Positioning of ESL Saudi Women and Challenges They Face While Learning English in the United States

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Using the positioning theory of Davies and Harre' (1999), researchers interviewed ESL Arabic speaking women about issues and challenges of studying English in one mid-south US university. Learning about the social and cultural backgrounds of this specific group can positively impact their English language learning and educational experiences. By helping this group of learners succeed, educators can impact not only these women, but the societies they are going to teach upon returning home. The results indicated that participants took multiple positionings; 1) positioning in relation to gender identity, 2) positioning as a factor for change through education.

INTRODUCTION

There are large numbers of English Language Learners (ELLs) studying in the United States. Most of these students learn English to meet the minimum English proficiency requirements mandated by US universities before they enroll in academic courses. According to *Education USA* data, there were 886,052 international students studying in the US during the 2013/2014 academic year. It is important that educators understand not only the linguistic needs for the international students, but also the cultural and social needs to better help them reach their academic goals.

Language learning is a complex process because it involves the interaction between many different variables to help learners acquire their target language. Some of the variables are internal and external motivations, age, length of language exposure, and language aptitude. The dynamics of language input and output often studied by applied linguists may not be ample to explain language acquisition. Research also indicates that social, cultural, and political contexts are important factors to understanding second language (L2) acquisition and usage (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Scholars have offered many theories and approaches to explain language acquisition, such as positioning theory, critical theory, discourse analysis approach, sociocultural approach, and post-structural approach. In this research, positioning theory and discourse analysis are used to understand the ELLs' feelings toward language learning. Analysis of discourse by second language acquisition theorists and researchers has indicated that positioning theory can help explain issues surrounding power and status (Harré & van Langenhove (1999; Kayi-Aydar, 2012); Yoon (2008). Preliminary research on this topic revealed that some Arabic-speakers felt "located" in their contexts in ways that made study in the US difficult. Although this data was gathered in face-to-face interviews, it can be argued that it is "…shared assumptions about [their lives]…" that here

"...influence small scale interactions..." such as these responses to interview questions (Harré 2008, p. 30). The purpose of this study was to understand the cultural and linguistic needs of ELL Arabic speaking adult women from one Arabic-speaking country learning English in the US.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This brief literature review is divided into five sections to help the reader understand major components of how these Arabic speaking women position themselves and/or felt positioned in a new culture while studying English abroad. These sections are: positioning theory, culture and positioning, gender differences and opportunity in relation to culture, overall L2 exposure and age, and marital status and L2 learning.

Positioning Theory

Positioning Theory is widely used in educational fields. Harré (2008) defined positioning theory as "the study of the nature, formation, influence and ways of change of local systems of rights and duties as shared assumptions about them influence small scale interactions" (p. 30). Harré and van Langenhove (1999) indicated that positioning as a concept assists scholars to understand how social interactions develop within a certain context. Kayi-Aydar (2012) reported that using the positioning theory of Davies and Harré (1990) helped her understand the complexity of L2 acquisition related to learners' positions in classrooms. Although positioning theory is generally used to analyze discourse between and among speakers, we have used it here to see how individual actors position themselves as members of a community currently studying in a new language/cultural community that is largely different from their own in respect to language, culture and religion.

ELLs can position themselves negatively or positively (or in ways neither negative or positive) depending on many different factors; however, it is essential to coach ELLs to position themselves positively while learning an additional language. Yoon (2008) reported that encouraging individuals to position themselves positively is important to meeting their needs. Consequently, studying the ELLs' social and cultural needs is crucial to educators whose work it is to assure their linguistic and social needs are met and to assure they can achieve their language goals.

Culture and Positioning
Culture

English learners studying in the United States come from various regions, educational backgrounds, languages and cultures. Each educational system has its own teaching strategies when it comes to teaching an L2. To understand the process of learning an L2 by language learners, educators should have adequate knowledge about students' cultures and literacy development. ELLs from any country encounter social and cultural challenges when living abroad. Many universities focus on helping language learners overcome the cultural challenges they experience while learning their L2 through a variety of different intercultural programs and activities. However, Lane (2002) believed that many universities and community colleges encounter difficulties in designing the types of instructional programs ELLs need to develop the skills necessary to adapt and be successful while learning their L2. ELLs experience different types of challenges than native English speakers because ELLs also face cultural and linguistic differences. There has been a considerable focus on students' oral and written proficiency but less attention has been given to students' social and cultural needs (McKay & Wong, 1996). Poole (1992) believed that educators must pay close attention to cultural aspects in ELLs' classrooms.

