotypes from Hollywood depictions, media coverage of the war in the Middle East, and incidents of terrorism. Because of this, Alnawar believes that culturally inclusive education is particularly important for Middle Eastern students, especially Arabs. The teachers in Alnawar’s study expressed interest in learning about their students in three main areas:

general knowledge about the culture, information about their students' educational backgrounds, and information about how to help them adapt to the new culture (p.37).

Rabia and Kakouti (2017) addressed the student-teacher relationship as one factor among several that they found essential to the success of their participants. They interviewed 16 students from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Syria, UAE, Iraq, and Jordan from two different universities in the Northeast of the United States. The six major themes that emerged in the study as "factors that Arab international students consider essential in terms of persistence, academic success, and cultural adjustment" are: sufficient time, extracurricular activities, and support from friends, faculty, and family (p.351). In the findings about faculty support, students noted appreciation for instructors who were understanding about the students' stage of language acquisition, encouraged participation, challenged them and made corrections, considered their status as an international student when making assessments, invited them for office visits, used visual aids during lectures, and suggested contacting the student success center for help. Nine out of sixteen students in the study "mentioned that a supportive and cooperative faculty is extremely helpful in terms of academic adjustment" (p.352). Rabia and Karkouti's findings correspond with the researcher's own experience and that of the participants in this study.

Razek and Coyner (2013) address challenges that include: transition to a new country and a new culture, social life, and academic life. The study revealed various cultural implications arising from the continuous increase of Saudi students on American higher education campuses after 9/11. The study found that Saudi students "demonstrated little understanding of the rules and regulations governing student conduct, social

interactions, and communication norms” (p.113), which could lead to misunderstanding and discrimination. To help overcome discrimination, they suggested that universities integrate multicultural seminars, workshops, and classes as part of their college programs. Saudi students in the study needed the encouragement of programs like these to engage outside their group as a way to increase their immersion in American college life as well as maximizing their learning.

Shaw (2010) explored ways to increase immersion in American college life and maximize the learning of Saudi students studying at Oregon State University, by providing experiences for the Saudi students in her study to connect with the Oregon landscape, campus resources, and other intercultural activities. Using a relatively new technique known as photoethnography, she asked students questions about photos that she took as the researcher, and examined how students' perceptions of a learning environment in the United States are different from their perceptions of the learning environment in Saudi Arabia. The method can help the students recall information and assist the researcher in understanding the subject's experiences better. The study focused on the success strategies of 25 Saudi participants that helped them to adapt to the new culture. Where the Razek and Coyner recommendations were about strategies universities could adopt, Shaw focused on strategies the students figured out themselves.

Shaw (2010) concludes that the success strategies her participants developed incorporate goal setting, study skills, time management, study groups, hard work, taking advantage of campus resources, and persistence. Also, the natural environment (i.e., natural beauty of Oregon), which the Saudi students found stress-relieving, relaxing. Feeling a part of the campus community contributed to the participants' success in the

United States. Shaw also found personal adaptation and intercultural competence to be the most fundamental characteristics for Saudi students to have a successful international experience. Shaw recommended supporting resilience and cross-cultural competence by helping Saudi Arabian students advance their coping skills and by providing assistance and aid to help them gain intercultural competence. Shaw's study provides the researcher valuable information with regard to the student teacher relationship and how a teacher can establish a healthy academic environment; however, it does not provide information, from the point of view of the international students, about how the students experienced their relationships with faculty.

Many studies on international students focus on the various challenges these students face in adjusting to a new culture. Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010) pointed out the need for opportunities for international students to interact with the communities in which they study to improve their English skills, to increase understanding, and to raise cultural awareness about international students. A study by Lee (2010) shows that intolerance within the larger community is often a primary factor in the international students' ability to adjust. She studied how cultural differences impacted the reception of international students into the communities in which they study. Data generated by the study showed that students from "predominantly non-white regions of origin had more negative experiences" and were less likely to recommend the university at which they were studying to others from their home country (Lee 2010, p. 70). Based on interviews with a sample of 24 students from 15 countries, they considered a range of difficulties encountered which ran from perceptions of unfairness and inhospitality to cultural intolerance and confrontation. They found that "not all of the issues international students

face can be problematized as matters of adjustment, as much research does, but that some of the more serious challenges are due to inadequacies within the host society" (Lee 2010, p. 70). The study identifies student perceptions of discrimination and how cultural discrimination may create a hostile climate in the institutions and communities that host international students.

A good example is an incident that happened at Idaho State University. Saudi and Kuwaiti students attending Idaho State University reported multiple incidents of anti-Muslim harassment, burglaries, and car vandalization. The governments of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait withdrew roughly 1,000 students from the institution and transferred them to other universities due to these hate crimes (Russell, 2017). This study seeks to discover, from the point of view of Saudi students, what instructors can do in university classrooms to facilitate integration into the communities in which they are studying, so that incidents like this can be decreased or even eliminated.

Although Lee (2010) examines issues of discrimination and bias and how they impact international students, the study does not address the issue in terms of the student-teacher relationship, or how instructors can play a role in helping international students to integrate into the classroom as well as the community by fostering an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance within the classroom. The current study examines the role that instructors can play in helping Saudi international students to integrate into the communities in which they are studying, and what can be done in university classrooms to reduce incidents of bias and intolerance.

Both cultural misunderstandings and a lack of understanding of the differences between Saudi and American styles of education can lead to intolerance and

discrimination, and can hinder the success of Saudi international students at American universities. Al-Shedokhi (1986) explores the academic issues of Saudi students. The study indicates that finishing examinations on time, especially essay tests, writing essays and reports, taking and organizing notes from lectures, and participating in class discussions were the major academic challenges of most international students. Andrade (2006) identifies factors that influence the adjustment and academic achievement of international students. These challenges are primarily attributable to English language proficiency, differences in culture, academic skills and educational background.

Three specific cultural issues addressed in studies about Saudi international students are: transition from a gender segregated society to a mixed gender society, racial and social discrimination, and language proficiency. In Alhamzi's (2010) qualitative research of Saudi Arabian students studying at Australian universities, his participants stated that language and communication difficulty was one of the greatest challenges. Participants also encountered some difficulty in adjusting to the new mixed-gender academic system and adapting to the new lifestyle. Alhazmi (2010) found that it was more difficult for students in the beginning and became easier with time.

Many of the studies recommended the use of university facilities as a way for international students to connect to the academic community. Al-Nusair (2000) used the College Student Experiences Questionnaire to measure the amount of effort Saudi students devote to using the facilities and the opportunities for learning and development that university campuses offer them. The 171 Saudi students who participated in the study were more likely to use campus resources and activities that were geared toward learning such as the library, opportunities for conversation, and interaction with faculty,

and less likely to engage in activities and resources that were oriented toward entertainment and socialization such as clubs, student organizations, music, writing, art, and theatre (p.71). Al-Nusair (2000) recommended that international student offices find ways to help Saudi international students to engage in more university sponsored social events in order to create supportive connections with the community, help Saudi students adjust to the new culture, address feelings of isolation and homesickness, and minimize experiences with discrimination and lack of belonging. Al-Nusair's study differs from the current study in that it is very broad and not focused on the student-teacher relationship, and second, it is based on quantitative research and doesn't reflect the nuanced experiences of the Saudi students.

Benefits of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is essential to explore the experiences of Saudi international students, but most studies about Saudi international students employ quantitative research (Al-Banyan, 1980; Al-Nassar, 1982; Shabeeb, 1996). These studies used questionnaires and were able to provide overviews, comparisons, correlations, and percentages. For example, Shabeeb (1996) identified the adjustment problems and concerns that Saudi and Arabian Gulf students encountered while attending colleges in Eastern Washington. To achieve his goal, questionnaires were mailed to 150 Saudi and Arabian Gulf students attending six colleges and universities in eastern Washington. Shabeeb (1996) found that the most challenging area for participants was difficulties with English, "followed by social-personal, living-dining, academic records, orientation services, admission, placement services, student activities, religious services, health services, and financial aid, in respective order," and showed correlations between these problems and

characteristics such as "gender, marital status, age, scholarship status, level of study, and major field" (Shabeeb, 1996, p. 1). The study was useful in that it identified a range of problems and correlations, but the findings did not explain how and why the problems exist, nor did it explore the individual experiences of the students concerning these problems, or the role of instructors in exacerbating or alleviating these difficulties.

Qualitative research gives the researcher the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of an issue than can be gained through quantitative research. Qualitative research methods offer a more systematic, in-depth analysis of a question than quantitative methods. In-depth interviewing and focus groups are the most commonly used data collection methods in qualitative research. Deep interviews effectively draw out the meaning people make of their lives from their experiences. "The in-depth interview takes seriously the notion that people are experts on their own experience, and so is best able to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon" (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 48). In addition to individual interviews, a focus group allows participants to discuss a topic about which they have common interest and experience, and the group dynamic may encourage participants to discuss topics that may not arise in individual interviews. This can create a more expanded perspective on a subject. For this reason, the researcher used focus groups and individual in-depth interviews rather than questionnaires. When conducting focus groups and interviews, the researcher was able to physically meet the participants, whereas this rarely happens with questionnaire responses. With focus groups and interviews, the researcher was able to discover clarifications and explanations directly from the target population concerning their interactions with their American educators and how their experience impacts their

educational performance. The researcher shares the language and culture of the participants in the study, which created safety and trust and allowed the participants to talk openly about their experiences in their own language.

This study seeks to discover what Saudi international students can tell us about how their relationships with their instructors impact their academic experiences in American colleges and what can be done to improve support for them. New qualitative research is necessary to add to our understanding of Saudi international students' experience in the current political environment, and how this and other factors impact their performance in the classroom and their interaction with their instructors. This research can give us valuable information to guide universities in understanding the challenges faced by Saudi students and what is needed to assist them in their academic success. The current study will address the absence of Saudi students' voices in the literature about international students.

