

ISSN: 2707-5508

EISSN :2708-5783

# الآداب



## لِلدِّرَاسَاتِ اللُّغَوِيَّةِ وَالْأَدَبِيَّةِ

مجلة علمية فصلية محكمة تعنى بالدراسات اللغوية والأدبية

تصدر عن كلية الآداب - جامعة ذمار

الترجمة الآلية إشكالات لسانية حاسوبية في الضمير والموصول والزمن النحوي

عتبات النص في نفج الطيب من غصن الأندلس الرطيب - مقارنة سيميائية

البعد النفسي في رواية رائحة الفحم لعبد العزيز الصقعي

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اتجاهات الدراسات السعودية أثناء تعلمهن اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة ثانية  
نحو التواصل في القاعات الدراسية المختلطة في الولايات المتحدة

دراسة تحليلية للوقت والمظهر في اللغة العربية ومقارنتهما بمفهوم الوقت  
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الآداب

للدراسات اللغوية والأدبية



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Quarterly Peer Reviewed Scientific Journal for linguistics and literary studies issued by the Faculty of Arts

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## Arts

for Linguistic and Literary Studies

A Quarterly Peer Reviewed Journal

Issued by the Faculty of Arts,

Thamar University, Dhamar,

Republic of Yemen,

(Vol. 13)

March : 2022

ISSN: 2707-5508

EISSN: 2708-5783

Local No:

(1631- 2020)

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## Female Saudi ESL Learners' Attitudes Toward Communication in Mixed Gender Classes in the USA

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Received on: 30/10/2021

Accepted on: 01/12/2021

### Abstract:

The present study examined the perceptions of female Saudi ESL students about their attitudes toward communication and with male ESL students in mixed gender classes in the US. It further investigated the cultural differences that may impact Saudi female ESL students in the English language learning process. Twenty female Saudi ESL students (10 and 10 beginners) participated in the research. The findings revealed that female Saudi ESL learners' attitudes changed at some level while learning English in a foreign country. Furthermore, the findings indicated that traditional gender segregation due to the Saudi cultural background was the primary determinant for the way female Saudi ESL learners communicated with the opposite gender. The results also showed that female Saudi ESL learners were confident and did not show any shyness at an advanced level compared to the beginner ones. However, the acquisition of ESL had produced considerable development in the personalities of advanced learners that they did not feel the need to avoid men at all, unlike beginners. The research findings may help ESL teachers, educators, and curriculum developers by providing important insights, and it also has future implications for the teaching of English in general.

**Keywords:** Attitude change, Shyness, Gender segregation, Female Saudi ESL learner.

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## اتجاهات الدراسات السعودية أثناء تعلمهن اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة ثانية نحو التواصل في القاعات الدراسية المختلطة في الولايات المتحدة

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تاريخ القبول: 2021/12/01 م

تاريخ الاستلام: 2021/10/30 م

هدفت الدراسة إلى الكشف عن تأثير اتجاهات الدراسات السعودية اللاتي يدرسن اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة ثانية (ESL) في الولايات المتحدة حيال تواصلهن وتفاعلهن مع الطلاب الذكور في القاعات الدراسية المختلطة. كما هدفت الدراسة إلى البحث في الاختلافات الثقافية الاجتماعية ومدى تأثيرها على العملية التعليمية لدى الدراسات السعودية للغة الإنجليزية. شارك في البحث عشرون طالبة سعودية متحدثات للغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة ثانية، عشر منهن في المستوى المتقدم وعشر من المستوى المبتدئ. وقد أشارت النتائج إلى تغير في اتجاهات الدراسات السعودية على مستوى معين أثناء تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في بلد أجنبي. كما أن الفصل التقليدي بين الجنسين بسبب الخلفية الثقافية السعودية كان المحدد الأساسي لطريقة لتواصل الدراسات مع الدارسين. كما أظهرت النتائج أن الدراسات في المستوى المتقدم تتمتع بثقة عالية ولم يبدو عليهن أي خجل مقارنة بالدارسات في المستوى المبتدئ. وقد أدى اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة ثانية إلى تطور كبير في شخصيات الدراسات في المستوى المتقدم حتى أنهن لم يشعرن بالحاجة إلى تجنب الرجال على الإطلاق، على عكس الدراسات في المستوى المبتدئ. قد تساعد نتائج الدراسة معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة ثانية (ESL) ومطوري المناهج من خلال توفير رؤى مهمة، كما أن لها آثاراً مستقبلية على تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بشكل عام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تغير الاتجاهات، الخجل، الفصل بين الجنسين، تعليم النساء السعوديات الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة ثانية