Culture is an essential component in the field of L2 acquisition because culture provides an informational frame which might provide data as to the individuals' values formation, positions and behaviors, and ways of communicating (Bordon, 1991). Ladson-Billing (1994) and Noddings and Shore (1984) suggested that teaching students goes beyond linguistic needs, teachers' responsibilities should include appreciating students' cultural and social needs. Roswell, Sztainbok, and Blaney (2007) reported that L2 cannot be adequately assessed by tests or quizzes with a single focus on vocabulary

comprehension because of cultural assumptions, which might be similar or different from the learners' backgrounds. The findings of this study revealed that there is a relationship between culture and language that leads to shaping literacy.

Positioning

Moghaddam asserted that "positioning on any level absolutely requires the inclusion of cultural considerations" (1999, p. 73). When international students arrive in the US, they start dealing with a variety of different issues related to their ability to adjust to new cultures and systems. According to Araujo (2011), international students studying in American universities may face the same problems American students are facing, but they also deal with unique challenges related to cultural differences, language restrictions, and sometimes discrimination and prejudice. According to Hattar-Pollara and Meleis (1995), Arab immigrants, (in this case, Jordanian women), have "a limited knowledge base regarding the dynamics and problems involved in their integration into their new society" (p. 521) Also, the women experienced pressure due to "immigration to and settlement in the United States" (p. 536). These women also felt lonely and isolated from the dominant culture due to language barriers and social aspects. Hattar-Pollara and Meleis further stated that failing to master the necessary skills and not comprehending the dominant culture add more pressure to women who are trying to learn English while trying to accomplish their daily living tasks.

Gender Differences and Opportunities in Relation to Culture

In the field of L2 acquisition, researchers work on factors that have an impact on L2 learning such as gender differences in relation to culture. Yepez (1994) examined gender history and female silence in some cultures and how that silence can create unfair opportunities to practice the target language in ESL classrooms and hinder these women's voices in the mainstream classrooms. Arshad, Ali, and Chaudhary (2013) examined the impact of gender differences in learning ESL among people of Pakistani culture. Participants from this study were from two gender groups, 215 were males and 215 were females, all from both rural and urban areas. The researchers concluded that the role of the participants' society or community cannot be ignored because students spent five hours in educational settings on a daily basis while they spent the rest of the time at places outside of schools. Thus, students' academic performance depends on both educational context as well as the community they are living in.

Overall L2 Exposure and Age

English language exposure has been studied by many researchers. It is not a new topic. Research study done by Gathercole (2002) concluded that learning vocabulary words in the target language can only occur after achieving a minimum level of exposure. Additional research by Dale, Dionne, Eley, and Plomin (2000) found that exposure to the target language's vocabulary words while learning an L2, compared to studying those words in isolation, has a positive impact on acquiring an L2. Furthermore, adult ELLs achieve a high proficiency level in the target language when they have been exposed to the target language earlier in their life compared to other adult learners (Krashen, Long, & Scarcella, 1979). Nguyen, Warren, and Fehring (2014) showed that limited exposure to the target language can hinder the process of learning in ESL classrooms.

Arguably, ELLs at the pre-puberty stage can acquire an L2 with little or no accent after 3-5 years of exposure to the target language (Asher & Garcia, 1969; Fathman, 1975; Oyama, 1976; Seliger, Krashen, & Ladefoged, 1982; Tahta, Wood, & Loewenthal, 1981; Williams, 1979). On the other hand, adult ELLs tend to retain an accent even after 3-5 years of exposure to the target language. Adult ELLs take more time to learn English as their L2 and they preserve a characteristic accent-linked pronunciation. Flege indicated that the success of learning an L2 is based on the age of L2 learners. In addition, learning an L2 before puberty is more effective, quick, and takes less effort than post puberty age. Flege (2010) further stated ELLs' proficiency rises with the amount of usage of an L2.

