Exploring the role of acculturation in Saudi scholars abroad: An introspective study

Prof. Hamad Aldosari

College of languages and Translation, English department
King Khalid University

Dr. Mohamed A. Mekheimer

Previously, King Khalid University

Currently, Beni Suef University

Exploring the role of acculturation in Saudi scholars abroad: An introspective study

Prof. Hamad Aldosari

Dr. Mohamed A. Mekheimer

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of acculturation in assisting Saudi scholars abroad to learn and acquire English and the target culture in some English native-speakers' countries. It was an introspective study because the instruments asked the informants to recall and respond to the questions of the Acculturation Questionnaire and the in-depth semi-structured interviews. This research used a mixed methods research methodology to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for the present study. Therefore, the study sought to identify the factors that affected Saudi scholars' acculturation in western universities and the cultural dimensions (cognitive, affective or behavioral) that are instrumental for English language learning abroad. It also sought to recognize the features of the intercultural communication competence that enhance acculturation to the target language abroad with regard to English education. Finally, it sought to identify the role of gender and specialty in influencing acculturation in the sample of the study. Twenty-six participants were involved in the questionnaire study, of whom three cases were purposefully selected

to participate in the interviews for the case studies. Results showed that sociocultural challenges, cognitive and affective aspects of acculturation, intercultural communication and culture-behavioral aspects were the most influential factors that affect acculturation. Qualitative results also support these results, under-estimating the role of language skills in acculturation. Recommendations and suggestions for further research were forwarded at the end.

استكشــاف دور التثاقــف لــدى المبتعثيــن السـعوديين بالخـارج: دراسـة اسـتبطانية

أ.د. حمد شبيب الدوسري

د. محمد أمين مخيمر

الملخص:

كان الهدف مـن هـذه الدراسـة هـو استكشـاف دور التثاقف في مسـاعدة الباحثين السعوديين في الخارج على تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية والاستفادة منها وما يرتبط بهـا مـن الثقافـات المسـتهدفة في بعـض البلـدان الناطقـة باللغـة الإنجليزيـة. فهـذه دراسـة استبطانية؛ لأن الأدوات طلبت مـن المفحوصين أن يتذكروا ثم يجيبوا علـى أسـئلة اسـتبيان التثاقف والمقابـلات المتعمقة شـبه المقننة. كما اسـتخدم الباحثان منهجية تثليث البيانات لجمع كل من البيانات الكمية والنوعية لأغراض الدراسـة الحاليـة. لذلك سـعت الدراسـة إلى التعـرف علـى العوامـل التـي أثرت في مثاقفـة المبتعثين السـعوديين في الجامعـات الغربيـة والأبعاد الثقافيـة (المعرفية أو الوجدانيـة أو السـلوكية) التـي تسـاعدهم في تعلـم اللغـة الإنجليزيـة في الخـارج. كمـا سـعت إلى التعرف علـى ميزات الكفاءة التواصلية بين الثقافـات التي تعـزز التثاقف للغـة المسـتهدفة بالتعلـم في الخـارج فيمـا يتعلـق بتعلـم باللغـة الإنجليزيـة. وأخيـراً، سـعت الدراسـة إلى تحديـد دور الجنـس والتخصـص في التأثيـر علـى التثاقـف في عينـة الدراسـة. وقـد شـارك سـتة وعشـرون مفحوصـاً في الدراسـة الاستقصائية، وتم اختيـار ثلاث حـالات عـن قصـد للمشـاركة في المقابـلات الخاصـة بدراسـات الحالـة. وأظهرت النتائـج أن التحديـات الاجتماعيـة والثقافيـة والجوانـب المعرفيـة والوجدانيـة للتثاقـف والتواصـل بيـن الثقافـات والجوانـب الثقافيـة والسـلوكية هـي أكثـر العوامـل المؤثـرة التـي تؤثـر في التثاقف. كمـا تدعـم النتائـج النوعيـة هـذه النتائـج ، ممـا يقلـل مـن

دور المهارات اللغوية في التثاقف. كما انتهت الدراسة بوضع توصيات واقتراحات لمزيد من البحوث المستقبلية في ختام البحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التثاقف؛ المبتعثون السعوديون؛ الجامعات الغربية؛ منهجية تثليث البيانات في البحث.

Introduction

The relationship between language and culture is innate, inseparable and integrative. Second/foreign language acquisition or learning is a process of acculturation to the second or foreign culture (Alsahafi & Shin, 2017; Lytra, 2011). The target language learners, especially those sent abroad on scholarships for the study of the target language and/or a specific discipline of knowledge, will naturally seek to acquire the language as a minority exposed to the dominating culture of the majority who speak the target language (Lytra, 2011). Typically, when foreign language learners are exposed to this dominating culture, it is more probably, hypothetically speaking, that they will acquire the target language more easily and swiftly (Andrade, 2006; Bar, 2017; Karolak and Guta, 2015; Myles & Cheng, 2003).

In addition, in foreign language teaching settings in non-native countries and in acquisition settings in native-speakers' natural environments, linguistic competence incorporates an implicit, yet equally significant portion of the acquisition of cultural awareness skills, knowledge of self and others both in interpersonal and inter-societal interactions (Kim, 2016).

Available research explains how acculturation builds up to the development of language learning (Aguilar, 2010; Balboni & Caon, 2014; Becerra, 2015; Gonzalez & Pounds, 2018; Lopez & Bui, 2014; Mingsheng, 2016; Shao & Crook,

2015; Simona, 2016; Zhang, 2015). Briefly speaking at this phase, one can infer that acculturation to the target language culture involves some level of intercultural communication competence - a process that, in turn, involves linguistic competence and extra-linguistic competence, including the mental representations of language and its pertinent culture and their implementation in the social context, governed by the 'grammars' of socio-cultural competence (Balboni & Caon, 2014).