\*أستاذ اللغويات التطبيقية المساعد - وحدة اللغة الإنجليزية بعمادة الخدمات التعليمية - وكيل الخدمات التعليمية - جامعة القصيم - المملكة العربية السعودية.

## 1. Introduction

This research investigates the factors that make beginner Saudi female ESL learners in the United States avoid classroom interaction with Saudi male ESL students. Because of the increasing number of Saudi male and female students studying in the United States, teachers and other students in the English language courses have become aware of this attitude. However, according to the present literature, the factors that influence the attitude of Saudi female students have received little attention or are virtually almost nonexistent in the literature. To fill this research gap, the ideal way would be to explore more about what attracted these learners with limited English abilities to the United States in the first place and to investigate their attitudes toward communication in mixed-gender ESL classes.

It is crucial to better understand the issue of this study in order to help Saudi female youth to accommodate the Saudi Vision 2030<sup>(1)</sup>. Woman empowerment is one of the biggest goals for the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, and the specifically designed educational policies for Saudi females can pave the way to achieve it. Most recently, Saudi Arabia has welcomed Saudi women in various professional sectors like education, science, computer, marketing, etc. The women's rights laws have been revised, and an example is to allow women to drive, which has never been approved before in the history of Saudi Arabia. Saudi women have started working side by side with Saudi men to prove themselves more productive members of society<sup>(2)</sup>. Many changes have been implemented as part of the government's newly stated 2030 vision that is intended to influence women's empowerment directly (Alotaibi, 2020). Providing the best educational facilities to improve Saudi women's education is in progress. The Saudi Higher Education Commission aims at making Saudi female students fluent in English as a second language; therefore, English is introduced as a compulsory subject in schools, colleges, and universities<sup>(3)</sup>. However, there are still a number of challenges to face before the accomplishment of these goals. The current study investigates the factors that affect Saudi female ESL learners' English communication in mixed-gender classrooms in the United States and offers a set of recommendations and implications.

Proficiency in the target country's native language is a prerequisite for accomplishing any or all of the program's objectives. Female Saudi ESL students have a greater struggle in achieving such level of proficiency. Nonetheless, geographical and educational background, linguistic characteristics, and cultural distinctions all have an impact on Arab students' ability to learn English<sup>(4)</sup>. Cultural differences are one of these elements that might impede language acquisition<sup>(5)</sup>. It should be noted that various languages are similar and even belong to

the same language family. However, the learning environments of Arab students differ dramatically since learning English includes linguistic and non-linguistic elements. Cultural differences are one of the non-linguistic elements resulting from the vast geographical distances between Arabic-speaking and English-speaking countries. Saudi Arabia and the United States are geographically apart. As a result, it is logical to assume considerable cultural differences between the two countries, which may influence L2 learners<sup>(6)</sup>.

In this regard, Gardner (2001)<sup>(7)</sup> identified two primary reasons to motivate individuals to acquire a new language. First, studying the target language is a gateway to advance in one's career or study abroad. The second reason is integrative, which implies that the learner aims to become proficient in the target language to integrate mainly in the target language with native speakers. It is beyond the scope of this research to determine which of these factors motivate Saudi female ESL students in the United States to take on the challenge. However, Gardner's (2001) Socio-Educational Model of L2 Acquisition hypothesizes that learning a new language necessitates understanding a foreign culture.

Consequently, it is reasonable to argue that Saudi female ESL students studying in the United States may get unique cultural insights while acquiring the English language of their choice, which may affect their attitude in general. These arguments suggest a hypothesis put forward by the present study that while learning English as a second language in a foreign country, Saudi female ESL learners' personalities, particularly Saudi women, would have experienced inevitable adjustments due to cultural differences.