Marital Status and L2 Learning

An extensive review of the literature found a gap in the literature in explaining the relationship between marital status and language acquisition. However, marital status may well be one of the factors that affect L2 acquisition especially among women from cultures that have clearly delineated gender roles. According to Poyrazli, and Kavanaugh (2006), married international students show a lower level of social adjustment compared to single students among 149 participants from five different American universities. Socially, single international students experience less adjustment strains than international married students. Living, economics, and life responsibilities take a large amount of time and leave little time to study and advance in academia (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006). Doctoral students generally face fewer adjustment difficulties than Master students in relation to education and English acquisition. Poyrazli and Kavanaugh concluded that there is a connection between academic achievements, marital status, ethnicity, and adjustment difficulties for international graduate students in the US.

There is a significant gap in the literature in addressing adult ELLs' needs in the process of acquiring ESL. According to Reeves (2006) and Rueda and Garcia (2003), there is a weakness in the literature in addressing the needs of adult ESL learners. In addition, a study conducted by Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) showed that the field of adult ESL has a gap in the literature. A study by Futrell, Gomez, and Bedden (2003) found that 60% of university deans believe that their universities failed to address the language, social, and cultural needs of adult ELLs in their curriculum.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the cultural and linguistic needs of ESL Arabic speaking Saudi woman while learning English abroad. Drawing on positioning theory, the following questions guided the study:
1. How do ESL Saudi women position themselves in a US institution in relation to their culture and gender identity?
2. What are the challenges these participants face while learning English abroad?
3. What do Saudi women suggest to future ESL students and ESL instructors to help in overcoming the linguistic and cultural challenges?

This research used a qualitative design to gain insight into the participants' experiences and feelings in relation to the challenges they encounter while learning English aboard. Merriam (2009) stated that "Research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people's lives" (p.1). Case study design plays an essential role in educational fields because it helps educators better understand a specific phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Hatch (2002) found that qualitative research can disclose participants' points of view through asking questions to identify how each participant validates their own experiences. In this study, the researchers interviewed five Saudi female students about their cultural and linguistic experiences while studying English in one Intensive English Program (IEP) in one mid-south university in the US.

Setting

All participants were enrolled in an IEP (a professional academic organization that provides English language training to international students to enable them to join US colleges and universities). This IEP has six English proficiency levels. Students attend five days a week for a total of 25 hours per week. The IEP requires students to take an exam at the beginning to measure students' linguistic proficiency level and to place students accordingly. Graduate students must graduate from level six with an average of 80% or above to obtain a TOEFL waiver to enroll in most US universities. TOEFL is one of the most widely used placement scores by US universities and colleges admission offices for international students. Undergraduate students may complete level five with an average of 80% or above for each language skill to enroll in the US colleges if they could not obtain a minimum TOEFL score or other equivalent language proficiency exam.

Participants

The participants were selected based on their nationality and their enrollment in the university IEP. The researchers were interested to see how Saudi women describe their roles while learning English in the US in relation to their different language proficiency, age, major of study, average of English language exposure, and marital status and how they describe the responsibilities of that marital status. The five ELL Arabic Saudi women who participated in this study were Noor, Zainab, Nada, Qamar, and Amal (all names are pseudonyms).

Noor had completed three English levels at the IEP by the time of the interview. She started learning English when she was eleven years-old in her country. She is married and has five children who live with her in the US. She studied basic English for ten years before coming to the US. Noor's daily exposure to the English language without the ELP hours was an average of eight to nine hours because her duties included helping her children in school work, watching television and listening to radio by English speakers, and other daily tasks that provided exposure to English language. Noor had a Bachelor's degree in food science from Saudi Arabia. Her goal after graduating from the IEP was to be a master's student in the college of art and sciences or in education.

At the time of the interview, Zainab had completed five English levels, three of them were in an English center in Washington D.C. and two at the IEP. She started learning English when she was eleven years-old in her country. Zainab was the only one of the participants who spoke three languages, including Arabic, English, and Korean and had taken English courses at another US institution prior to joining the IEP. She studied basic English for seven years before coming to the US. Her daily exposure to English excluding the ELP hours was an average of seven to eight hours because she communicated in English with her husband. Zainab's husband is an Arabic speaker, who had completed his English courses and joined the university. Her husband encouraged her to speak English everywhere including communicating with him. He motivated her by surprising her with gifts after noticing an improvement in her English. Zainab tried to have English speaker friends and to attend cultural events that would offer her practice in English. Zainab's goal after completing the required English courses was to obtain a Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. degrees in College of Engineering.