The Problem of the Study:

Currently, it is not uncommon to see people from different countries and cultures living, working or studying in other countries, especially easterners in the West (Byram, 1997). For example, Saudi Arabia sends millions of students to foreign countries, most commonly countries whose native tongue is English, to study or obtain expertise in different fields, academic, medical, military and others.

However, there are very few studies conducted in the Saudi environment to assess and/or develop how acculturation to English as a foreign language occurs (Wu & Alrabah, 2014). This study will tap into the role acculturation by introspecting the role of intercultural communication competence in outland Saudi scholars living in Britain in their English language learning compared to other MA and Ph.D. students of English studying for their higher studies in homeland Saudi universities.

The study will also tap into the perceptions of both samples of populations as to how acculturation enhances intercultural communication and linguistic competence in Saudi scholars inland and outland.

Research questions:

The main research question underlying this tentative study is:

What is the role of native and host cultures in English education and acculturation of Saudi scholars abroad?

Sub-questions:

1- What are the factors that affect Saudi scholars' acculturation in western universities?

2- What are the cultural dimensions (cognitive, affective or behavioral) that are instrumental for English language learning abroad?

3- What are the features of the intercultural communication competence that enhance acculturation to the target language abroad with regard to English education?

4- How do gender and specialty affect acculturation in the sample of the study?

Methodology and Data collection:

Method

This study employed a mixed methods design that involved quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments and analysis techniques to explore the sociocultural, linguistic and communicative challenges, experiences and transitions of Saudi scholars sent out on scholarships to study in Western universities. This design was also used to collect data from in-depth interviews to investigate the socio-cultural encounters of three Saudi scholars to identify the cultural dimensions (cognitive, affective or behavioral) that are instrumental for English language learning abroad, the features of the inter-cultural communication competence that enhance acculturation to the target language abroad.

Participants

Twenty-six participants in this study were Saudi ex-scholars involved in graduate programs in western universities. The sample recruited for this study was identified by convenience through a snowballing strategy. Participants were selected if they fulfilled these three criteria: (a) had traveled on a schol-arship to study in a western university during the last decade, (b) had lived in a western society for at least three years, and (c) were proficient in English (having checked their most recent IELTS/TOEFL scores).

Instruments:

The Acculturation Questionnaire

This inventory was based on a rigorous review of pertinent literature on acculturation and intercultural communication theory. The questionnaire comprises 15 items taping culture-related dimensions in five life domains of acculturation and communication: socio-cultural challenges, language skills, intercultural communication, cognitive and affective aspects and cultural and behavioral aspects. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire had a good internal consistency with the alpha coefficients of 0.957. Alpha Cronbach values for the five dimensions of the questionnaire were 0.883 for Sociocultural challenges, 0.799 for language skills, 0.763 for intercultural communication, 0.763 for cognitive and affective aspects, and 0.800 for cultural and behavioral aspects. The overall alpha Cronbach value for the questionnaire has been confirmed at 0.957, meaning that the scale used in this research is reliable since all values indicate a reliability co-efficient of above 0.70, which is really acceptable level of reliability.

In-depth Interviews

The researcher explored the participant' experiences by using semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview questions reflect this research sub-questions.

Literature Review:

The Growing Theory of Acculturation

Acculturation is the process that an individual must pass through to adapt to a different culture. For this to happen, there must be changes in both social and psychological behavior (Schumann, 1978). Terminologically, acculturation cannot be totally attributed to foreign language learning because acculturation can occur without existing in the target country (Schalley, 2015). However, some of the features of acculturation can be seen to be relevant to foreign language learning. Acculturation requires international students to adjust their social and psychological behaviors to become more integrated with the target culture (Shafaei, 2016). In this way, the distance that separates the learner from the target culture is a measure through which to evaluate acculturation (Hou, Neff & Kim, 2017).

The theory of acculturation could offer plausible explications for the individual differences in foreign language learning as it could also explain the intervening variables that influence the process of acquisition in second language settings with proposed models that highlight acculturation factors (Balakrishnan, 2017; Hou, et al., 2017; Mak, 2015; Schumann, 1978). Nevertheless, from the psychological perspective, motivation can be considered as an elemental factor (Cabo, et al., 2017; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Ramãrez, et al., 2013; Williams, 2017).

However, there are obstacles to acculturation when the social or psychological distance is large, thereby inducing the learner to fail to progress after the early stages and the language will remain simplified or pidginized (Schaefer & Simon, 2017; Schotte, et al., 2018). Consequently, the language of the learner will be fossilized because of lack of communication with the target language group. Therefore, nativization of the new language in the target culture significantly involves a greater amount of assimilation linguistically and culturally. Learners need to make linguistic and cultural inputs correspond to the internal view of what constitutes the second language system, while the non-profiling of the target language or de-nativization represents the next stage when the learner modifies this early language to external inputs in a series of stages (Ramãrez, et al., 2017; Williams, 2017).

Integration of NNES Scholars

Recently, there has been a growing research on the integration of non-native English speaking (NNES) scholars sent to Western countries. For instance, Leonard, Wayne, Wheeler, Valadez, Guillen & Vila (2002) suggested that linguists often tend to attribute NNES students with features that contrast with supposed attributes of 'modern Western society' without any real knowledge or experience of the other culture.