It is important for American educators to begin with an understanding of the Saudi educational system and how it differs from the U.S. educational system. In order to support Saudi international students, it is important that American instructors understand the extent to which the education and cultural background of Saudi international students shapes their perceptions and expectations when they enter U.S. universities. Shapiro, Farrelly, and Tomaš, (2014) emphasize the obligation that educators have to their students, "As our classrooms become more diverse, we are tasked with the responsibility of exploring inclusive teaching approaches that honor the experiences and expectations of our students" (p.9).

It is important to consider the differences between the Saudi educational system and the American system in order to understand the challenges Saudi students face in adapting to the classroom culture of U.S. universities, and interacting with their American instructors. The following sections will provide an overview of both the Saudi and U.S. educational systems, examining standard teaching practices, curriculum content, and classroom expectations, and highlighting key points of difference that can be problematic for Saudi students.

Saudi Education

When the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was formed in the early 1930's by King Abdul-Aziz, he acknowledged the importance of education for the Saudi people and laid out the foundation of a system of public education. The Ministry of Education was founded in 1953 by King Fahd, making education free to all Saudi Arabian citizens and thousands of scholarships were made available for Saudi Arabian students to study abroad (Krieger, 2007, p. 1). King Saud University, founded in 1957, was the first institution of higher learning in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Bowen, 2008, p. 37). It is the largest university in Saudi Arabia with 51,168 students and offers a variety of programs (Ministry of Education, 2015). In 1961, Saudi Arabian women were first allowed to attend universities (Chai, 2006, p. 118). In 1970, approximately 2,500 students graduated from Saudi Arabian universities, and about 200,000 students graduated in 2004 (Wynbrandt, 2004, p. 297). The domestic demand for higher education in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s and 1970s led the Saudi Arabian government to spend large sums of money sending students abroad to earn degrees, especially to the United States (Bowen, 2008, p. 37). More recently, the number of universities in Saudi Arabia increased from 7 in 1998

to 20 in 2009 (Ministry of Education, 2015). In 2017, the government allocated 23% of the national budget (\$54 billion) for education (Ministry of Finance, 2017, p.22). Saudi Arabia's financial resources have played a significant role in improvements made to the educational system in recent years: the literacy rate is now more than 75%, up from a 25% literacy rate about 60 years ago (Wynbrandt, 2004, p. 297).

Saudi Arabia has made education a high priority, allocating a substantial amount of money to the education of its citizens, and imposes a national curriculum on public and private schools. The principles of Islam influence the Saudi Arabian educational system, and students are taught Islamic principles in most of their classrooms. All students at every school study from identical texts and other academic materials in all subjects regardless of individual interests. As Gabbard (2004) states, "The state organizes a massive public subsidy to ensure that schools are able to function. We would be surprised, then, if the role of schools did not complement the state's role in our society" (p.xxvii). Saudi instructors and curriculum do not reflect the experiences of the majority of Saudi students. Most of what Saudi students learn is usually irrelevant to their personal lives or careers. Public schools and universities in Saudi Arabia offer a strictly traditional educational culture. The education system in Saudi Arabia relies on the transmission of information from the educator (the power) to the student (the disempowered). Freire (1970) has described this analogy as a banking model, or an act of depositing, in which the student is the receiver, and the teacher is the depositor.

The public school system in Saudi Arabia follows the same pattern as American schools; students may attend Kindergarten, followed by six years of elementary school, three years of intermediate school, and then three years of high school. However, where

U.S. elementary students stay with the same teacher throughout the day, a Saudi elementary school might have six or seven periods, with students attending a different class each period. The Saudi curriculum differs in that it includes Islamic teachings, and schools are gender segregated. Students attend an academic school to study Islamic religion. Male and female students attend separate schools and are taught by instructors of the same gender. The curriculum is the same for males and females except for home economics for girls and physical education for boys; however, in 2019 the government plans to add physical education for girls.

Many of the differences between Saudi and American educational culture can be viewed through the lens of collectivism vs. individualism (Hofstede 1983) as a useful, though simplistic, distinction between cultures (p.75). In collectivist societies, people tend to be more social, the opposite of individualist cultures. People are tied closely together. Gaining help from others is common, and helping others is highly valued. People look after each other. In exchange for this security, people in collectivist societies are willing to accept existing authority structures even when they are not in favor of individuals. In a collectivist culture thinking is restrained. It is important to keep your beliefs in line with the group. Saudi students are used to relying more on their teachers and are not used to thinking critically and formulating their own ideas. It is not acceptable to criticize their teacher or any authority figures. This plays a role academically for Saudi students who sometimes rely on each other in ways that are not usual or acceptable by American standards. Expectations for collaborating and borrowing are different in a collectivist culture. Unlike American students who are expected to rely on themselves, and figure out how to do their work on their own, students from a collectivist culture

value help from each other and feel safer functioning and thinking as part of a group. In addition, actions of individuals reflect on family and community not just on themselves, and high importance is placed on gaining the approval of the collective. A Saudi student's success is connected to the community's success. In America, if a person goes to college and doesn't succeed, it impacts them and maybe their immediate family, but it is not likely to affect their neighbor. In a collectivist culture like Saudi Arabia, if one person in the community succeeds, the whole town succeeds. If he fails, the whole community fails.

In a typical Saudi classroom students sit in straight rows facing the teacher. Students at male schools wear traditional Arabic clothing, and female students wear uniforms. From elementary to university level, classrooms are almost identical. There is little variation between teaching methods and styles. The state mandated curriculum is identical at each grade level, and teachers are not allowed to individualize lesson plans. Classrooms are teacher centered. A high degree of formality is expected. Students stand when the teacher enters the room and do not sit until told to be seated. No disrespectful behavior is tolerated. Students do not work together during class. Even during class activity, students work alone, and collaboration is discouraged inside the classroom; however, collaboration is highly encouraged outside of the classroom. Students often study in groups, borrowing and sharing ideas. Even when writing papers, it is acceptable in a Saudi classroom to use another student's high scoring paper as a model, or for students who have worked together outside of class to turn in almost identical papers. It is also common and acceptable to share tests and the correct answers to tests.

There is no interaction between students and instructors outside of the classroom. Asking for one-on-one help is not acceptable and may even be seen as a challenge to the instructor's authority. In Saudi schools seeking help outside of the classroom implies that the teacher did not explain the subject well enough in the classroom. In Saudi classrooms, instructors, teachers, and professors are highly respected. Students demonstrate respect in many ways, including the tendency to downplay one's accomplishments and abilities. A show of humility is common in many collectivist cultures as a sign of respect for authority, as well as value for the collective, not just the individual.

In Saudi classrooms, the teacher talks while the students listen. There is no discussion; the instructor lectures, then asks direct and specific questions. Students must raise their hands or wait to be called on when answering questions. "To criticize a teacher's arguments in a Saudi school is unimaginable. It is not uncommon in Saudi Arabia for students to be completely silenced if they question the validity of a professor's argument" (Alhammad, 2010). Students can be dismissed from the classroom for challenging the teacher's line of reasoning. Even asking questions is not acceptable. Students might avoid asking questions in class, or might be reluctant to admit to not understanding a course reading or assignment, so as not to embarrass themselves or the instructor. To ask a question might imply that the instructor was not clear in their lecture or assignment. For these reasons, students from Saudi Arabia prefer listening to speaking up.

Students are given few writing assignments and are expected to write on the same topics assigned by the teacher rather than exploring their unique interests. Specific guidelines must be followed, and students are not encouraged to write about their own

ideas or develop their own voice. Students are not taught to take an argumentative position on a topic or make counterarguments. Open minded, critical thinking is discouraged because it might be a threat to authorities. It is not okay to challenge authority, religious views, or the government establishment as a whole. As an individual, there are consequences for saying something against the authorities, so it is common to work collaboratively, checking ideas with peers to make sure they are safe, okay, and acceptable. Although there is no group work inside Saudi classrooms, students often work with others outside of class. Private student help services are common. Cooperation is valued, and group mind is considered better than individual thinking, therefore, there is no concept of intellectual ownership.

In Saudi Arabia, the method of learning at government schools, and even some private schools, is based on traditional rote learning. Teachers encourage the ineffective methods of memorization and the superficial understanding of facts for the sole purpose of passing tests. For each class, the ministry of education school board has approved a specific curriculum, which must be taught and followed. The state approved information is taught by traditional rote learning, mainly through giving lectures, during which students are expected to take notes. Teachers provide students with practice examples from texts, followed by tests as an assessment of the academic material covered during the class period. Tynjälä (1999) stated that "Traditional examinations often lead students to adopt a surface approach to learning and studying and to attempt to memorize the material instead of trying to understand it" (p.365). When their exams show sufficient competence, they are promoted to the next grade to learn more challenging material. "This type of education extends far beyond high school to college and university levels"

(Alhammad, 2010). Students are continuously taught ways to pass an exam, rather than learning to retain and utilize information, and to think critically.

Freire (1970) believes in the importance of dialogue, engagement, equality, and education that denounces silence, and deplors oppression. Saudi Arabia lacks an educational system that encourages love of education, individual initiative, and critical thinking. They use a banking model of spoon-feeding students information that does not test their mental capabilities. Critical thinking is essential to a healthy and progressive education. Saudi schools do not emphasize the importance of independent thinking at elementary or college level. The love of education, creativity, and collective learning are absent.