Nada had completed two English levels at the IEP at the time of the interview. She started learning English when she was thirteen years-old in Saudi Arabia. She studied basic English for seven years before coming to the US. Nada's daily exposure to English excluding the IEP hours was between three to four hours. Nada has a Bachelor's degree in physics from Saudi Arabia. Her goal after graduating from the IEP was to attain a Master's degree in Nano-technology/Physics. She was divorced and has one child who lives with her.

Qamar completed three English levels at the IEP by the time of the interview. She started learning English when she was thirteen years-old in her home country. She studied basic English for thirteen years before coming to the US. Her average daily exposure to English excluding the IEP hours was between one to two hours because she lived with her brother and she communicated with him in Arabic mostly. Also, it was not easy for her to go out of her house for purposes of English practice without permission from her brother and family in Saudi Arabia.

Amal completed three English levels at the IEP by the time of the interview. She started learning English when she was thirteen years-old in her country. She studied basic English for thirteen years before coming to the US. The average of daily exposure to English excluding the IEP hours was one hour because she spent most of her time with her ill son at home. She did not have child and housekeeping support from her husband. Consequently, she had a little time to practice her English. See Table 1 for participants' demographic information.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Pseudonym	Noor	Zainab	Nada	Qamar	Amal
Age category	36-45	18-25	26-35	26-35	18-25
Major	Food Sciences	Genetic Engineering	Nano Technology	Math	Math
# of English courses in the US	3-4	5-6	1-2	3-4	3-4
Average hours of daily English exposure out of IEP	8-9	7-8	3-4	1-2	1
# of spoken languages including English	2	3	2	2	2
Marital Status	Married	Married	Divorced	Single	Married
# of children	5	0	1	0	1

Note. N = 5

Data Collection and Analysis

The data used were collected from five Arabic speaking female students studying English in an academic IEP at a mid-south research university. All participants were from Saudi Arabia. Creswell (2013) stated that case study design is the most appropriate to gain an in-depth understanding of participants. Creswell suggested that using 4-5 participants for case studies "should provide ample opportunity to identify them of the case study as well as conduct cross-case theme analysis" (p. 157). In this study, we invited five Arabic speaking women to participate. The researchers used a single-case design with multiple participants, as recommended by the Merriam (2009) study, because the participants shared a similar cultural and linguistic background. Having a sampling of multiple-participants helped the researchers "strengthen the precision, validity, stability, and trustworthiness of the findings" (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2013, p. 33).

All data were collected by one researcher because she spoke Arabic. The researcher used note taking and audio recording to record participants' responses. All interviews were conducted face-to-face during students' lunch time (11:30 am-1:00 pm.) based on the participants' time preference. Nada, Qamar, and Amal's interviews took approximately an hour each. Noor and Zainab's interviews took approximately 100 minutes individually over two days. Noor and Zainab's interviews were lengthier because they had been in the US longer than the other participants and they had more information and more to explain related to the research questionnaire. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The researcher gave the participants the freedom to use English or Arabic to answer the research questions. When needed, the researcher translated the questions into Arabic to help the participants understand the questions well and answer them correctly. The researcher translated the Arabic responses into English. Then, all the participants' responses were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for the coding process.

The researchers used two data analysis phases. First, the researchers read each transcript without coding, and then they entered the data line by line into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to try to identify similarities and differences and to specify any powerful quotes stated by the interviewees. After that, the researchers read the transcripts multiple times and started coding the data using color coding to begin

identifying themes. Second, the researchers read the data in regards to positioning to identify the type of positioning that these participants used while learning English. They hoped to grasp the positioning of these Saudi women studying English in the US and how that locating impacted their access to available learning opportunities.