In addition, prior research also revealed that NNES scholars are more often likely to experience many problems in their accommodation to the requirements of their higher studies

in Western universities. In this vein, Myles & Cheng (2003) diagnosed the main challenge that these scholars encounter as being "to become acculturated into a new academic and cultural community" (p. 247). NNES scholars' problems are ascribed to their inability to adapt to the new target cultures or to reformulate their identities due to socio-cultural factors. Myles & Cheng (2003, p. 248) summarized these factors in language barriers, personal challenges, such as finances and family support, psycho-social challenges, such as making new friends, isolation, loss of social status, and understanding the rules of specific social situations and academic challenges. For example, researchers suggested that there is a link between scholars' social interaction with the host culture and their social adjustment (Bedford, 2017).

After a few years abroad, international scholars tend to get involved in social contact with native speakers in the target culture to the advantage of their socio-psychological adjustment and identification with the new cultural environment (Clément, et al., 1994; Noels et al., 2000). This tendency is supported by the NNES scholars' desire to integrate in the new society where they can socially contact with their native counterparts (Singh & Han 2010). However, intercultural communication competences differ from one country to another and from one culture to another, thereby causing pragmatic miscommunications, no matter how much vocabulary and grammar the students master (McMeniman and Evans, 1997; Myles & Cheng, 2003).

According to researchers, sociocultural theory of language learning and acculturation/pidgnization theory consider language learners as active participants in a real language communication situation who engage in real-life language learning strategy use that facilitates direct communication with indigenous cultural groups (Baralt, et al., 2016; Burnette, et al., 2013; Donato and MacCormick, 1994; Fernández-Dobao, 2016; Moranski, 2016; Sato, 2017). In ESL contexts, where scholars are sent to Western countries for learning at higher institutions, language for communication is inexorably related to acculturation and identity formation through reformulation processes that takes time (Cabo, et al., 2017).

Affective factors are also important for acculturation to take place inasmuch as cognitive factors are. Prior research demonstrated that motivational factors play a significant role in acculturation since motivation is an important factor in the social-cultural and personal identification profiles of international students in western societies (Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013). Motivation for learning a second language makes scholars more interested in identifying with the socio-cultural and personal context of the learning environment (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013), now that this motivation-influenced context drives scholars abroad to accommodate themselves to the multicultural environment (Dörnyei and Csizér, 2005).

Results:

Results from the questionnaire study

Participants consisted of % 53.8 (n=14) males and 46.2 % (n=12) females. The majority of the sample were males (53.8%); for age, 38.5% were below 30 years old and 61.5 % were aged above 30 years old. Slightly below half of the sample (46.1 %) were specialized in Language and Literature, 23.1% w were specialized in Sciences, 19.2 % were specialized in Humanities and Social sciences, and finally 11.5 % were specialized in medical sciences.

Table 1: Distribution of the sample by gender and age

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Age	Frequency	Percent
Male	14	%53.8	Under 30	10	%38.5
Female	12	%46.2	Above 30	16	%61.5
Total	26	%100.0	Total	26	%100.0

Table 2: Distribution of the sample by Specialty

Specialty	Frequency	Percent
Language and Literature	12	%46.2
Sciences	6	%23.1
Medical sciences	3	%11.5
Humanities and Social sciences	5	%19.2
Total	26	%100.0

The descriptive statistics for the key variables in the study are presented below. The means and standard deviations associated with each scale that were used to measure the role of native and host cultures in English education and acculturation of Saudi scholars abroad are shown in Tables 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

Table 3: One-Sample Statistics Mean Values of Socio-cultural challenges for the first dimension

Socio-cultural challenges dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	%	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. Given my Arab and Muslim backdrop, I have to work harder to improve the stereotypes about Muslim Arabs.	4.62	.496	92%	16.602	0.000
2. I feel the pressure that what I do or say will be seen as representative of my ethnicity, race, language and religion.	4.00	1.200	80%	4.249	0.000
3. On campus, I feel that my first language and prior education constitutes a limitation on studying in English in a western university.	4.00	1.200	80%	4.249	0.000
Overall mean	4.21	0.97	84%	23.324	000

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and t-value of the variables used in this study. The overall mean (Mean = 4.21, SD = 0.97) for the Socio-cultural challenges dimension was reasonably high. The respondents reported moderately high levels of Socio-cultural challenges. The highest mean was for the statement (Given my Arab and Muslim backdrop, I have to work harder to improve the stereotypes about Muslim Arabs) (Mean = 4.62, SD =.496).

Table 4: One-Sample Statistics Mean Values of Language skills for second Dimension

Intercultural communication	Mean	Std. Deviation	%	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
4. It is harder for me to perform well in my studies because of my proficiency level in English.	1.46	.761	29%	-10.314	0.000
5. I sometimes feel misunderstood or limited in daily situations/ communication with others in the target country because of my incompetent intercultural communication skills.	4.38	.752	88%	9.383	0.000
6. I feel bothered by speaking English with an accent.	4.62	.496	92%	16.602	0.000
Overall mean	3.49	0.67	70%	30.909	000

Table 4 shows the means, standard deviations, and t-value of the variables used in this study. The overall mean (Mean = 3.49, SD = 0.67) for Language skills dimension was reasonably high. The respondents reported moderately medium levels of Language skills. The highest mean was for the statement (I feel bothered by speaking English with an accent) (Mean = 4.62, SD =.496).

Table 5: One-Sample Statistics Mean Values of Intercultural communication for third Dimension

Intercultural communication	Mean	Std. Deviation	%	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
7. I have had disagreements with other Saudis (e.g., friends or family) for liking Western customs or traditions.	1.96	1.216	39%	-4.355	.000
8. I have had 3ments with westerners for liking and practicing Saudi or Islamic customs, traditions or rites.	3.88	1.243	78%	3.628	.001
9. I feel that my particular practices (Saudi or Western) have caused conflict in my relationships.	4.46	.508	89%	14.659	.000
Overall mean	3.44	0.99	69%	20.550	000

Table 5 shows the means, standard deviations, and t-value of the variables used in this study. The overall mean (Mean = 3.49, SD = 0.67) for the Intercultural communication dimension was reasonably high. The respondents reported moderately medium levels of Intercultural communication. The highest mean was for the statement (I feel that my particular practices (Saudi or Western) have caused conflict in my relationships) (Mean = 4.46, SD =.508).