American Education

Even though many educators see the need for reform in American education, U.S. schools are much more progressive than Saudi schools. American schools are based on individualism rather than collectivism, and classrooms tend to be more student-centered in comparison to Saudi schools. Like Saudi Arabia, the curriculum in U.S. schools is highly controlled by the government and by special interest groups. As Gabbard (2014) states, compulsory schooling in the United States has always served the values of our nation's dominant institutions and the interests of the social, political, and economic elites who own, control, and benefit most from the social arrangements and relations engendered by those institutions (p.2).

However, in America, there is greater room for variation from one state to another, and within individual classrooms, based on the needs and preferences of students and teachers.

In a typical American classroom, students may be seated in rows, grouped in clusters, or sit in a half circle facing the instructor. Student participation is encouraged, and students often work in groups or pairs. Classes vary in levels of formality depending on the teacher. Rules tend to be stricter for elementary through high school, but at the college level, teachers often tolerate very informal, relaxed behavior, including eating and drinking in class. Students are often not called out for their posture or even for not paying attention, talking to a neighbor, or sleeping (Suffolk University ISS, 2018). Some instructors are stricter than others, and students usually get a feel for an instructor's expectations within the first few class periods. This can be uncomfortable for Saudi students who are used to the same standards and rules in every classroom.

Outside of class, in American schools, instructors are much more informal than in Saudi schools. A student may talk to their instructor, much like they would a colleague. There is not a strong hierarchical barrier as there is between Saudi students and their instructors. The relationship is more relaxed and straightforward, and instructors often share things about their personal lives inside as well as outside of class. This can be problematic for Saudi students who are used to formal relationships and expect their instructors to direct them in their learning in a more authoritarian role. On the positive side, this informality can make the instructors more approachable and puts more responsibility on the student for their own learning. It can also be confusing when an instructor expects a higher level of formality and respect when they are in the role of instructor, such as during class or in office hours, than when they are interacting with students outside of these roles.

American instructors are used to providing help and support to students outside of class. When asked for help before or after class, during office hours, or through email, they generally respond and consider this to be part of their duty. Saudi students are not used to being able to seek help from their instructors outside of class, and even during class they are discouraged from asking questions during a lecture. Students only meet with their instructor in their office if there is a problem that the instructor wants to talk to the student about privately. Email communication between instructors and students is very rare or non-existent. In American schools, office hours are meant to help students, and instructors welcome requests for help during office hours and through email.

American classrooms focus heavily on individual participation through class discussion. Active participation is encouraged, expected, and often required. In Saudi classrooms, when the instructor talks, the students have to wait until he finishes before asking questions, and must always raise their hand. In America a student can jump in and ask a question or make a comment during the lecture, and this is seen as a sign of positive engagement in the class. In Saudi Arabia this is not acceptable. In Saudi Arabia students usually only comment when the instructor asks a question. An American instructor may see a Saudi student's silence in class as a lack of participation, when it is meant to be a sign of respect. In American classrooms, discussion, sharing opinions, and even disagreeing with the instructor are seen as signs of critical thinking. In Saudi Arabian schools, critical thinking is discouraged, what American teachers see as a sign of strength, Saudi instructors see as a sign of disrespect. "U.S. students are expected to express their 'own' ideas and opinions" (Shapiro et al., 2014, p. 12). American students prefer speaking over listening; it is all about individual voice.

In American schools, critical thinking is encouraged, students are expected to use their own words, express their own thoughts, and develop their own voice in writing assignments. In America students are often expected to choose a topic of their interest. This can be overwhelming and challenging for Saudi students who are not used to being encouraged to think and write in this way, and are used to being assigned topics by the instructor. It is not easy for Saudi international students to put their thoughts and opinions in writing without being very careful. It feels safer to rely on the thoughts of others. In Saudi Arabia, if someone says something well, it is okay to use it. However, at U.S. universities, "using someone else's work inappropriately (plagiarism) is therefore viewed as stealing, and may have serious consequences" (Shapiro et al., 2014, p. 12). A lack of understanding of the concept of intellectual ownership, combined with challenges with the English language can cause serious problems for Saudi students when citing and documenting sources. It is vital that U.S. instructors understand this problem and give special attention to making sure that Saudi international students understand how to properly cite and document sources.

Compared to students in Saudi Arabia, American students are given quite a bit of flexibility to choose their courses of study, and within their courses they are encouraged to think for themselves and direct their own learning, especially in higher education. In Saudi Arabia, through high school and even in the university, there are fewer elective courses than at Western universities. American instructors encourage their students to formulate their own ideas and follow their interests, and students learn to make choices and be self-directed. Students in Saudi Arabia rely on instructors so much that they expect the instructor to direct them, to lead them, and to initiate efforts. There is less

room for expectations from themselves. They tend to wait to be told what to do rather than initiating efforts. While this reliance on the instructor is considered a demonstration of respect for authority in Saudi schools, it can be seen as laziness by American instructors who are used to students showing more initiative. U.S. instructors who understand the educational and cultural background of Saudi international students can be aware of this challenge, and encourage and support Saudi international students in learning to feel confident in making choices, thinking for themselves, and taking initiative in their learning.

Examining the two educational systems provides a context for understanding some of the challenges that students might face transitioning from one system to the other. As American institutions become more diverse, they need to explore and honor the experiences of their international students to help them succeed in U.S. higher education. The existing literature on Saudi international students offers some useful strategies, suggestions, and recommendations that U.S. institutions can implement to facilitate Saudi students transition into American academic culture. The following section summarizes findings from the existing literature about experiences and challenges faced by Saudi students and expands and deepens understanding of the primary research question. The researcher aims to build upon these findings through in-depth interviews that allow the voices of current Saudi students to be heard. It is hoped that the findings will help instructors at U.S. universities understand the educational background and expectations of Saudi students so that they can know what kinds of information, support, and strategies will help them to transition to the U.S. educational system and succeed in the classroom.

In Summary

Most of the existing studies about Saudi international students mention general issues of adjustment to a new culture and integration into the broader university community. This study will focus mainly on the experiences of students transitioning from the Saudi educational system to the U.S. academic system and their interactions with their American teachers. Integrating from a collectivist society and a very traditional education system, as outlined in the section on Saudi education, to a more progressive system creates new experiences and challenges that need to be studied. "Prior to coming to the United States, Saudi Arabian international students are often the most academically successful among their peers in their home country" (Leong & Chou, 1996, p. 58). Therefore, they have high expectations of academic achievement in the United States. As members of a collectivist culture, Saudi students' achievements are shared by their families and communities, so their successes and failures reflect not only on themselves but on their entire community. The government also places a high expectation on them. The expectations of family, community, and government have a substantial impact on their perceptions of success and failure. It is essential that American instructors understand the high expectations placed on Saudi international students in addition to understanding the challenges of studying in a new culture.

For Saudi students to succeed in U.S. classrooms, the universities at which they study need to be educated about the transition challenges that these students face and must "take steps to make their institutions a welcome place" by providing support services for the students and providing training for faculty and staff (Andrade, 2006, p. 150). These services include English-language courses, tutoring, and supplemental

courses that focus on specific academic content and skills. In addition to resources and organizations outside of the classroom, it is vital that universities instruct teachers in the needs of their international students. Instructors should also be informed about the campus resources available to support international students so that they can direct students toward those services.

This study seeks to discover and understand the experiences of Saudi students with their American educators from the perspective of the Saudi students. It is hoped that this information will contribute to a better understanding of how American instructors in higher education may improve the learning experience for Saudi international students. The findings shed light on the main research question: Within the student-teacher relationship, what do Saudi students perceive as barriers to learning and what facilitates learning?

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

The researcher had three objectives in conducting this study. The first objective involved the desire to gain meaningful information to help understand what academic challenges Saudi international students face in their interactions with their teachers, and how they experienced these difficulties while studying in the United States. The second objective concerned acquiring a meaningful understanding of how Saudi international students seek and receive support from their teachers, and what, if any, barriers they experience. The third objective concerned the goal of gaining meaningful information to help understand the possible impact of the participants' relationships with their U.S. teachers on their academic success. This valuable information may better help inform the Saudi government, U.S. universities, and U.S. instructors about this population's challenges, so that they can better support Saudi international students. The researcher hopes that this study will be one component of a more substantial body of research that will enhance the academic lives of Saudi international students in the United States.

Research Questions

6. Within the student-teacher relationship, what do Saudi students perceive as barriers to learning and what facilitates learning?
7. How do Saudi student perceptions of their US teacher's understanding and acceptance of racial and cultural diversity impact their academic performance?
8. What are the factors that lead Saudi students to choose their teachers?

9. What are Saudi student perceptions of the role of teachers in helping them communicate with other students, and in handling prejudice in the classroom?
10. What is the role of teachers in helping Saudi students utilize campus resources to improve their academic success?

The Researcher's Role

Because this is a qualitative study involving one-on-one in-depth interview and a focus group, it is important to understand the researcher's involvement and interpersonal connection with his participants. It is essential to highlight the background and experiences that led to the researcher's interest in learning more about the teacher-student relationship when studying at universities in the United States. The researcher's interaction with Saudi international students was in two principal roles: as a Saudi citizen, and as an international student. The researcher was born and raised in Saudi Arabia. He finished high school and one year of college in Saudi Arabia. The researcher, then completed his undergraduate and graduate degrees in the United States. The researcher's exposure to the Saudi and U.S. educational systems gave him the opportunity to understand the differences between the two systems. This experience was a crucial factor in the researcher's involvement and interaction with his participants throughout his investigation.