Limitations

The IEP had many restrictions on researchers even though most participants are adults. The IEP limits researchers' observation time for data collection. Also, participants had limited time to meet with the researchers due to school and family responsibilities. Participants in the IEP usually have limited time to interact outside of their classes because of the workload and family responsibilities. In addition, the study was limited to speakers from only one country. The participants had different ages and marital status. They were interested in different majors at different levels (graduate and undergraduate). It is difficult to say if those differences had an impact on their answers or views of themselves and their positions in their home society or their status here. Also, due to the limited time of researchers and especially of the participants, there was no number-checking or peer debriefing done.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand the positioning of Arabic speaking women studying ESL and to investigate the challenges Arabic women face in learning English while living in and adjusting to US culture. The results of this qualitative study revealed that participants took multiple positionings for different reasons. The primary positionings that the participants took were: positioning in relation to gender identity and positioning as a factor for change through education. In this qualitative research, we aimed to answer the following questions:
1. How do ESL Saudi women position themselves in a US institution in relation to their culture and gender identity?
2. What are the challenges these participants face while learning English abroad?
3. What do Saudi women suggest to future ESL students and ESL instructors to help in overcoming the linguistic and cultural challenges?

Positioning in Relation to Gender Identity

All participants agreed that their female gender identity impacted their English language learning; some participant said positively, some said negatively, and some said both positively and negatively. Noor indicated that her female identity had a positive impact on her English learning. She indicated that this positioning is mainly due to self-confidence: "females learn better and faster than males and they have special methods in reading that enable them to learn faster." However, Amal explained that her female identity had a negative impact on her English learning process "because I am a woman from a conservative family, I cannot study and practice outside English courses." Saudi females often feel shy when talking in front of males and will not attempt to get help from male teachers inside or outside of class.

Another reason for the positioning by Saudi women as having difficulty as students was because most Middle Eastern culture relies more on females to conduct house work and child care, spousal care, cooking, and cleaning. Females have more responsibilities at home, which leaves them with little time to study and practice English. In their home country, Saudi females usually try to get help from immediate family members or female friends with higher English proficiency levels. In addition, they usually get help doing their housekeeping work from immediate family members. However, when studying abroad, women are forced to do most of the domestic work themselves without external support, something they are not accustomed to. Consequently, they have limited time to network and study with classmates, or to interact with native speakers of English.

Zainab, Nada, and Qamar revealed that their gender identity had a negative and, to a lesser degree, positive impact on them while acquiring their second language. It is important to mention that all

participants came from a culture that considers the interaction between females and males unusual. In the US, they find themselves in classes that contain all genders, and they are required to communicate and participate in class activities. Being in multi-gender classes made these females uncomfortable, especially whenever there were Arabic-speaking male students in the same classroom. Zainab said "Some Arabic males look negatively to [sic] Arabic females talking with males." Also, in the Arabic cultures of the Gulf countries' many males do not give permission to females to study or interact with male students. Zainab also stated "If I were a male, I would learn more because males can go outside of the house and practice English, and I would not need to take permission from my family to interact, I would immediately go and practice." Thus, females often feel isolated because they are not able to practice as much as they wish and because they lack the time to associate with native speakers and classmates. At the same time, Zainab, Nada, and Qamar mentioned that their gender identity had a positive impact on them because they can go to school and study just like male students, and they can learn about other cultures.

Positioning as an Agent for Change

The researchers wanted to highlight Zainab's discourse because it was a powerful and took different positioning from the other participants. Zainab shared the same culture, language, religion, country, and challenges related to those variables with the other interviewees, but she positioned herself as responsible for changing her society through education. Before coming to the US to study English, Zainab promised herself when she came to the US that she would communicate with male students. In addition, she kept reminding herself that interacting with male classmates and instructors is not a "bad" thing, since it is for educational purposes: "interacting with male classmates is something normal in schools." Zainab strongly supported the idea that interaction with male students is crucial to improving females' English skills.

Zainab looked at her female gender identity as influential like male gender identity because "women are half of the society," so they must have their role in any society. Moreover, she indicated that, even if a society or a culture marginalized women, women should stand up for them: "If all women stand [up for] to their right, our society will change and accept." She further stated that "everything at the beginning is hard and people refuse it, but after a while they will get used to it." She also expressed her sad feelings toward most of the women of the Gulf countries when they must do things that they are not comfortable with to satisfy their male family members: "Females are sometimes do something that they don't like, but they do them because of the pressure of their families and spouses."