Table 6: One-Sample Statistics Mean Values of Cognitive and affective aspects for fourth Dimension

Cognitive and affective aspects	Mean	Std. Deviation	%	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
10. I learned a lot about who I am through inter-actions with others abroad during my studies.	4.69	.471	94%	18.333	.000
11. I could develop mature cultural self-awareness by communicating with others who are different from my culture.	4.08	1.230	82%	4.463	.000
12. Learning the target language is a good way to learn about its culture, especially when you live in that target culture and feel empathy with its people.	4.54	.508	91%	15.430	.000
Overall mean	4.44	0.74	89%	33.67	000

Table 6 shows the means, standard deviations, and t-value of the variables used in this study. The overall mean (Mean = 4.44, SD = 0.74) for the cognitive and affective aspects dimension was reasonably high. The respondents reported moderately high levels of cognitive and affective aspects. The highest mean was for the statement (I learned a lot about who I am through interactions with others abroad during my studies) (Mean = 4.69, SD =.471).

Table 7: One-Sample Statistics Mean Values of Cultural and behavioral for the Fifth Dimension

Cognitive and affective aspects	Mean	Std. Deviation	%	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
13. I feel that people very often interpret my behavior based on their stereotypes of what Saudis are like.	4.54	.508	91%	15.430	.000
14. When I am in a place or room where I am the only Saudi person, I often feel different or isolated; my communicative skills fail me.	2.00	1.200	40%	-4.249	.000
15. When communicating with someone of a different gender, race, or nationality, I often wonder what I should or should not do or say.	4.54	.508	91%	15.430	.000
Overall mean	3.69	0.74	74%	27.98	000

Table 7 shows the means, standard deviations, and t-value of the variables used in this study. The overall mean (Mean = 3.69, SD = 0.74) for the cultural and behavioral dimension was reasonably high. The respondents reported moderately medium levels of cultural and behavioral. The highest mean was equally shared by the statements (I feel that people very often interpret my behavior based on their stereotypes of what Saudis are like) and (When communicating with someone of a different gender, race, or nationality, I often wonder what I should or should not do or say.) (Mean = 4.54, SD =.508).

To explore the role of native and host cultures in English education and acculturation of Saudi scholars abroad and to identify the factors that affect Saudi scholars' acculturation in western universities, factor analysis, using Principal Components Extraction and Varimax Rotation, was performed on the correlation of 15 items in total. See Table 17 for factor loadings and descriptions of the four components. Table 8 below sums up the results:

Table 8

Rotated Component Matrix - The Acculturation Factors

Rotated Component Matrix[a]				
Items	Component			
	1	2	3	4
On campus, I feel that my first language and prior education constitutes a limitation on studying in English in a western university.	.936			
I feel the pressure that what I do or say will be seen as representative of my ethnicity, race, language and religion.	.936			
I have had disagreements with westerners for liking and practicing Saudi or Islamic customs, traditions or rites.	.932			
I could develop mature cultural self-awareness by communicating with others who are different from my culture.	.917			
When I am in a place or room where I am the only Saudi person, I often feel different or isolated; my communicative skills fail me.	-.913			
I have had disagreements with other Saudis (e.g., friends or family) for liking Western customs or traditions.	-.908			
I sometimes feel misunderstood or limited in daily situations/communication with others in the target country because of my incompetent intercultural communication skills.		-.948		
I feel that people very often interpret my behavior based on their stereotypes of what Saudis are like.		.899		

Rotated Component Matrix[a]				
Items	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Learning the target language is a good way to learn about its culture, especially when you live in that target culture and feel empathy with its people.		.768		
I feel that my particular practices (Saudi or Western) have caused conflict in my relationships.			.887	
Given my Arab and Muslim backdrop, I have to work harder to improve the stereotypes about Muslim Arabs.			-.878	
When communicating with someone of a different gender, race, or nationality, I often wonder what I should or shouldn't do or say.				.848
I learned a lot about who I am through interactions with others abroad during my studies.				-.696
I feel bothered by speaking English with an accent.				.674
It is harder for me to perform well in my studies because of my proficiency level in English.				.585
Total	5.456	2.841	2.431	2.177
% of Variance	36.372	18.938	16.208	14.515
Cumulative %	36.372	55.310	71.517	86.032

The first factor of acculturation consists of six items, whose coefficients varied between -0.913 and 0.936; these items describe the variables concerning the effect on Saudi scholars' acculturation in western universities. This factor explains 36.37% of the total variance. It comprises items from the socio-cultural challenges in the first dimension and cognitive and affective aspects in the fifth dimension and items from the Intercultural communication dimension.

The second factor delineated a cluster of three items, whose coefficients varied between -0.948 and 0.899. These items derived from the Language skills dimension, the cultural and behavioral aspects dimension, and the cognitive and affective aspects dimension, accounting for 18.9 % of the total variance. The third factor delineated a cluster of two items, whose coefficients varied between -0.878 and 0.887, and were derived from the Intercultural communication dimension, and the Socio-cultural challenges dimension, thus accounting for 16.20% of the total variance. The fourth factor delineated a cluster of four items, whose coefficients varied between -0.696 and 0.848, deriving from the cultural and behavioral aspects dimension, the cognitive and affective aspects dimension, and Language skills dimension, eventually accounting for 14.5% of the total variance.