Since the study investigates Saudi female ESL learners, a better understanding of the Saudi Arabian lifestyles of female ESL learners would be useful for the readers. Various factors may lead Saudi female learners to be distracted from the second language learning process which would affect their linguistic abilities. Saudi female personality traits may be traced back to the culture's societal standards, which deeply influence their conduct. As a matter of fact, Saudi Arabia is a renowned nation in terms of gender segregation following the Islamic rules and regulations in all the affairs of life. According to the Islamic notions of *ikhtilat* and *khalwa* (these Arabic phrases are further described in the literature review section), females and males who are not blood relatives are not permitted to interact. As a result of the limits associated with gender segregation, this avoidance may impact Saudi female learners' struggle to acquire a new language<sup>(8)</sup>. The researcher hypothesized that novice Saudi female ESL learners would carry over their culture's norms of avoiding engagement with unrelated males in general and Saudi men in particular while studying English. However, the psychological changes that would have happened while learning English as a second language

may prevent advanced Saudi female learners from doing so.

Shyness is another key factor that may have a strong influence on Saudi female ESL students. According to Javid, et al (2012)<sup>(9)</sup>, shy ESL students are reluctant to engage with their peers. Their study focused on the sociolinguistic components of language acquisition. The work originated an investigation into how culture influences learners' progress in learning a foreign language, yielding useful insights. Similarly, the current study was conducted in the United States, and it investigated how Saudi female learners cope with learning English from a sociolinguistics standpoint.

## 1.2 Research questions

The goal of this quantitative study is to explore whether learning a second language influences Saudi females' attitudes toward interacting with people of the opposite gender. More specifically, the thoroughly investigated concerns include:

- 1) What are the differences in the attitudes of the Saudi female ESL learners towards communication with men in their native and foreign countries?
- 2) How are the attitudes of Saudi female ESL learners toward communication with men related to their levels of shyness?
- 3) How are the attitudes of Saudi female ESL learners toward communication with men related to their levels of proficiency in English, the target language?

## 2. Literature Review

Saudi Arabia's education system has received considerable attention and investment during the last 90 years. One of the most effective educational programs was the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, established in 2005 by Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah Bin Abdul Azziz to help Saudi high school and university students' study abroad. As King Abdullah believed, the program's goal was "for them to know the world and for the world to know them"<sup>(10)</sup>. Students and their families get a monthly stipend and health insurance coverage as part of the scholarship package<sup>(11)</sup>. According to the Saudi Ministry of Education, the program's objectives were as follows:

- To provide scholarships to eligible and qualified Saudis so they may pursue higher education at some of the world's most prestigious institutions.

- To raise academic and professional standards by exchanging scientific, educational, and cultural knowledge with other nations.
- To create a reservoir of competent and experienced Saudi employees in the workplace.
- To improve the professional level of the Saudi workforce.

The Saudi Ministry of Education has deployed 200,000 Saudi students to 22 countries to accomplish these objectives. The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, New Zealand, Austria, Hungary and Czech Republic, Singapore, South Korea and Japan, China, Malaysia and South Africa are all mentioned on the Ministry of Education's official website. However, the United States is the most popular destination for Saudi female and male students. The US embassy in Saudi Arabia stated that 100,000 Saudi students are currently studying in the United States, as retrieved from: (<https://sa.usembassy.gov/important-information-regarding-students-visas/>). Moreover, that number may increase if the program is prolonged for another few years<sup>(12)</sup>. For studying in English speaking countries, it is crucial for Saudi students to acquire English as a second language.

Like any L2 learner studying in a foreign country, many factors impact Saudi students' capacity and ability to learn English as a second language. For example, McCroskey and Richmond (1991)<sup>(13)</sup> believed that many behavioral aspects influence the communication process. On the other hand, cultural differences may also significantly affect the capacity of a learner to acquire a new language (Lado, 1957). Therefore, according to Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH)<sup>(14)</sup>, the similarities and differences between the NL and the TL are crucial for learning development. However, Behaviorism, the theory on which this approach was founded, lost its credibility, and so did this once-popular approach of interpreting errors caused by interference from the mother language<sup>(15)</sup>.