The Researcher's Assumptions

In order to promote transparency in this research study, the researcher's assumptions are needed. Before gathering data for the study, the researcher expected participants would be excited to share their experiences with their teachers through in-depth interviews. The researcher believed the participants would want to help themselves

and other Saudi international students as well by sharing their experiences. The researcher felt his participants would be eager to assist him with his research. The researcher assumed that his participants would describe their academic challenges and their relationships with their educators to be difficult, anxious, and stressful experiences. The researcher expected that they would share experiences such as difficulty interacting with instructors, language barriers, stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice. The researcher expected the participants would describe how improving the relationship with their teachers can help them cope with their academic challenges. The researcher had assumptions that Saudi international students would be hesitant to use supportive academic services when facing academic challenges. The researcher's assumption was that Saudi international students do not use academic support services such as tutoring, counseling, advising, writing, and other campus services. The researcher formed these assumptions as a result of years of personal experience at western universities. After collecting the data, the researcher was surprised to find that desire for recognition by their instructors was the primary concern of the participants.

Research Design

A qualitative study approach was chosen because the researcher's purpose was to deeply understand the issues faced by Saudi international students in their interactions with their American instructors while studying at a university in the United States. The study utilized in-depth individual interviews and a focus group to investigate the opinions of Saudi international students about their interactions with their American instructors, and to bring to light valuable information about how those interactions might be improved. According to DiCicco, Bloom, and Crabtree (2006), the individual in-depth

interview allows the interviewer to delve deeply into social and personal matters, whereas the group interview allows interviewers to get a wider range of experience, but because of the public nature of the process, prevents delving as deeply into the individual (p.315). Group interviews often take the form of focus groups, with multiple participants sharing their knowledge or experience about a specific subject.

The researcher chose a qualitative investigational research method using in-depth interviews and focus groups because the combination of these methods is effective in developing useful, rich data. In addition to in-depth individual interviews, the researcher used a focus group to gain new perspectives to build on the information explored in the individual interviews. Kitzinger (1994) stated that focus groups are group discussions organized to explore a specific set of issues such as people's views and experiences (103). The focus group was conducted after the individual interviews. The researcher used information gathered in the individual interviews to initiate discussion about the topics that emerged in the individual interview. The data collected revealed new broad issues other than what had been explored through research questions in individual interviews.

The researcher's idea behind using both focus group and individual interviews is that the focus group process can help students to generate new questions and ideas, and explore a broader range of issues than in a one-to-one interview. Individual interviews are particularly valuable when researchers want individual reactions placed in the context of the individual's experiences without the group influence factors. According to Kitzinger (1994), "group discussion is particularly appropriate when the interviewer has a series of open ended questions and wishes to encourage research participants to explore the issues of importance to them, in their own vocabulary, generating their own questions and

pursuing their own priorities” (p.299). In this study the focus group was particularly valuable in allowing topics to be discussed that did not arise in individual interviews.

The researcher shares a similar language, education, religion, culture, and experience with the participants which allowed him to understand their relationships with their American instructors. Throughout this investigation, the researcher developed a level of trust with his participants which gave the researcher an insider perspective. The insider role allowed him to research with a population of which he is also a member and allowed him to establish a rapid and complete acceptance by all participants. Therefore, the participants were more open, which provided a greater depth of data. This helped the researcher to rapidly develop a positive relationship during interviews.

The process of establishing rapport is an essential component of the interview. DiCicco, Bloom, and Crabtree (2006) outline four stages of rapport: apprehension, exploration, co-operation and participation (p.317). Because of the common language, culture, and educational background, the researcher was able to skip the initial stage of apprehension, move quickly through the second stage of exploration, and into the stage of co-operation where the participants eagerly and openly shared about their experiences. The researcher spent a great deal of time learning, listening, exploring, and connecting with the participants. The participants were not afraid of offending one another, found satisfaction in the interview process, and shared openly about their experiences. Because of the level of trust and comfort the participants felt with the researcher, the interviews as well as the focus group were able to move quickly into the final stage of rapport, the participation stage. “This stage of the process reflects the greatest degree of rapport, and at this point the interviewee takes on the role of guiding and teaching the interviewer”

(DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006, p. 317). Therefore, the researcher was able to gain information about the experiences of the Saudi international students who participated in the study that went beyond his initial assumptions.

Participants

Using convenience sampling, the study was limited to participants who identified as male Saudi international students studying as undergraduates at a large Western research university. The researcher chose only male Saudi international students for two reasons. First, the majority of Saudi students studying in the United States are males, over 72% out of the total population (SACM, 2014). Second, due to the nature of Saudi Arabian communications and segregation culture between males and females, the researcher decided not to include Saudi females for this matter. In Saudi culture it is not acceptable for a man and woman to be alone together. The researcher felt that this would negatively impact the quality of information obtained through in-depth individual interviews. In addition, only male Saudi students responded to the emails.

The participants were selected based on three criteria: (1) All participants were enrolled in a variety of undergraduate classes a large research university in the inland West of the U.S., including business, science, political and health programs, (2) The length of study at the university ranged from one year to four years, providing perspectives from new students as well as those nearing graduation. (3) All participants were male students from Saudi Arabia.

The International Student Coordinator sent e-mails to all undergraduate Saudi students attending the university inviting them to participate in the study. Only nine male Saudi students responded. Five students who met the study requirement were chosen by

the researcher. Two of the students were graduate students, and they were not chosen because the researcher decided to limit the study to undergraduate students. The other two that were not chosen were seniors. The researcher wanted the study to have students in each year of college. In the participants selected, there was one freshman, two juniors, and two seniors. These five students participated in both the individual interview and the focus group. Both focus groups and in-depth interviews were held in a classroom at the international student services center.

Data Collection

Interview sessions were held at the international student service center on the university campus. Each interview lasted 45 minutes. Each participant was interviewed once. All individual interviews were completed over a two-week period. Interviews were audiotaped, and the researcher took hand-written notes. Interviews were conducted in Arabic, although English was sometimes used for clarification of English terms. The interviewer used words in Arabic that were clear and meaningful to the participants.

The researcher asked questions that focused on the Saudi students' relationships with their teachers. All questions were related to Saudi international students' experiences with their American teachers at the university. Each participant replied to the same research questions, and additional topics arose during discussion based on their responses. The rationale behind this approach was to allow room for the respondents' personal views and experiences to arise rather than being strictly limited to the researcher's questions. This kind of interview allowed the participants to explore areas the researcher had not previously considered.

Interviews were transcribed immediately after each session and translated into English by the researcher. Each recording was erased as soon as it was transcribed. The researcher's written notes, documents, and reflection were compared with the interview transcripts.

Five themes emerged from the individual interviews and the focus group discussion. The five themes are directly related to student-teacher relationships and arose in response to the interview questions. The questions used in the interviews were the same as the research questions.

After posing each research question to a participant, the researcher spent quite a bit of time clarifying and answering questions about what the research questions meant and what the purpose of the question was. It is common for conversations in Arabic to follow multiple tangents, and the researcher spent time in each interview answering questions from the participants about the study, and explaining the research process and the purpose of the study. Although these explanations took a large portion of the time, the content of the interviews was closely tied to the research questions. All additional explanations and follow-up questions were designed to keep the interviews closely tied to the research questions and encouraging the participants to share their experiences in relation to each of the research questions.

A single focus group was conducted one week after the individual interviews were completed. It was also held at the international student service center. The focus group lasted 120 minutes. The session was audiotaped, and the researcher took handwritten notes. The discussion was conducted in Arabic, although English was sometimes used for clarification of English terms.

The researcher reminded the participants of the questions that were asked in the individual interviews, and passed out a paper with a list of the themes that emerged from their responses. The themes listed were: recognition, language barrier, stereotyping, valuing racial and cultural diversity, acceptance and understanding of cultural and racial diversity, and choosing American instructors. All participants were in agreement of the themes that the researcher discovered through analysis. The researcher then invited the participants to raise issues that had not yet been discussed. This approach allowed participants to share experiences and give feedback that were not strictly limited to the researcher's questions.

The recording of the focus group discussion was transcribed immediately after the session and translated into English by the researcher. The recording was erased as soon as it was transcribed. The researcher's written notes, documents, and reflection were compared with the discussion transcripts.

New topics emerged from the focus group discussion that were not directly related to teacher student relationships; however, they reflected classroom dynamics that are influenced by the role of the teacher.

Data Analysis

In this qualitative study, data analysis was primarily inductive, guided by the research questions. Interviews were transcribed and reviewed. The collected data was processed through open coding. Each individual and focus group interview was analyzed to detect emerging themes. The researcher compared the five participants' answers to each question in order to discover common themes. In response to the first research question, three out of the five participants immediately brought up their concerns about

not being recognized as a Saudi student, and feeling that their teachers did not understand their background, culture, who they were, or what they contributed to the university. The other two participants also discussed this issue in response to the first question, but more indirectly. Two other themes, closely related to the theme of recognition, emerged from the first question: stereotyping and lack of accommodations in relation to difficulties they faced with English language acquisition. Other themes emerged as a result of the second and third questions about valuing cultural and racial diversity, and how they choose their instructors, however, these themes validated and expanded on the three themes that emerged from the first question. Two more themes emerged during the focus group. These were related to their relationships with their American classmates, and their use of campus resources.

After transcribing the interviews and analyzing them to identify themes, the researcher selected excerpts from the transcripts to demonstrate each theme. Each theme is described, followed by short extracts from the participants' answers that support each theme. The researcher followed a similar process for the focus group. Because of the group dynamic, the discussion was less structured than the individual interviews. The researcher looked for common themes in the responses of the participants over the course of the discussion and selected excerpts to illustrate those themes.

The results of the research fall into two main categories: (1) barriers and difficulties faced by participants in their relationship with American teachers, (2) strategies and recommendations adopted by the participants to resolve these challenges.

During individual interviews and focus group, the researcher produced data in the form of notes, and a summary of the individual's interview transcripts. The data emerged

from all individuals and focus group responses to each question. This was done with open-ended questions. The researcher organized the data from the responses to the questions and looked across all respondents and their answers to identify consistencies or differences and explore the connections and relationships. Five themes emerged from the research questions. Finally, the researcher organized them into categories that summarize and bring meaning to the text.