To check gender and specialty effect on acculturation, linear regression analysis was conducted. Table 9 below summarizes the results of the linear regression analysis, which

indicates that the model is highly significant (p < 0.01).

Table 9: Regression of affect acculturation in the sample of the study

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	R^2
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	56.081	1.650		33.992	.000	
Sex	.498	1.228	.094	.405	.689	267[a]
Specialty	.471	.528	.207	.893	.381	

Table (9) above shows that there are no significantly statistical differences (α≤0.05) between the variables of Sex and Specialty towards acculturation in the sample of the study. There were no effects attributable to sex, as the (t) value is (.405) and the level of significance is (0..689), nor were there any differences attributable to Specialty as the (t) value is(.893) and the level of significance is(0.381).

Results from Interviews:

The researchers conducted interviews with three participants to explore the socio-cultural, linguistic, cognitive, affective and social aspects of their acculturation to the target country culture and their learning experiences, social life in the new communities. The socio-cultural lives of the cases studied here varied depending on a variety of internal and external

factors, including their language proficiency, the socio-cultural challenges, intercultural communication, cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects, their social background in their homeland, and whether they adapted well or not in their new social worlds. The three participants were married, living with their spouses and children during their studies. One of them was married to an American. These three scholars stated that they had a better chance for socializing with other families from different cultures, and they were more likely to meet other families in their educational settings and in their local communities. The participants were purposely involved in friendships with native-speakers in the target countries in order to improve their language experiences and become better acquainted with the culture. They reported that they were keener on partaking with social events and meeting new people. The three cases lived independently or in shared houses with other families from the target culture. Thus, they had also a good chance socializing with the host native-speaking families. They all had received much of affective and cultural support from these families, as they reported, but they still had access to other ethnic groups of native-speaking social networks at the university when they felt more comfortable spending their leisure time with these outsider students. The three cases below were kept anonymous at their request.

Case 1: Mrs. F in England

Mrs. F was sent to Burmingham University on a scholarship to study TESOL. Her academic history tells of distinguished, hard-working person of an intelligent, subtle and resourceful person. The interviews reflected how the British culture influenced her identity, self-image and the sociocultural challenges she has survived during her stay in Birmingham, England.

Although she had received solid English language preparation in Saudi Arabia, she realized she had not sufficiently learned English in a functional way that would foster sociocultural communication skills she needed in a native English-speaking community. Initially, she had to practice thinking and communicating in English in a culturally responsive fashion. Despite the difficulties she met, she was motivated to become involved in class discussions and put questions to teachers and native speakers on campus. Within this English-speaking environment, she was motivated to find her listening and speaking as well as her cultural communicative competences both improved. Being an EFL learner helped her create a new learning understanding of the language and culture and develop a new point of view about her own personality.

She attributed her acculturation to her personality traits and her ego-identification dynamics. She realized there were always difficulties; however, she believed that an open-minded and

flexible attitude towards native-speakers in her surroundings would help her adapt well to the new situation. For her, academic success was easier than adjusting culturally and socially to the new environment. It took her some time to be able to present, discuss, or even debate in front of her class in English, and to express her ideas and comments in academic settings, given that she was a veiled, somewhat reserved woman.

In Birmingham, her life was very tense then, but she handled the sociocultural challenges quite well. She averted any sensitive discussions about religion, extramarital sex, and politics. However, most of her satisfaction came from learning the language and learning more about her specialty. When asked about the impediments to acculturation in the new society.

Language and cultural adjustment were little problems for Mrs. F. When she was asked about the cultural dimensions (cognitive, affective or behavioral) that are instrumental for English language learning abroad, she said:

Students who go to study abroad need to have an open mind and the spirit to accept others and judge them not by our measures as Muslim Arabs, but as human beings who are different from us ethnically, culturally, linguistically and spiritually.... We also need to reform the stereotypical pictures that westerners have about Saudis abroad.... But it is better to study the do's and don'ts in the English culture to avoid blunders.

Mrs. F said her life in cosmopolitan university was both a pleasure and a demerit. The pleasure was that because she was in a native-speaker, perfect academic community, the encouragement and help she received from teachers was considerable, a fact she deeply appreciated. The downside was that there were also plenty of conflicts within this small community and a conflict between her morals and Islamic traditions and the western traditions. She struggled with that, too. She said:

The factors that were stressing for me culturally in the new environment was my hijab, my race and my ethnicity.... Some teachers and peers perceived that the hijab and the abaya (traditional women dress) were a symbol of conservativeness and an impediment to full participation in daily activities. … Thus, communication between men and women was related to the conservative cultural attitudes in Saudi Arabia.

Mrs. F is ready for the challenges that might face her, and she is preparing to devote her future life to TEFL development in Saudi Arabia, both the language and the culture of its native-speakers as he experienced it in England.

Case 2: Dr. A in Australia

Dr. A worked as a language instructor in a southwestern Saudi university for five years. When he was 23 years of age, he spent two years in England for his master's degree in linguistics. Then, he returned to his university and taught

English for a while. At the age of 26, he decided to leave and pursue his doctorate degree in an Australian university. Asked about the factors that affected him as a Saudi scholar in Australia, he said:

The proficiency level in English and the competence to understand and interpret the exotic culture of Australia was a big challenge for the newcomers.... There were also negative comments by some peers, even from my own culture, that criticized our home practices and traditions. For me, my prior experiences in England with individuals from different cultures helped me have smooth adjustment experiences.