In a similar vein, Byram and Feng (2005) assert that learning a new language exposes one to that language's culture; hence, the two are intimately intertwined and cannot be separated. The cultures into which individuals are born influence how they behave and communicate to some degree<sup>(16)</sup>. These observable principles that show up in a person's behaviour are learned through social encounters backed up by local culture. As a consequence, many ESL students in the United States follow cultural norms, which leads to widespread misconceptions. Briefly, each native language has trained its speakers to pay various sorts of attention while talking about events and experiences. This conditioning begins in infancy and is very difficult

to undo while learning L2<sup>(17)</sup>.

Knowing a little about Saudi Arabian women's social lives might be useful and relevant to the context of the study. Gender segregation exists in Saudi Arabia's public and higher education institutions, although it is not racial segregation between men and women<sup>(18)</sup>. According to Sallam (2013)<sup>(19)</sup>, many Saudi women embrace segregation conventions and traditions. Discussing the causes for gender segregation is outside the scope of this study and calls for further research on this contentious subject. In summary, Saudi Arabian social life characterizes essentially little male-female interaction (Le Renard, 2008; Alghamdi, 2017)

## 2.1 Females in Saudi culture

Women in Saudi Arabia live in a patriarchal society dominated by male authority<sup>(20)</sup>; Le Renard, 2008). Al Alhareth, and Al Dighrir (2015)<sup>(21)</sup> pointed out that women have a complicated position in Saudi culture, particularly in the public sphere. Gender segregation is an inevitable reality for Saudi women<sup>(22)</sup>, which Westerners would have a hard time imagining. This source states that gender segregation is important to most people's social, educational, and political activities. The Arabic notions of *ikhtilat* and *khalwa*, employed earlier to explain this distinction, must be defined precisely. The term *ikhtilat* is defined as the mingling of men and women<sup>(23)</sup>.

In contrast, *khalwa* means the hidden mixing of men and women not related by blood<sup>(24)</sup>. Despite the fact that both terms refer to segregation, the meaning differs slightly. AlMunajjed (1997)<sup>(25)</sup> claimed that religion's social effect is profoundly ingrained in Saudi culture. Muslim religious scholars termed "*Ulama*"<sup>(26)</sup> play an essential role in Saudi Arabian society in several aspects, including recommending suitable male-female interactions (Atawneh, 2017)<sup>(27)</sup>. However, Muslims often reject mingling men and women in public places such as schools, universities, hospitals, and restaurants because it breaches Islamic principles on *ikhtilat*. Also, it is vital to note that *ikhtilat* is controversial among Saudi ulama and ordinary people alike since some argue that it is not prohibited in Islam<sup>(28)</sup>. They do, however, agree that *khalwa* is severely forbidden (Meijer, 2010).

Saudi Arabia is the only Muslim country that practices this segregation (Alwedinani, 2017), and one could wonder, why? The answer to this question traces back to the first Saudi Arabian Kingdom of that century. While exploring the history, AlMunajjed (1997) stated that the Saudi royal family had a close association with Muhammad ben Abdel Wahab<sup>(29)</sup>, the most well-known Islamic scholar, religious reformer,

and *mujadid* of all time. AlMunajjed (1997) defined a *mujadid* as a voice sent by God at the beginning of every century to encourage Muslims to reconnect to the authentic truths of the Quran, Muslims' holy book. Wahabi is the name used by many Western scholars for the *mujadid* whose interpretations of Islamic teachings, the *Shari'a*, are followed by most Saudis and other Muslims (Alqahtani, 2015). The first Saudi king, Ibn Saud, and Muhammad ben Abdel Wahab pledged to adopt the Holy Quran and the Hadith, the "documented records of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) utterances" as Saudi Arabia's constitution, which is still in practice today<sup>(30)</sup>.

The *Shari'a*<sup>(31)</sup> is an Islamic constitution based on interpretations of the Quran and the Hadith. Muslims all over the world are expected to abide by what the *ulamas* have agreed upon. Ordinary Muslims who are not highly educated do not have the right to dispute the *ulamas*' interpretations, including the terms *ikhtilat* and *khalwa*. Therefore, Saudi Arabia has practiced gender segregation since the eighteenth century, with men and women living separate lives (Al-Saraj, 2011; Alsuwaida 2016; Alwedini 2017). One might foresee that isolation would become a normal part of life for a Saudi female emerging from that segregation. As a result, any integration with the opposite gender will be either nonexistent or hard to come by in Saudi Arabia, which will cause problems for those who intend to continue their education abroad (Alghamdi, 2017).