Strengths, Limitations, and Recommendations for Future Research

The in-depth interviewing qualitative method was a particular strength of the study. In-depth interviews allowed the researcher to capture a real lived description of the male Saudi Arabian international students' experiences in their own words. The in-person interviews by the researcher, who shares many similarities with the participants, allowed him to build a trusting working atmosphere in which participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences with the researcher. The follow-up interviews in the group provided the participants the full opportunity to reflect on the responses from the individual interviews. The focus group allowed them to discuss their experiences again and make any changes or additions. Also, conducting the interviews in Arabic was a strength, because the primary language of Saudi Arabian students is Arabic as opposed to English. The confidence of the participants increased when they spoke in their native language.

The findings of this study should be carefully interpreted because this study focused on a small sample of five male Saudi international students at one institution. Only undergraduate students participated in the study. The exclusion of graduate students is a limitation, because graduate students typically have more extensive experience and a more mature perspective. This study was limited to the Saudi student perspective of their

relationships with their instructors. This is only one component among many components. The teachers' perceptions of their Saudi students was not addressed. As for future research, the strongest recommendation is to investigate instructors' perspectives of their Saudi students. Also, the perspectives of American students and faculty administrators should be considered. Limited research was found about Saudi international students in regard to their relationship with their teachers. It would be interesting to ask teachers about their relationships with Saudi students, especially to see how they react on hearing that Saudi students want to be recognized and want opportunities to share their culture. Future research, inclusive of research with female Saudi Arabian international college students, is important in fully understanding the lived experiences of Saudi females studying in the United States. Other research may be needed including the perspectives from participants such as family members, spouses, advisors, and other educational professionals. Research including Saudi students at other institutions would bring a wider range of experiences.

Readers should bear in mind that, although this study focuses on a few students at one institution, as was mentioned in Chapter III, Saudi culture is relatively uniform. The participants of the study are relatively the same age as most Saudi international students, they come from an identical educational system regardless of where they lived in Saudi Arabia before coming to the United States, and they are all exposed to American education and culture. Therefore, their responses are reflective of other Saudi students.

CHAPTER IV RESULTS

Findings

Introduction and Overview

The findings show that Saudi international students have many different challenges with their instructors at the university where the study was conducted. In both the individual interviews and in the focus group discussion, the most significant finding was the participants' need for their instructors to recognize their unique status as Saudi international students. The instructor's ability to see them as individuals and as Saudi students, and to understand what that means, is vital to their academic success.

Participant responses to the first question, "Within the student-teacher relationship, what do Saudi students perceive as barriers to learning and what facilitates learning?", demonstrated that whether or not a teacher understood and accepted racial and cultural diversity had a significant impact on the Saudi students' academic performance and overall experience. All statements from participants are translated as closely as possible from Arabic. Participant #5 stated:

Yes, teachers who recognize and accept racial and cultural diversity in their classrooms can help Saudi students succeed in their classrooms. I have been in a class where the teacher valued racial and cultural diversity, and I did very well and enjoyed the class. It was an excellent experience, and I have been in a class where I felt the teacher did not appreciate racial and cultural diversity, and I didn't do well, and I hated the class.

The

participants felt supported by instructors who spent some time getting to know them and their cultural background, rather than relying on racial or cultural stereotypes.

All participants expressed the opinion that their instructors valued cultural and racial diversity. However, in Saudi Arabia, students are expected to show instructors a high level of respect, and it is not acceptable to be critical. When the participants say that they believe their instructors value diversity, this is an Arabic way of giving them the benefit of the doubt, even though they have not experienced evidence that it is true. Criticism of instructors is often buffered by a positive statement, as when Participant #1 said:

I think most of American teachers value diversity in their classroom, but some of them didn't show it or didn't talk about it. I think the American teacher should do more in making diversity be appreciated and welcome rather than judged in their classrooms.

They felt strongly that whether or not their teachers recognize and understand their status as Saudi international students significantly impacts their academic performance.

The researcher spent a significant period with each participant discussing student-instructor relationship struggles during the in-depth interviews. They mentioned difficulties in communicating with their instructors due to language barriers, academic background differences, and different expectations from the teacher, and expressed concern about their instructors' lack of understanding of their culture and academic background. Participant #3 said, "Some teachers have limited knowledge when it comes to understanding international students. I don't know why, but it seems that some don't have an interest in who I am." They felt that academic performance was prioritized at the

expense of their need to be seen and recognized as Saudi students. Participant #4 said, “Sometimes I feel the American teacher has no interest in diversity. His or her concern is academic issues, which is good, but it is even better if they express some interest in the ethnic background of their students.” They felt that recognition and understanding of their background was essential to their academic success.

All participants, regardless of their length of stay at the university or academic majors, claimed that their instructors in general were professional, kind, and helpful. They appreciate the kindness of their instructors, but niceness doesn't, from a practical perspective, help them succeed in school. However, the following themes will clarify and illustrate what instructors can do beyond being “nice” to help Saudi international students succeed.

Theme 1: Recognition—Being seen and understood by their instructors is vital for the academic success of Saudi international students.

Findings indicated that Saudi international students face challenges and barriers in their relationships with their instructors and suggested strategies to overcome these barriers. The most significant issue was recognition of the students by their instructors. Many of the participants felt that their instructors didn't even know their names, let alone where they were from, or anything about their culture, educational background, or language difficulties. The participants felt that it was vital to their education that their instructors take the time to learn about them, either through conversations before or after class, during office hours, through email, or by allowing each student in the class to introduce themselves at the beginning of the semester. Participant #2 worried about whether or not his instructors noticed that he was a Saudi student, and when he wanted to

participate, he worried about whether or not his instructor could understand him. He was afraid that his teacher might question his ability, or think that he did not study hard enough. He said, “I need my teacher to realize who I am and where I come from.”

Recognition by the instructor is vital, and when a lack of recognition happens, students feel down and lack desire to put forth effort in the classroom. Even the slightest positive recognition by the instructor improves the international student’s morale and enthusiasm about school work and their outlook on school, in general. As Participant #5 stated:

Lack of recognition in the classroom made me lonely and isolated. I try to talk to my teacher after class, and some teachers do listen, others don’t. I wish that teachers spent some time talking with students, especially after class or at their offices.

The participants felt that being seen and understood by their instructors was a primary factor in their academic as well as social success. The responses of the participants in this study indicate that U.S. instructors have not been able to give their Saudi international students sufficient attention, acceptance, understanding, support, and a sense of belonging required for them to adjust to a new academic environment.

Theme 2: Stereotyping—Recognition without understanding and appreciation of cultural differences can lead to negative judgments.

Participants reported that being recognized as Saudi students without knowledge and understanding of their culture can lead to stereotyping and negative judgments.

Participant #1 was concerned that if his instructors have a lack of knowledge about his

culture and race, then, they might misinterpret him, and judge him poorly, or treat him with disrespect.

Many problems stem from differing cultural expectations about appropriate student teacher relationships, and participation in the classroom. Participant #2 noted, that in Saudi culture, students tend to be quiet in class, and making eye contact with teachers is considered inappropriate; however, he feels his teachers at the American university judge him poorly for what is considered a sign of respect in Saudi Arabian classrooms. American teachers value classroom discussion and view students' participation as a sign of competence, but in Saudi classrooms, students are not expected to participate. Participant #3 said, "Here if you don't participate, teacher thinks you have no competence and it might affect my overall grade." Saudi culture tends to regard the teacher as an expert and the student should not argue with the teacher. Participant #4 said he avoided what seemed like confrontational discussions in the classroom because of his experience with the standards of interacting with instructors in Saudi schools and said, "My cultural value of the teacher causes inaccurate judgments." Participant #3 said, "I mean if I don't argue or make comments or disagree, for the teacher that's a sign of not understanding." Participants found these discrepancies between the expected roles of students and instructors to be a source of misunderstanding. The participants have found that what is considered respect in Saudi Arabia, is often considered to be lack of participation, or incompetence in U.S. classrooms. The participants felt that a lack of understanding about these differences in cultural values and signs of respect for the teacher negatively impacted their academic performance and the way their teachers judged their competence and ability.

Another significant issue that arose in response to the first question about barriers to learning, and was expanded in response to the second question about their instructors understanding of racial and cultural diversity in individual interviews, was problems with being stereotyped as cheaters. The participants' experience was that Saudi international students have been stereotyped as cheaters, which makes them feel disconnected and places them in a position of marginalization and neglect within the classroom. Participant #1 shared an example from one of his math classes. He said that whenever they had a test or a quiz, the instructor always looked at him frequently, and when he asked her if he could go to the bathroom, she said no one was allowed to leave the class during tests. "I know for sure she thinks I am a cheater," he said. The participants were aware of concerns that Saudi students had been caught cheating, however, they did not know anyone who was caught cheating, and did not like being judged because of choices that another student made. Participant #2 said, "Cheating exists among non-Saudi students as well, but only Saudis are being put on the spot for it." When asked if he knew why Saudi students are characterized as cheaters, he answered "Maybe due to a few past incidents." Participant #3 said, "I don't like to be stereotyped as a cheater, only because some Saudi student was caught cheating a long time ago." When asked if he knew a Saudi student who was caught cheating he responded, "No, I never heard it." Participant #5 said, "I don't like cheating, I don't need cheating, I come here to learn, and if I study hard then I don't need to cheat." Students felt that because they were on scholarships with generous living expenses, instructors might perceive them as lazy, or looking for an easy way through the class, rather than serious students who work hard.