Dr. A indicated that the English language proficiency level was a source of difficulty for some low-proficiency learners, especially in specializations other than language such as the sciences. He indicated that the more open to the western culture a Saudi scholar is, the more achieving and successful he is in academia. He suggested that good language and communication abilities helped the more successful peers to adapt to the western culture and the culture of the academic and social communities around. This also helped them make best use of the available academic resources. This also helped them to work collaboratively with peers from different nationalities. He said,

I preferred to work cooperatively with other students from different nationalities. Mixing with others, males and

females, could help me better adjust to the culture. I could support this openness to the target culture by attending the cultural and social celebrations held by peers, professors and other neighbors in my surroundings there.

Dr. A noted that other Saudi scholars who avoided socializing in the target culture were having difficulty in accepting new ideas or thinking in creative ways. These were the most resistant to change. They also tended to avoid the western lifestyles, given their restrictive social norms they brought with them from the home environment.

Case 3: Ms. B in the United States

Ms. B came from a rural background and was appointed a teaching assistant in her university. She was sent on a scholarship to study applied linguistics in a Midwestern university in the United States. She was willing to adopt the mores and values of the host culture. Although she came from a rural backdrop, he could easily adapt to the values of the target culture, which she found more fitting in her case; she said, "I didn't want to give explanations to others why I was dressed and I behaved the was I used to do in the new surroundings. I like this lifestyle anyway".

For communication, Ms. B indicated that her good proficiency in English and her knowledge about the American culture was partly acquired from viewing American movies and episodes. She could even pick up the accent fluently as

a native-like speaker of American English. She also believed that mixing with others even males was good for acculturation. She said,

In academic settings, I preferred to cooperate with male peers from American and western nationalities. Mixing with the other gender could help not only improve my communicative competences but also helped me to adjust to the culture quite easily.

She believed that assimilation of the new culture occurred by integrating the values of the home culture with the values of the host culture by more engagement with the host community. For the social challenges, she indicated that nostalgia sometimes attacked her, suggesting that homesickness and loneliness were the only social challenges.

Differences between studies in the United States and in Saudi Arabia was for Ms. B a matter not only of academic nature but was also of a cultural perspective in terms of classroom activities. Students need to focus more on practical activities including oral presentations more than theoretical orientations. This made her sometimes tense because at the beginning, she was not much welcomed by peers from other nationalities and she had to defend her discussions especially when she had to discuss an ethnographic issue.

Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative data indicated that the scholars who participated in the questionnaire and interview studies placed more emphasis on mastering the English language as a means of communication and assimilation of the target culture. Language skills not only fostered their cultural communication skills but was also a construction tool of their new cultural identities in western universities. Prior research consistently indicated that language proficiency or lack thereof can negatively affect adaptation and adjustment processes in the target language country (e.g., Bedford, 2017).

Results showed that sociocultural challenges were the most influential factors that affected the scholars' acculturation, especially their adaptation to the new sociocultural milieu against the stereotypes of their Muslim Arab background. For linguistic and communicative skills, speaking English with an accent was also a challenge that the scholars in the study perceived to be a challenge against smooth acculturation. They also perceived that interactions with others in the target culture country helped them considerably to learn about their identities in a way that induced better acculturation modes. For the culturo-behavioral aspects of acculturation, the respondents indicated that in situations where they were at a loss doing or saying the appropriate response, they felt such situations were the most impeding and challenging to acculturation.

Concerning cultural factors, the findings revealed that respondents did not have a high level of difficulty with language more than they did with other cultural factors; the greater level of difficulty was experienced with the social factors, compared to the academic factors. In this respect, Gonzalez (2004) stated that international students may be able to speak English correctly from a syntactic and grammatical perspective, but they may not have the language fluency to be "thinking cognitively, affectively, and socially." Therefore, non-native students may have difficulty adapting to the academic and social needs of western cultures. Academic success is viewed as their primary goal, even though cultural adjustment and language adaptation might present difficulties in their sojourn overseas.

A linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the effect of gender and specialty on acculturation. Results showed that these two variables did not have any effect of size on the acculturation of the informants in this study.

The qualitative data also indicated that scholars with previous acculturation experience, prior learning experiences in western societies and familiarity with western mores were more accustomed to the lifestyles and cultural values of the west. Additionally, scholars with vicarious preparation about the target culture made easier for some scholars to accept the norms of the target culture and get assimilated easier and quicker.

Scholars in the interviews experienced some aspects of cultural stress especially in their initial years. This included the difficulties of making friends with people from other cultures due to cultural, religious or social barriers and activities, but they could overcome these difficulties after a while. This observation has been reported in similar research (Abdel Razek, 2012; Yue, 2012). Some researchers indicated that Saudi students were less participatory in sociocultural activities in western universities because of religious habits that prohibit certain social events like gender mixing or dietary habits like eating pork or drinking alcohol.

The study revealed that when scholars had positive attitudes towards the target culture and country as well as when they have strong motivations for learning abroad, they are likely to assimilate the target culture easier and quicker. Researchers of Second Language Acquisition theories have pointed out that different affective variables such as a learner's motivation or personality will determine successful language learning. The learners' attitudes about the target language community, including people, culture, and their coursework decide how non-native speaking graduate students perform. Both informants also believed that using a communicative language learning approach will likely decrease any cultural sock they may experience when these learners will be given similar chances of learning abroad.

Coming to Western cultural environments, the case study participants experienced different degrees of cultural change, which they were somehow prepared to accept. Qualitative data indicated that traveling to Western universities and even vicarious experiences with the target culture before pursuing doctoral studies served as a scaffold for acculturation and adjustment to the new culture environment.

Limitations

Given the small size of the sample both for quantitative and qualitative data collection, this study is limited in some aspects. The small sample size makes the findings short of generalizability as well as it may limit the linear regression analysis in terms of predicting the role of sex and specialization vis-a-vis acculturation.