Another factor impacting communication between the genders is shyness for Saudi ESL learners<sup>(32)</sup>. Previously, Chu (2008)<sup>(33)</sup> explored how shyness influences Chinese learners and dealt with these learners' relations with instructors, especially with the participants' reluctance. Chu's (2008) and others' work indicates that shyness can be considered for ESL learners in general and their speaking proficiency in particular.

It is to be noted that shyness in Saudi female ESL learners can result from the cultural background. Baki (2004)<sup>(34)</sup> concluded from examining Saudi female students' higher education experiences that Saudi cultural norms are transferred to their academic experience. For example, Saudi women were expected to be housewives and to nurture mothers at the time (Alsuwaida 2016; Baki, 2004). In the 1950s, a group of well-educated men petitioned Saudi Arabia's third king, King Faisal, to allow women education. Religious officials were outraged by King Faisal's decree, but the king responded by mandating that men and women be educated separately, as was customary in Saudi Arabia at the time. Since then, sex segregation has been entrenched and is still prevalent across the nation.

Gender segregation in Saudi Arabia has also affected women's mobility. Baki (2004) opined that many Saudi women find it difficult to travel across the country. In the past, Saudi women were not allowed to drive;

therefore, they had to hire someone else to do it for them. Because this was not possible for all Saudi women, their freedom of movement was restricted. Baki (2004) indicated that the conservatism of Saudi Arabian society is the last but important contributing component to that scenario. Thus, Saudi women's lives are affected even though this is not a feminist issue.

Another example is the Saudi education system's single-gender-based teaching. For this purpose, classes are specially equipped with televised lectures for Saudi female students<sup>(35)</sup>. In addition, the female students receive live broadcasts performed by male faculty members to prevent any face-to-face connection between men and women following the teachings of *ikhtilat* and *khalwa*. Likewise, Saleh and Malibari (2021)<sup>(36)</sup> asserted that Saudi women's travel routines differ greatly from their western counterparts. They believed that this is not simply due to cultural differences, but Saudi women were also prohibited from driving until recently, and they were granted driving privileges in 2018. They further concluded that it had been expected that permitting women to drive would increase their mobility and empower them in society.

It is worth noting that Saudi Arabia's conservatism had been modernized under the regime of King Abdullah, the country's sixth ruler. King Abdullah ascended the throne in 2005 and implemented several reforms, one of which was advancing women's rights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, his policies generated an uproar in Saudi society, splitting conservatives and liberals. Meijer (2010) spoke on the evolution of the argument. After September 11, 2001, the controversy grew, and both sides could feel the heat. As a result, King Abdullah replaced some more conservative *ulamas* with the liberals to bring the argument back to a more peaceful level. Meanwhile, the king launched his previously mentioned scholarship, which greatly contributed to a societal shift in Saudi Arabia (Alfurayh and Burns, 2020). The present research seeks to analyze how students who received scholarships and travelled overseas for higher education dealt with this adjustment.

To begin with, there are various challenges, which Duff (2012)<sup>(37)</sup> discovered a link between L2 learning process, identity and personality characteristics, learners encounter when they study abroad. Age, gender, race, nation, ethnicity, and L1 background, he claims, are all identity predictors. As a result, when evaluating community engagement, each of these factors should be considered. He mentioned, for example, how Western female Japanese learners refuse to speak like Japanese males since Japanese girls communicate in order to express their femininity. This kind of speech offends many Western women who believe in gender equality. As a result, because this Japanese social pattern opposes one element of Western culture, learning it

may have an impact on a learner's personality and identity. Similarly, due to the differences in how men and women interact in the two civilizations, Saudi female ESL learners may have difficulty coping with the Western culture.

## 2.2 Cultural differences in second language acquisition (SLA)

Prior research substantiates the belief that identity and culture are inextricably linked; therefore, culture greatly influences language development<sup>(38)</sup>.