Because Saudi students come from a collectivist culture, there are different standards about working together and documenting the work of others. Participant #4 related an experience where the teacher started talking about plagiarism as soon as he entered the class, “and she was looking at me all the time,” he said. When asked if he had taken a course with her before, he said, “No this is my first time with her.” What might be called cheating in America, is considered cooperation in Saudi Arabia. There is no concept of intellectual ownership in Saudi Arabia, and when writing papers Saudi students sometimes borrow sources and don’t understand the need to distinguish their own voice from others. This kind of textual borrowing and unintentional plagiarism is a result of different academic systems and cultural expectations, as is the Saudi practice of cooperating in learning, which is different than actual cheating with an intent to deceive. This difference in the cultures often causes misunderstanding around plagiarism and cheating. It is the role of the teacher to make these distinctions and expectations clear, and to make sure that students have access to and understand the university guidelines about intellectual ownership.

Theme 3: Recognition and understanding by instructors leads to providing support and accommodations.

Saudi international students need unique support and accommodations in order to succeed at U.S. universities, because of social, cultural, and academic challenges. Many of their challenges center around English language acquisition. They noted difficulties in communicating with their professors, and completing assignments due to language barriers. They worried about instructors forming a negative impression of them because

of the way they speak, or because assignments take them longer than students who speak English as their primary language.

Participants reported choosing instructors whose teaching and grading styles took into consideration the difficulty of the language barrier, allowing them to take more time with assignments and do revisions or make-up work. Participant #1 said, “The recognition of my teacher is vital for me because if the teacher understands my need, then the teacher may provide more accommodation and modification for me.” Whether participants use a site like Rate my Professor, recommendations from an adviser, or from other students, what they are looking for and asking when choosing a teacher is whether or not the instructor will accommodate them and their needs.

Participants reported challenges understanding lectures, noting that some teachers speak very fast, and there are some words that are difficult to understand. They found it helpful when teachers use visual aids such as PowerPoint, videos, and pictures.

Participant #1 said, “My English proficiency caused many barriers for me. Sometimes, I really cannot fully understand the lecture.” Participants also reported challenges with teachers who rely entirely on the textbook. Participant #3 said that it is easier for him to read from notes than from the book, which is difficult for him to summarize. He prefers teachers who provide some summary and explanation for each chapter.

Having enough time, without pressure, to complete assignments was an important factor for all of the participants. Participant #3 looked for teachers who give fewer in-class tests and quizzes, preferring assignments or tests that he could take home or do online, so he had more time to complete them, and with less stress. “I like teachers who give less tests and quizzes. If I heard from somebody, that a teacher gives essay test questions

in class, I will try to avoid taking classes with them,” he said. Participants #4 and #5 found grading styles to be an important indicator of whether or not a teacher was likely to accommodate their needs. Participant #5 said, “If his syllabus shows grading as A+, A-, D+, D-, or divides the grades in too many percentages, I will drop the class, because I can tell that the teacher is very picky and strict.” Participant #4 looked for instructors that allow make-up work and extra credit.

Difficulty with the English language hinders the participants’ communication with their teachers, is a great barrier to their learning, and contributes to a wide range of problems in their academic success. However, language is more of a barrier for some than for others, depending on the student’s proficiency, and how language intensive their major is. Participant #5 noted that because his major is computer science, he relies less on English literacy and more on numbers, equations, and codes. He said, “I did struggle at the beginning, but with time I managed to overcome the English barrier.” Because each student is different and has their own set of challenges and needs, it is important for teachers to become familiar with the unique needs and circumstances of their students, and offer appropriate accommodations.

Theme 4: Saudi international students desired information from their instructors about campus resources.

It is impractical for teachers to meet all of the needs of international students, and during the focus group, when encouraged to share their personal stories of how they use and benefit from the university’s support services outside of the classroom, all participants agreed on the importance of school services to their academic life at the university. They mentioned student organizations and services such as the student union

building, writing center, counseling help center, international office services, and the library. Participants #1 and #2 said the service centers provide a place for them to ease stress, find support, and to gain knowledge to deal with all kinds of problems. Participant #3 said that his English 101 teacher took the class to the library for a tour, and showed them how to get help from the library staff and how to do research and use the other library research. He said it was an excellent opportunity. All participants said they rely on the library to study in a quiet place, borrow books, print and scan papers, and use the library computer and internet. Participant #3 meets with a counselor to discuss issues from school and interactions with professors. All participants found the writing center useful for paper editing and revision. The participants found these services to be vital to their success; however, most of them discovered these services on their own or through other Saudi students. The Saudi student community is small and when a new student arrives, they rely heavily on senior students for most of their academic needs and information. This support from the Saudi student community is valuable, but they wished that their instructors gave them more information about the university resources available to them.

For all of the participants, language is sometimes a barrier in using campus resources, particularly the writing center. Participant #4 noted that although there is a writing center they can go to, there are no bilingual tutors. “They don’t have bilingual tutors who understand students like me since English is not my language. I need somebody who can be patient and give me enough time to review my writing,” he said. Participant #1 also noted that the writing center doesn’t give him enough time for the support that he needs, and said, “Maybe it works for the American students, but because

of the language barrier, for me, it is not enough time.” Not all instructors informed their students about the writing center and participants wished that instructors and the writing center worked more closely together to address their needs. Participants felt that the teachers were only interested in the content of their own class, and wished that teachers played a more active role in helping them to be aware of and take advantage of the resources available to them outside of the classroom.

Theme 5: Teachers can facilitate student relationships and enhance the learning process by including activities that make culture and diversity visible in the classroom.

This next theme arose only when the students were together during the focus group and interacting about their experiences in more detail. Because questions during the individual interview focused on the student-teacher relationship, interviewees did not mention their difficulty communicating with classmates. However, during the focus groups, once one student mentioned that problem, others chimed in.

Participants noted difficulties in communicating not only with their teachers but with their classmates. They expressed their experiences of feeling isolated from other classmates and how they see the educator’s role in improving relationships among students. Participant #4 said, “It’s not only the teacher who doesn’t know who I am, but also, my classmates, some of my classmates don’t understand why I come here to study. One of my classmates asked me ‘don’t you have colleges?’” Saudi students want to be recognized by other students as well as the teacher, and feel the teacher should play a role.

The participants found it difficult to make friends with their American classmates, noting that most American students like to be with their own American friends. Therefore, most of their friends are from Saudi Arabia or other international students. Participant #3 said, "I don't know why it is difficult to make friends with the American classmates." Participants #2 and #4 said there was no visible prejudice or discrimination in their classrooms, and Participants #1 and #3 felt it existed in the more subtle forms of marginalization, lack of understanding, and negative conclusions about them. When asked what they thought they should do if they were being discriminated against, all participants agreed that they should be willing to share their background and culture with their instructors and American students to promote understanding and awareness of their background and culture.

Lack of friendship, communication, and recognition from American students was most often a problem when asked to work in groups. All of the participants found group projects and activities to be a significant challenge. When instructors asked them to form discussion groups, sometimes they were left out, and their classmates usually did not invite them to join their groups. Participant #4 said, "Sometimes I have to ask the groups who need more people to join them, some groups ask me to join, others don't." Participant #2 said, "Many of my classmates usually did not invite me to join their group discussion and I feel isolated." When asked why this might be, he said, "I am not sure why. But maybe I am an international student and I don't speak good English, or simply, they are not sure who I am to be in their group." Their perception is that their domestic classmates want to be with each other and might not want them to join them because of difficulty with the language and unfamiliarity with their race and culture.

When asked what they thought instructors should do to improve student relationships during group discussions, all participants agreed that teachers should play a role in the formation of groups. Participant #2 spoke of being left out when groups were formed and said, “My domestic classmates want to be with each other and might not want me to join them because, maybe I am not a native English-speaking person.” When asked what the instructor did when this happened, he said, “They don’t pay attention, or they think it is the student’s role to join a group. I prefer the teacher to be the one who assigns students to the groups.” Participant #1 agreed, “Teacher should be the one who signs up the groups, so I can be with the group without permission”, and Participant #4, said “Teacher should check each group and see if all students fit in each group to make sure no one is left.” In addition to facilitating the formation of groups, the participants felt that instructors should provide more opportunities for them to let their classmates know about their culture and background.

The participants found it to be helpful to their learning process when teachers included opportunities to recognize the diverse cultures of their students, made the effort to learn about them and their backgrounds, and included activities that promote diversity in the classroom. Their perception was that most American teachers value diversity in their classroom, but don’t do enough to make diverse culture visible and understood. The participants believe that teachers should do more to make diversity appreciated and welcome rather than judged in their classrooms. Participant #2 said, “Most of the teachers I know, don’t have activities that value diversity in their classes.” The participants felt that activities that value diversity would help facilitate relationships with the other students. Participant #5 said, “Some of my classmates don’t understand my background

or why I am here.” They expressed a desire for their instructors to know that each international student is unique, welcome their differences, and make those differences visible and accepted in the classroom.

All participants expressed a desire to share more about themselves and their culture in order to promote understanding and minimize discrimination. Participant #3 said, “Some teachers give a student the chance to introduce themselves in front of the class at the beginning of the semester which helps me to let them know who I am.” The participants believe there are a broad range of classroom activities that can help students recognize the value of diversity. For example, Participant #2 suggested that, “teachers whenever they have a chance, should provide international students with the opportunity to share stories of their home culture, such as holidays, customs, and cultural practices,” and Participant #3 said, “I like to see a world map in most of the American classrooms, to show that we all belong to one place.”

The participants strongly believe that teachers can set the example for students and demonstrate that they value diversity, by including activities in the classroom that help other students understand the educational and cultural background of international students, and helping to dispel negative stereotypes based on language barriers, and other issues.