Conclusions, Recommendations and Future Research

The findings from this study go in congruence with several other findings from previous research. The validated question-naire findings contribute to research on acculturation of Arab scholars in different western universities. These findings will open up new horizons as to how to facilitate the educational environments for Muslim Arab scholars abroad in a way that would help them combat the sociocultural, cognitive, communicative and behavioral inhibitors to smooth acculturation in the target cultures.

Future research is recommended to be conducted on larger, more representative participants from a broader span of Arab Gulf universities' scholars of both genders sent abroad for pursuing higher studies in different fields. It is also recommended that prospective research may be undertaken using a variety of mixed methods measures to ensure convergent validity of the instruments and to improve the research validity in different contexts.

As the participants suggested that traditions in the home culture such as attire, food and beverage, and rituals could be impediments to smooth acculturation as emphasized in some qualitative data, investigating such factors warrants further research.

Prospective research also needs to investigate and define the sociocultural, cognitive, affective and behavioral factors that affect the success of scholars sent abroad for pursuing their higher studies. This needs to be done against a global comparison between Muslim Arabs versus Asians, males versus females and across the different disciplines of knowledge, which scholars pursue abroad. In addition, future research needs to study the impact of global issues such as terrorism, the rise of Islamist fundamentalism, veiled women human rights, etc. on the cultural and behavioral aspects of scholars abroad.

References

- Abdel Razek, A. (2012). An exploration of the case of Saudi students' engagement, success and self-efficacy at a Mid-Western American university. (Doctor of Education dissertation), University of Akron. Retrieved from:

  https://etd.ohiolink.edu

- Aguilar, M. (2010). Intercultural communicative competence as a tool for autonomous learning. Revista canaria de estudios ingleses, (61), 87-88.

- Al-Araki, M. (2015). Models of Intercultural Communication: Identities, Styles of Acculturation, and Premises for Enjoying the Company of One Another- Empirical Data From the Public Sector in Norway. SAGE open, 5(2), 1-13. DOI: 10.1177/2158244015577795

- Alsahafi, N. & Shin, S. (2017). Factors Affecting the Academic and Cultural Adjustment of Saudi International Students in Australian Universities. Journal of International Students, 7(1), 53-72.

- Andrade, M. (2006). International Students in English-Speaking Universities: Adjustment Factors. Journal of Research in International Education, 5 (1): 131.

- Angelone, E. (2016). A process-oriented approach for documenting and gauging intercultural competence in translation. The interpreter and translator trainer, 10(3), 304-317. DOI: 10.1080/1750399X.2016.1236560.

- Balakrishnan, V. (2017). Key determinants for intention to use social media for learning in higher education institutions. Universal access in the information society, 16(2), 289-301. DOI: 10.1007/s10209-016-0457-0.

- Balboni, P., Caon F. (2014). La comunicazione interculturale, Venezia, Marsilio.

- Bar, A. (2017). Factors affecting the acculturation of Saudi female doctoral students in a US mid-western research university. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, Proquest Dissertations Publishing. UMI 10688206.

- Baralt, M., Gurzynski-Weiss, L., & Kim, Y. (2016). Engagement with the language: How examining learners' affective and social engagement explains successful learner-generated attention to form. In M. Sato & S. Ballinger (Eds.), Peer interaction and second language learning: Pedagogical potential and research agenda (pp. 209–239). Amsterdam: John Benjamins. https://doi-org.sdl.idm.oclc.org/10.1075/lllt.45.09bar

- Becerra, L. (2015). Acculturation Revisited: The Impact of the Acculturation Level of the Latino/a Therapist on Working with People from the Same Ethnic Group. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Alliant International University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. UMI 3645935.

- Belford, N. (2017). International Students from Melbourne Describing Their Cross-Cultural Transitions Experiences: Culture Shock, Social Interaction, and Friendship Development. Journal of International Students, 7(3), 499-521. Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.569941

- Burnette, J. L., O'Boyle, E. H., VanEpps, E. M., Pollack, J. M., & Finkel, E. J. (2013). Mindsets matter: A meta-analytic review of implicit theories and self-regulation. Psychological Bulletin, 139, 655–701.

  https://doi-org.sdl.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/a0029531

- Byram, M. (ed.) (1997). Face to Face. Learning Language and Culture through Visits and Exchanges. London: CILT.

- Cabo, D., Prada, J. & Pereira, K. (2017). Effects of Community Service-Learning on Heritage Language Learners' Attitudes Toward Their Language and Culture. Foreign Language Annals, 50(1), 71-83. DOI: 10.1111/flan.12245.

- Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1994). Motivation, self-confidence, and group cohesion in the foreign language classroom. Language Learning, 44, 417– 448.

- Dörnyei, Z., & Csizer, K. (2002). Some dynamics of language attitudes and motivation: Results of a longitudinal nationwide survey. Applied Linguistics, 23, 421-462.

- Dörnyei, Zoltán & Chan, Letty (2013).Motivation and Vision: An Analysis of Future L2 Self Images, Sensory Styles, and Imagery Capacity Across Two Target Languages. Language Learning, 63(3), 437-462. DOI: 10.1111/lang.12005.

- Evans, A. & Suklun, H. (2017). Workplace diversity and intercultural communication: A phenomenological study. Cogent Business & Management, 4(1), 1-9.

- Fernández-Dobao, A. (2016). Peer interaction and learning: A focus on the silent learner. In M. Sato & S. Ballinger (Eds.), Peer interaction and second language learning: Pedagogical potential and research agenda (pp. 33–61). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

- Gonzales, V. (2004). Second Language Learning: Cultural adaptation process in international graduate students in US universities. University Press of America, INC.