Anwaruddin (2012) evaluated the English abilities of 18 Bangladeshi university students by conducting interviews with the participants, and their writing talents were assessed. Participants who identified as English users while keeping their Bangladeshi identities did poorly in the target language, according to his findings. Students who identified as English, on the other hand, displayed higher levels of language proficiency.

Furthermore, according to Anwaruddin (2012), people's identities are intimately connected to the formation and maintenance of links with various texts. As a result, rather than seeing students as people with specific learning requirements, educators and researchers must understand them as humans with multiple identities who are always growing (such as learning English). Accordingly, the current study expected that Saudi female ESL students would have a difficult time adjusting to the cultural disparities between their native Arabic and English cultures.

The problem of cultural disparities in language learning has been studied empirically for a long time<sup>(39)</sup>. Gezi's (1959) study focuses on the lifestyles of Middle Eastern students in the United States. Many Middle Eastern students, he claimed, were oblivious of the realities of American society and how different it was from what they had grown accustomed to in their homelands. Furthermore, according to Gezi (1959), many misconceptions stem from the cultural barrier that exists between Americans and Middle Easterners.

As proven by Le Renard (2008) and Alsuwaida (2016), when learners' first and target languages conflict philosophically, the outcomes can be disastrous. Saudi female ESL students must either embrace or reject new trends in the language they are learning because Saudi Arabian men and women's interactions are so different from those in the United States. Whatever decisions learners make when learning the target language will have an indelible impact on their identities. As a result, one can conclude that identity is

determined not exclusively by the individual, but rather by how that individual perceives himself or herself in a broader societal context.

To summarize, the learner's L1, culture, and learning motivation will all have an impact on their ability to learn the target language. Other variables such as motivation and linguistic differences and similarities will be controlled for being outside the scope of this research because the current study investigates the relationship between proficiency in the target language (English) and the subjects' culture on a microscopical level. Shyness and how Saudi female ESL learners' English skills may influence their discussion with male classmates in their ESL classes will be the only aspects explored in this study.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Subjects

Twenty Saudi female ESL learners were selected as participants for the study, of which ten were advanced learners, and ten were beginners. Their average age was 25, with the youngest subject being 20 years old and the oldest being 30 years old. The participants were enrolled in ESL programs at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL, and Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. The subjects' duration of stay in the US was also recorded, with the maximum being two years and the minimum being three months. In addition, results of the placement tests conducted at the subjects' respective ESL institutions were used to gauge their English Language proficiency level, which ranged from advanced to novice. Finally, it must be noted that all of the subjects had spent approximately six years in Saudi Arabian public schools studying English as a Second Language.

#### 3.2. Instruments

A modified version of shyness questionnaire developed by Duff<sup>(41)</sup> was used as an instrument for this study. The questionnaire covered three aspects of participants' communication attitudes were assessed: 1) their attitudes toward communicating with Saudi males or men of other nationalities; 2) Self-assessments of their shyness/awkwardness in communicating with men, and 3) whether they felt that learning English had altered their personalities. Their possible responses were organized as follows on a 5-level Likert Scale: Level 1 = strongly agree (SA), Level 2 = agree (A), Level 3 = neutral (N), Level 4 = disagree (D), and Level 5 = strongly

disagree (SD). Furthermore, a demographic survey was also conducted to gather information about other variables such as age, gender, length of stay in the United States, and years of English education in Saudi Arabia. The modification in the questionnaire was meticulously performed to enhance its relevance to the study. It is important to note that before administering the questionnaire to the subjects, the validity of the modifications was examined by linguistics specialists, who then validated the amended questionnaire. A pilot study was also carried out to test the questionnaire's reliability. A random sample of ten Saudi females was randomly recruited to check the validity of the instrument. The outcome of the pilot study showed that the modified questionnaire was feasible, and all the participants of the pilot study were excluded from the actual study. The questionnaire was sent to the participants via email.