CHAPTER V DISCUSSION

Five themes emerged in the analysis of the findings: the importance of recognition, problems with stereotyping, providing support and accommodations, use of campus resources, and the teachers' role in facilitating student relationships by including activities that recognize and value diversity in the classroom. The most significant theme was the participants' need for teachers to recognize who they are and where they are from. All other themes were related to and followed from this need. Recognizing the problems individual students face as learners in unfamiliar contexts is critical to improving the learning environments for Saudi and international students. Saudi students do not always have the knowledge or ability to initiate the cross-cultural exchanges needed to get the most of their education in the United States, "thus, to ensure that inter-cultural contact takes place and thereby achieving its benefits, careful thought must be given to course programming in the area of inter-cultural contact and communication" (Volet & Ang, 1998, p. 17). The responses of the participants in this study showed how important the recognition of their cultural heritage and educational background within the context of their learning in the classroom is to the academic success of Saudi international students.

The participants' responses indicated that a lack of recognition, or recognition without understanding of their culture often led to stereotyping Saudi international students negatively. Because Saudi international students come to the United States with generous scholarships that pay not only their tuition but all of their living expenses, they

are often seen as rich, lazy, weak, dishonest, and only interested in having a good time, as opposed to serious, rigorous students interested in academic success. This stereotype hurts the Saudi students personally, socially, and educationally. Stereotyping Saudi international students negatively widens the segregation between domestic and Saudi international students. The ways Saudi international students are generalized makes them feel disconnected and places them in a position of marginalization and vulnerability within the classroom and campus. Because of these stereotypes, educators might easily see Saudi international students as problems that need to be treated. They may assume that Saudi international students are not interested in learning and ignore their potential as useful cultural and intellectual resources. As a result, less emphasis is placed on finding practical ways of gaining knowledge about the different cultural experiences, interests, and backgrounds that Saudi international students bring into the classroom which could enhance learning for all. To reflect more deeply on the stereotyping of Saudi international students and its effects, one of the interviewees stated: "I don't like to be stereotyped as a cheater, this is unjust, unfair and affected my performance in the classroom." Although international students should be prepared to deal with stereotypes, the role of a teacher is to bring together the different aspects of culture and beliefs in the classroom. Teachers must know their students and their academic abilities individually, rather than relying on racial or cultural stereotypes. Open-minded teachers are ready for a culturally diverse environment that creates an amazing academic experience.

The findings indicate that recognition and understanding by teachers leads to providing support and accommodations. Most of the accommodations and support that Saudi students need center around issues with English language acquisition. Multiple

studies have shown that one of the most significant academic challenges for Saudi international students relates to the ability to use the English language proficiently (Jammaz, 1972; Shabeeb, 1996; Shaw, 2010). The participants indicated that English language difficulties are a challenge for them.

Although they have typically studied English for one or two years before their admission to college, most Saudi students feel it is not enough time. Test scores, such as the International English Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), don't necessarily indicate preparedness for English 101 classes at an American university. English classes designed specifically for international students are needed to prepare those students for English 101.

Language difficulties include speaking with an accent, rate of speech, pronunciation, and being able to understand lectures and written materials. Because of language limitations, it is not easy for Saudi and other international students to fully understand what the teachers say or what they need. Participating in class discussion, and giving presentations can be great challenges. Many international students need extra time to do tests and homework. The language problem can indirectly increase the workload burden of international students. For example, an assignment that an American student is able to finish reading in an hour, an international student who does not speak English as a first language, may have to consume three hours to complete.

Instructors often form a negative impression if a student does not speak or write perfect American English, because in American schools, mastery of a prestige dialect of English is very often equated with intelligence. Instructors need to understand that language is a tool and not necessarily a measure of a student's intelligence, knowledge, or

ability. If teachers do not take the time to get to know their students, and if the students do not speak out for themselves, teachers are not likely to be able to understand the needs of international students.

In addition to the language barrier, differences between the Saudi and the U.S. educational cultures make it even more difficult for Saudi students to succeed in their classes. For example, universities in the U.S. place a high value on class participation. Saudi international students are used to being taught through teacher lectures with very little participation, therefore they are not prepared for the high participation demanded in most U.S. classrooms. Saudi international students are accustomed to listening quietly and respectfully in class and not sharing their own ideas and opinions. They are also unfamiliar with self-directed work and expect more guidance and help from teachers. Saudi international students often lack knowledge about the cultural and educational expectations in American classrooms. Even when campuses offer resources, like the international student services center, either they don't provide the information or training that students need to make the transition to an American university, or the students are not informed about how to access the services and information available to them.

Teachers can play an important role in guiding international students to resources outside of the classroom. The Saudi students in the study found campus resources vital to their academic success, but reported that they usually learned about these services on their own, and it was rare for teachers to inform them about resources outside of the classroom. When teachers are educated about the needs of their international students, and the campus resources available to them, they are better able to guide their students to the resources that they need. Teachers could also play a role in helping universities to

know what kinds of services international students need. It is in the best interest of the university as well as the students to make sure that international students have access to the services they need to succeed. Teachers are in the best position to get to know and understand the needs of international students, and can then offer valuable information to the directors of campus resources about how to support international students in the classroom.

Only one participant in the study knew about and had used the counseling services available to students. Sandhu (1995) showed that the wide range of problems international students face, like language acquisition, homesickness and grief, encountering a new culture and various unknown factors, feelings of inferiority, and the loss of their social and familial networks can make it “frightening to establish a sense of belonging” (p.230). Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, (2003) stated that “such concerns can lead to life-disrupting stress” (p.333). The researcher’s experience is that Saudi students are not familiar with counseling because it is not common or acceptable in their culture. Counseling is only sought by people who are seriously mentally ill and so there is a stigma against using mental health services. “Counseling and therapy are not commonly sought in Middle Eastern countries. People are more likely to turn to family members and friends for support” (Al-Qasem, 1987, p. 57). However, when students are isolated from their social support, counseling can be incredibly valuable. Teachers who are aware of the psychological stress that international students are under, and have taken the time to get to know their students, are in a key position to inform students about the counseling services available to them.

While participants benefited from academic services such as the writing center and the library, most of them did not have positive experiences with extra-curricular and social activities on campus. Rabia and Karkouti (2017) found that friendship, social support, and extracurricular activities contributed greatly to the adjustment and success of the international students in their study (p.347). Tinto (1975) concluded that the more positive social interaction international students have with other students on campus, the more likely they are to stay in school and be committed to completing their education at the university (p.92).

Saudi students often feel alienated from their domestic peers, and would like teachers to play a more active role in facilitating student relationships. American educators should anticipate potential communication challenges when working with international students, and they should provide opportunities for collaborative work between domestic and international students, developing strategies to help students overcome language difficulties and facilitate multicultural interactions. In a diverse classroom, improvement in responsive communication reduces misunderstanding and fosters trust between instructors and students. Also, a teacher's communication style provides an example for students who want to interact with others. In this approach, the instructor plays a central role in caring and communicating in an open-minded way with diverse students. The participants suggested adjustment strategies, first, teachers need to understand and accept racial and cultural diversity in their classroom, and then set the example for other students. They can do this by including opportunities for students to learn about each other and their cultural backgrounds and using teaching activities that value cultural and racial diversity.

Findings indicated that including activities that recognize and value diversity in the classroom facilitated the learning process for the Saudi international students in the study. The researcher believes that classroom instruction that incorporates learning about the cultural and educational backgrounds of all students will be a benefit to the instructors and the students, as well as the entire university and the larger community. Levine (2016) stated that, “by talking and listening to people different from ourselves, we learn and enlarge our understanding” (p.32). Students in American classrooms in recent years are more diverse than ever. They represent different ethnicities, races, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and they speak other languages than English. These students often bring a wide range of academic and social abilities and skills. Although the participants in this study stated that their American teachers valued racial and cultural diversity, their experience was that many instructors did not include any activities that recognize and support racial and cultural diversity in their classrooms. It is hoped that since there is an overall attitude of support for racial and cultural diversity in higher education, bringing greater awareness of the importance of cultural recognition to the academic success of international students will lead to efforts to make this support visible in the classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To help Saudi international students succeed when studying at institutions in the United States, universities, teachers, and the Ministry of Saudi Education may find it helpful to be aware of the teacher-student relationship experiences shared by the Saudi students in this study. To understand their experiences, it is advisable to know the academic and cultural background of Saudi international students. It is also essential to listen to and understand the experiences and perceptions shared by Saudi students.

The interviews in this study were designed to bring to light the barriers that Saudi international students experience in their relationships with their instructors. There were some suggestions made of things that instructors can do to facilitate learning, but the findings were primarily focused on the need to be seen and recognized as Saudi students and the problems that stem from a lack of recognition and understanding from instructors of what it means to be a Saudi student. Therefore, many of the recommendations in this section are drawn from the researcher's own experience and from other resources.

Recommendations for administrators at American universities

The researcher believes that universities that recruit large numbers of international students, and benefit financially from those students, should make it a priority to meet these student's needs, and cannot use lack of finances as an excuse. The findings of this study indicate that instructors are in the best position to get to know and understand the needs of international students, and that healthy, supportive relationships with their instructors is a primary factor in the academic success of Saudi international students. It

is recommended that American universities make it a priority to ensure that their instructors receive the training, resources, and support needed to help international students adjust and succeed at their school.

One recommendation for U.S. universities is to provide paid mandatory training for their instructors in how to support international students. It is not within the scope of this study to recommend how this should be accomplished. However, there are a variety of multicultural educational theories that can be drawn upon to design a training course. Alnawar (2015) suggests a combination of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) in order to address the needs of students across a spectrum of races and cultures. Alnawar defines CRT as an “academic discipline focused upon the application of critical theory, a critical examination of society and culture, to the intersection of race, law, and power” (p. 7). Ladson-Billings (1995) was instrumental in developing CRP, a pedagogical system which emphasizes the need for instructors to know the backgrounds of their students and implement teaching methods that are inclusive of the full range of diversity in the classroom. Not only would international students benefit if instructors were to receive training based on theories such as these, but domestic students would benefit as well.