Zainab indicated that a lot of her female classmates from the Gulf Countries have conflicting ideas about interacting with male students: "We have to be in groups that have males and females, females from my country don't want to speak and complete the task with males, especially when that male is from their home country. They interact with males if they are from different cultures, but don't do the same with individuals from same cultures."

There are two main differences in the way Zainab was raised. First, Zainab is different because of the way her family influenced her. Second, she is different because of the effect of her father's work environment. Zainab was raised in a house that encourages females to be independent. The influence of Zainab's family, especially her father, on her positioning was clear through her conversation: "My dad treats us equally, I mean, my brother, my sisters, and I. He taught us to be independent. My brother, my sisters, and I worked equally at home. After I got marries [sic], my husband and I have agreed on dividing duties and chores at home as well, so we both can succeed." Furthermore, she stated that her father's words had a huge impact on her personality and the way she thinks:

"I still remember my dad's words about me when I was little. I used to not care a lot about my school work, even though I had never received a bad grade. However, my mother was a school principal, and she always wanted me to be at the front line of everybody else. One night, she got mad at me and my dad told her, she will be the one who you are going to be proud of. I will work to make my dad's words true. My dad's words have changed my life and my grades since that time I heard him talking to my mom. I want to make my family proud of me."

As a results, Zainab wanted to appreciate her father's way in raising her by being successful. Clearly, Zainab positioned herself differently from the other Arabic females that study with her in the IEP. This is

mainly because her father worked in a multicultural work environment with people from different nationalities and cultures, and his family lived with him in a place close to his work. Zainab said "I lived in a multicultural place and that's why I am probably different from the majority of females from my country. I don't have friends that share the same culture with me in my country and even I don't know how to deal with them." In summary, the impact of the way Zainab's father positioned her has been powerful. He raised her in a way that helped her become self-confident and understanding of the multicultural nature of American schools. This later helped her to adjust faster to the American university way of life and to perform better at the IEP.

Main Challenges Saudi Women Face While Learning English
   Most of the challenges participants reported facing while learning English were cultural and linguistic. Culturally, the participants listed the following challenges: a lack of interaction with native speakers, which directly related to cultural issues such as males-females' interactions; and some cultural rules that restrict women's right on when, what, where, and with whom they could interact. This directly impacted the amount of native speaker input and classmate practice time they had. Moreover, participants listed lack of enough study time due to child care, housekeeping, and spousal care, which they related to the Middle Eastern background as well.
   Linguistically, Arabic speaking women reported the following challenges: first language interference with the target language, and difficulties with specific English skills such as grammar rules, writing direction, and vocabulary use. There are many differences between the Arabic and the English languages that make English acquisition a challenging and time consuming issue. These differences between Arabic and English constitute a major pressure on Arabic students learning English. It is important to note that, when asked about the linguistic issues, the participants briefly described some linguistic issues. However, that was not the case when they were asked about the cultural issues. Then they had lengthy and multiple topics to describe.
   The participants faced other challenges while learning English, which they linked to social and personal issues, such as social media distractions. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were reported as time consuming distractions by the participants, even though they were helpful for English acquisition in some cases. In addition to social challenges, the participants listed financial issues, time management, and home country issues, like home sickness and concern about political and social instability in their home countries, as personal challenges that they faced daily while learning English. Still, despite these things, linguistic and cultural challenges were the two main challenges participants reported confronting regularly in this research study. These challenges have negatively impacted the ability of the participants to acquire the target language and by extension impacted their ability to reach their ultimate academic goals.

Recommendations by the Participants to Future ESL Students
   The participants provided a set of recommendations to incoming females students. These centered around practicing English more and emphasizing an improved self-esteem. The following were the main recommendations offered by the participants to future international students in general and to Saudi women and by extension Arabic speaking women as well. These are specifically aimed at helping improve their English language skills:
   1. Practice reading and listening by reading English newspapers, books, stories, or watching English TV shows and/or listening to the news.
   2. Try to enroll in English courses before traveling abroad to study.
   3. Work on time management by setting priorities.
   4. Practice English speaking with native English speakers.
   5. Work on completing the assigned homework on a daily basis without delay.
   6. Practice speaking English even if you make mistakes.
   7. Use the help desk and sign up for office hours to get some support from ESL instructors.