- Gonzalez, N. & Pounds, J. (2018). The Impact of Acculturation and Cultural Values on Hispanic Immigrants' Parenting. Contemporary Family Therapy, 40(1), 56-67.DOI: 10.1007/s10591-017-9428-8

- Hou, Y., Neff, L. & Kim, S. (2017). Language Acculturation, Acculturation-Related Stress, and Marital Quality in Chinese American Couples. Journal of Marriage and Family, 80(2), 555-568. DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12447.

- Karolak, M. & Guta, A. (2015). Intercultural communication with Arabs: Studies in educational, professional and societal contexts. Intercultural communication in the context of Saudi Arabia tertiary education. Springer, Singapore. 43.

- Kim, K. (2016). Unveiling linguistic competence by facilitating performance. Language acquisition, 23(3), 307-308. DOI: 10.1080/10489223.2015.1115051

- Leonard, J.A, Wayne, RK, Wheeler J, Valadez R, Guillen S, Vila, C (2002) Ancient DNA evidence for Old World origin of New World dogs. Science, 298:1613–1616.

- Lopez, I. & Bui, N. (2014). Acculturation and Linguistic Factors on International Students' Self-Esteem and Language Confidence. Journal of International Students, 4(4), 314-329.

- Łukasz, K. (2017). Language Proficiency and Cultural Identity as Two Facets of the Acculturation Process. Psychology of Language and Communication, 21(1), 192-214 DOI 10.1515/plc-2017-0010.

- Lytra, V. (2011). Negotiating language, culture and pupil agency in complementary school classrooms. Linguistics and Education, 3 (1)1-14.

- Mak, A. (2015). Beyond Host Language Proficiency: Coping Resources Predicting International Students' Satisfaction. Journal of studies in international education, 19(5), 460-475. DOI: 10.1177/1028315315587109.

- Matveev, A. V., & Merz, M. Y. (2014). Intercultural Competence Assessment: What Are Its Key Dimensions Across Assessment Tools? Retrieved online from/;

http://www.iaccp.org/sites/default/files/stellenbosch_pdf/Matveev.pdf April 30th, 2016.

- McMeniman, M., & Evans, R. (1997). The contribution of language learning to the development of cultural understandings. Australian Review of Applied Linguistics, 20, 1–18.

- Mingsheng, L. (2016). Developing Skills and Disposition for Lifelong Learning: Acculturative Issues Surrounding Supervising International Doctoral Students in New Zealand Universities. Journal of International Students, 6(3), 740-761.

- Moranski, K., & Toth, P. (2016). Small-group meta-analytic talk and Spanish L2 development. In M. Sato & S. Ballinger (Eds.), Peer interaction and second language learning: Pedagogical potential and research agenda (pp. 291–316). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

- Myles, J. & Cheng, L. (2003). The social and cultural life of non-native English speaking international graduate students at a Canadian university. Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 2(3), 247-263.

- Ramãrez, N., Lieberman, A., Mayberry, R. (2013). The initial stages of first-language acquisition begun in adolescence: when late looks early. Journal of Child Language, 40(2), 391-414.

- Sato, M. (2017). Interaction Mindsets, Interactional Behaviors, and L2 Development: An Affective-Social-Cognitive Model. Language Learning, 67(2), 249-283. DOI: 10.1111/lang.12214.

- Schaefer, C. & Simon, B. (2017). Opportunities for Immigrants' Acculturation and Identification Varieties. Political Psychology, 38(6), 959-975. DOI: 10.1111/pops.12381.

- Schalley, A. (2015). Multilingualism and assimilationism in Australia's literacy-related educational policies. International journal of multilingualism, 12(2), 162-175.

- Schotte, K. & Stanat, P. & Edele, A. (2018). Is Integration Always most Adaptive? The Role of Cultural Identity in Academic Achievement and in Psychological Adaptation of Immigrant Students in Germany. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 47(1), 16-37. DOI: 10.1007/s10964-017-0737-x

- Schumann, J. (1978). The Pidginisation Process: a Model for Second Language Acquisition, Rowley, MA: New- bury House.

- Shafaei, A. (2016). Integrating two cultures successfully: Factors influencing acculturation attitude of international postgraduate students in Malaysia. Journal of research in international education, 15(2), 137-154. DOI: 10.1177/1475240916653566.

- Shao, Y. & Crook, C. (2015). The Potential of a Mobile Group Blog to Support Cultural Learning Among Overseas Students. Journal of studies in international education, 19(5), 399-422. DOI: 10.1177/1028315315574101.

- Simona, F. (2016). Theoretical models of interpersonal communication and second language acquisition. Journal of Identity and Migration Studies, 10(1), 22032.

- Singh, M. & Han, J. (2010). Teacher education for World English speaking pre-service teachers: Making transnational knowledge exchange for mutual learning. Teaching and Teacher Education, 26, 1300-1308.

- Williams, J. (2017). The Beneficial Role of L1 Spoken Language Skills on Initial L2 Sign Language Learning: Cognitive and Linguistic Predictors of M2L2 Acquisition. Studies in second language acquisition, 39(4), 833-46. DOI:.1017/S1366728917000347.

- Wu, S. & Alrabah, S. (2014). Tapping the Potential of Skill Integration as a Conduit for Communicative Language Teaching. English language Teaching, 7(11), 119-129.

- Yue, Y. (2012). Health and wellbeing of international students in an Australian tertiary context. (Doctoral dissertation), University of Tasmania. Retrieved from:

  http://eprints.utas.edu.au/id/eprint/15009

- Zhang, J. (2015). Effects of virtual conversations on international, students' intercultural communicative competence. The College of William and Mary, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. UMI 3663023.