Class lists could be structured such that when an instructor gets the list of their students, they have access to a brief description of each student with some information about where they are from, educational background, and language proficiency. This way instructors can easily access information about each student, and in conjunction with the training mentioned above about working with international students, they can arrive on the first day of class with some understanding of the challenges that their students face.

These brief student descriptions could also be linked to an online database about the challenges with which different student populations struggle.

Because it is unrealistic to expect instructors to meet all of the needs of the international student body, a second recommendation for U.S. universities is to ensure that campus facilities meant to serve international students are doing their jobs effectively. Cooperation between instructors and campus services should be emphasized. During teacher training sessions instructors can be educated about the resources available to international students and encouraged to invite representatives from those services to their classes, or take their classes on tours of the library and other campus facilities. All departments, for example registration and accounting, should be staffed with people who are knowledgeable about international students and their needs, or international students could be recruited to work in these offices. Libraries and writing centers should receive training about how to serve international students, and offer workshops to teach international students how to use their services. It is important for instructors and directors of campus resources to cooperate in meeting the needs of the international student body, and to be supported by the university administration.

Although most universities already offer orientation programs for their students, it would be beneficial to have a comprehensive orientation workshop for international students. The workshop could provide information and guidelines about things such as university policies on intellectual ownership and plagiarism and expectations for classroom behavior and participation. This could also be an opportunity to help international students meet and interact with faculty and domestic students and begin integrating in the social life of the university.

A fourth recommendation for U.S. universities is to consider extending the policies that ensure equal access and learning opportunities for all students to international students. One policy might be to create a line in the teacher's syllabus to welcome international students and inform them of their rights to campus resources, similar to the statements regarding students with special needs.

Finally, the international and Saudi students who come to study at universities in the United States are not only contributing diversity and millions in university revenue, but they are peaceful ambassadors who bring and carry a right positive image from the host country to their country when they go back.

Recommendations for Instructors

The findings of this study indicate that one of the most important things a teacher can do to support Saudi international students is to recognize and value racial and cultural diversity in the classroom. Get to know students. Take time to learn who they are, and where they are from. Learn about the cultural and educational differences between the Saudi and American educational systems as outlined in the previous sections on Saudi and American education. Find out about individual needs by getting to know each student. Knowing that their teachers are interested in them as individuals will help them succeed. Know something about the educational background of the students and let them know how expectations in U.S. universities are different. Let students know what kind of interaction is expected and appropriate in class and in communications outside of class. Understanding cultural differences, allows teachers to design courses that account for the diverse backgrounds of their students while helping students meet learning outcomes.

Instructors should design courses that are inclusive and don't disadvantage students who didn't grow up here or share the same culture.

Teachers who value cultural and racial diversity set an example for students, and are able to facilitate relationships between international students and their classmates. There are many ways that a teacher can model acceptance and appreciation of diversity. The Saudi students in the study appreciated opportunities to let their teachers and other students know who they are. Allowing all students in a class to introduce themselves and say something about themselves, their culture, and their background at the beginning of the semester can create a context of support and understanding that will foster learning throughout the semester. Continue to provide assignments and activities that give students an opportunity to share their culture and background and to get to know one another. Instructors can display a world map in the classroom and let students show where they are from. When asking the class to work together, assign students to groups rather than expecting them to sort it out themselves, and make sure that international students are dispersed throughout the groups rather than ending up all in one group. Help other students to appreciate the knowledge and insights that international students bring to the classroom, and appreciate the struggle of learning new material in a new language.

Teachers should recognize that student-teacher relationships and communication are often very different in the schools where international students have received most of their education, and provide clear guidelines for what they expect from students and what students can expect from their teachers. Instructors should make time to talk to students after class and let them know how to contact them during office hours, and through email. Be aware that Saudi students are not used to having positive interactions with their

teachers outside of class, and may need encouragement to take advantage of office visits and email communications. In Saudi Arabia an office visit with an instructor has negative connotations and usually means that they are in trouble. Instructors should help Saudi international students understand that they are there to help and that office hours are a way to get individualized attention and support.

It is important for instructors to be aware than conventions of respect vary between Saudi and American culture. For example, in Saudi classrooms it is considered impolite for a student to make eye contact with their teacher. In many cultures, including Saudi Arabian culture, it is unacceptable for students to express their own opinions in class, particularly if their ideas contradict their teacher. Keeping this in mind can help teachers be understanding of the challenges that Saudi students face when participating in class discussions. Students are expected to be quiet and listen during class, so Saudi students feel they are being argumentative and disrespectful if they share their opinions in a class discussion. Setting clear expectations for participation and discussion at the beginning of the semester can help Saudi student to feel more confident about joining in class discussions.

Saudi students are familiar and usually comfortable with classroom lectures; however, depending on their language proficiency, understanding lectures can be difficult. It is easier for them to absorb information from lectures if instructors remember to speak slowly and clearly, and explain difficult words, or write them out on the board. Using visual aids such as PowerPoint, videos, and graphics can be a great help to international students. While lecturing, instructors can pay attention to the students and allow for questions if someone does not understand. A good instructor can tell when they

are losing their students, and when their students are engaged and following what they are saying.

It is common for international students to require more time for assignments because of the language barrier. Instructors should keep this in mind when designing tests and assignments. Assignments or tests that students can take home or do online allow more time for students to complete them, and with less stress. Instructors should be aware that textbook reading can be particularly difficult and time consuming for students who are in the process of learning English. Providing an outline or summary of the assigned chapters can be a great tool for international students. Offering opportunities for make up, or extra credit assignments is another way to accommodate international students' need for more time. When making assignments and giving tests, instructors should consider the purpose and what is going to help the student retain and use the information in the long run.

Writing is another area that Saudi students struggle with, not only because of the language barrier, but because Saudi education does not typically employ a significant amount of writing assignments. Also, because Arabic is not a Latin based language and uses a completely different alphabet, writing in English is particularly challenging. Saudi international students are not used to coming up with their own topics and are used to highly structured writing projects assigned by their instructors. Working on writing projects in stages, getting feedback, making revisions, and acknowledging their progress and improvement will help students become better writers and gain a deeper understanding of the content of their writing assignments.

Instructors should be aware that there is no concept of intellectual ownership in Saudi culture, so there are often misunderstandings around using and citing the work of others. Instructors should make sure that their students have a thorough understanding of the university's intellectual ownership policies, and the seriousness of plagiarism and help them understand the difference between direct quotes and paraphrasing. Even after nearly a decade of studying in the United States, the researcher still struggles with an understanding of intellectual ownership and plagiarism. Teaching students how to take notes and summarize can help them to absorb and retain information from their reading. Giving opportunities to use, repeat, and reframe what they have read can help students internalize what they have learned through reading. This will also give them excellent practice in paraphrasing, and help them to avoid issues of plagiarism when writing papers.

Although Saudi students are not used to working in groups during class it is very common for them to work together outside of class, sharing answers to tests and collaborating on assignments in ways that might be considered cheating at an American university. It is important to give clear guidelines about the kinds of cooperation and collaboration are acceptable outside of class.

Teachers should be aware and honest about their perceptions of international students. If a teacher has had experiences with plagiarism or cheating in the past, it is important that they don't generalize that problem to all students of the same country. Particularly with plagiarism, try to understand the cultural expectations that may have led to the problem and avoid misunderstandings with future students by setting clear standards and making sure all students understand and have the resources to comply.

Teachers are often busy and overworked, but by getting to know their students and their student needs, they are in a position to guide students to other resources that can support their learning in the classroom. Teachers who are familiar with the campus resources available to students are in an ideal position to recommend those resources and have information available to give to students when the need arises. Teachers can advocate for international students. If a teacher sees a need that campus resources are not meeting they can speak to the international student offices, or when appropriate, speak directly to the resource center that is most suited to providing the needed service.

Many universities in the U.S. have webpages devoted to specific tips for instructors. A particularly detailed one is the University of Washington's Center for Teaching and Learning page, "Strategies for Teaching International and Multilingual Students" (2018).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Saudi international students face some transitional difficulties in the relationship with their instructors. Instructors are usually the first line where help and resources can be provided. Instructors need to focus on the challenges faced by international students and provide adequate support for them. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations for teachers, universities, and the Saudi Ministry of Education on how to assist Saudi international students in becoming successful were generated. Firstly, the universities should have an English program for international students to communicate efficiently both in academic and in nonacademic settings. Secondly, U.S. instructors should be aware of the value of embracing and recognizing international students and appreciating the diversity in their classroom. Instructors should encourage American students to develop intercultural competence to interact with international students. Thirdly, instructors should guide international students in finding all of the academic resources available including counseling because international students need guidance to succeed in their academic learning.

It is recommended that SACM and the Ministry of Education offer Saudi students a special orientation program before coming to the United States introducing them to U.S. culture and overall American academic culture. Such efforts might include seminars by experts from the United States, as well as Saudi students who previously studied in the United States sharing their own experiences studying at American universities. Saudi schools should also offer intensive English language preparation for students who plan to

attend universities in the United States. It is important that Saudi students are educated about the different expectations, policies, and standards that they will encounter when studying at U.S. universities.

American institutions are beginning to recognize the value of their international students and provide greater support for them. Hopefully this study can contribute to a continuing effort to support Saudi students at American institutions. Helping Saudi international students to succeed will lead to greater understanding between the people of Saudi Arabia and America. Students who have had a positive experience studying abroad will return to their own country as ambassadors and advocates of the country in which they studied. Investing in international students and providing positive multicultural education can help the world to feel more unified.

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