8. Try to look for a native English speaking friend or a conversation partner to practice English on regular basis.

Practicing more English especially with native English speakers can help improve ELLs' language proficiency. Also, improving self-confidence plays an important role in helping Arabic females learn English faster. Society and family gender role differences of Saudi women from women in the US can isolate Saudi/Arabic-speaking women and limit their opportunities to practice their English. Moreover, the participants provided a set of recommendations to ESL instructors centered on encouraging students to practice English and attend cultural events. Also, the participants related that it is very important that ESL instructors understand the social and cultural needs of their female Arabic students.

Recommendations by the Participants to ESL instructors
1. Encourage students to attend cultural events.
2. Understand the cultural and social needs of international students, specifically Arabic females.
3. Encourage female students to be more active by giving them extra reading and/or listening assignments related to well-known female social figures to help empower them.
4. Encourage female students to overcome their fears and to participate more in class discussions.

The researchers believe that ESL instructors' involvement in the cultural and social needs of their Arabic-speaking female students can have a great positive impact on their English language learning.

DISCUSSION

In this research study, the researchers investigated the positioning of five Saudi women studying English in the US and to comprehend the difficulties these women face in learning English while living in and adjusting to new academic and cultural environments. In our analysis, researchers used positioning theory as the most appropriate way to analyze the data collected from the participants to understand through these conversations what positioning they took as international students and why they positioned themselves that way. Wood and Kroger (2000) declared that:

> Conversation analysts also attend to the discursive construction of identities and selves,
> but with greater attention to the details of interaction and without relying upon notions of
> cultural narratives or discourses. Positioning is an important concept in considerations of
> the way in which people are both producers of and produced by discourse. (p. 101)

It was crucial to understand how the five participants, Noor, Zainab, Nada, Qamar, and Amal, described themselves in relation to their culture and gender identity, and later how and why Zainab positioned herself differently compared to other Saudi females who were studying in the same IEP.

All participants agreed that their female gender identity affected their English language learning. The Middle Eastern society is a male-dominant society and sometimes marginalizes females. These ESL female participants were from educated families in their home countries, so they were excited about being able to study abroad and also about the challenges they faced. However, some cultural issues still impacted them negatively.

Most participants were married and had children living with them, and they listed challenges related to family, housekeeping and child care. These challenges took a large portion of their time and limited their ability to learn and practice English outside of IEP classes. In addition, all the participants started learning English between 11-13 years old. However, learning English in their home contexts meant learning simple English grammar and reading taught non-native English-speaking teachers who generally learned English in their home country. As a result, they had little or no authentic English learning experiences. Teachers who have not themselves lived in an English-speaking environment may not always be able to prepare students to go abroad. This explains many of the difficulties Middle Eastern students have when studying abroad and learning English from English speaking ESL instructors. The cultural, linguistic, social, and personal challenges the participants listed may represent what many of the Gulf Countries' female students go through while learning English abroad. It is impossible to generalize to any other setting based on one qualitative study of speakers from one country in one US setting. This is

a much-needed area of study. This study examined a few women from one Gulf Country. Further study is needed to understand if these challenges are similar to those of other Arabic-speaking countries.

CONCLUSION

Arabic female students face pressure due to cultural and social restrictions. English language instructors focus more on linguistic needs and less on social and cultural needs. Arabic-speaking female students believe they have more responsibilities than their male counterparts while learning English abroad, responsibilities such as housekeeping and child care. These responsibilities take time and limit their abilities to learn English because of limited exposure to English at home and outside the home. It is important that ESL instructors pay close attention to their Arabic-speaking female students and try to help them overcome these issues and succeed in their English learning. The main goal for most these women studying in the US is to complete their degrees and return home to help empower their societies. By helping this specific group of learners succeed, educators can impact not only these women, but the societies they are going to teach upon returning home. The future direction of this research should focus more on understanding the perceptions of ESL instructors on their Arabic-speaking female students. It is important to learn how these instructors position this group of students and how that type of positioning affects the students' learning experiences.

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