## 4. Results

The current study examines Saudi female ESL learners' attitudes regarding communicating with members of the opposing gender. Twenty Saudi female ESL students who had spent three months to two years living and studying in the United States were given a questionnaire about their attitudes toward interacting with men. Their responses were studied in light of their cultural backgrounds, attitudes, and beliefs about communicating with members of the opposing gender. The findings from the data analysis of the participants' responses to the questionnaire are summarized according to the order of research questions and stated below. The Likert scale shyness measurement results are stated first, followed by attitudes toward contact with members of the opposite gender.

### 4.1 Participants' Shyness

The results of the participants' responses to the questionnaire items suggested that none of the subjects were shy at all. Statement 1 centered on participants' social feelings and the fear of looking foolish in social situations, with which 80% of the respondents disagreed, indicating that individuals could participate in public situations without the fear of embarrassment. Moreover, 75% of the participants strongly disagreed with statement 2, implying that they would not often feel insecure on social occasions. Respondents' strong disagreement to statement 3 with the mean of 90% clearly revealed that they were not afraid to say "no" to any kind of unaccommodating requests. All the participants strongly disagreed with statement 4, which showed that they would not feel lonely most of the time. Finally, the responses to statement 5 signified that none of the participants felt ashamed or embarrassed after social interactions since 100 % strongly disagreed

with the statement. Table 1 shows the Likert Scale Shyness statements, the modes, and means of participants' responses.

*Table 1: Likert Scale Shyness Results*

| Likert Scale Items 1-5                                  | Mode | Mean |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| I am afraid of looking foolish in social situations.    | D    | 80%  |
| I often feel insecure in social situations.             | SD   | 75%  |
| It is hard for me to say "no" to unreasonable requests. | SD   | 90%  |
| I feel lonely a good deal of the time.                  | SD   | 100% |
| Sometimes I feel ashamed after social situations.       | SD   | 100% |

#### ***4.2 participants' attitudes toward communication with members of the opposite gender in their home country***

Table 2 shows the participants' views regarding communication with members of the opposite gender and their styles and ways of communication. The participants' responses show a clear inclination to avoid interaction with members of the opposing gender in their own country. 80% of respondents strongly agreed with the idea of interacting with women in their everyday lives instead of men. Statement 7 extended upon number 6 by inquiring if the participants had any sort of contact with males outside of their families. More than half of the respondents (60%) strongly agreed, implying that they did not have any contact with males outside of their families. Furthermore, all the participants felt that they found it difficult to ask something from a strange man, as 100% strongly agreed to statement 8. The responses to statement 9 showed that the Saudi female ESL learners typically avoided engaging in discussions with men in ESL classrooms since 80% of participants responded in strong agreement to the statement. However, the results revealed that all of the participants felt comfortable interacting with male members of their family and may simply inquire about whatever they wanted. It can be noticed that the mode of all of the responses was "strongly agree," which proves that the participants showed strong agreement with all the statements.

Table 2: Likert scale results of all participants' attitudes toward communication with members of the opposite gender in their home country

| Likert Scale Items 6-10                                    | Mode | Mean |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| I prefer to have contact with women rather than men.       | SA   | 80%  |
| In KSA, I did not have contact with men outside my family. | SA   | 60%  |
| It is hard for me to ask a strange man about anything.     | SA   | 100% |
| I avoid discussions with men in ESL classes.               | SA   | 80%  |
| I find it easy to ask for anything I like from my family.  | SA   | 100% |

#### 4.3a Beginners' attitudes toward communication with members of the opposite gender in ESL classrooms (U. S.)

The responses to statements 11-15 are summarized in section 4.3, examining the participants' views regarding communicating with members of the opposing gender. The statements were divided into two sub-sections, i.e., 11a-15a and 11b-15b, in order to illustrate differences between the responses of beginners and advanced learners, respectively.

All of the beginners' group participants agreed that attending all-female classes would aid in their efforts to enhance their English language skills. They also strongly agreed with statement 12a, which was about the appropriateness of single-sex classrooms. 70% of beginners disagreed with statement 13a, showing that more than half of them cared about the nationality of their classmates. However, beginner respondents strongly disagreed with the preference to have contact with Saudi men with the mean of 60%. Finally, the majority of beginners (80%) preferred to interact with men other than Saudis. The possible reasons for these responses are explored in the discussion section. Table 3 lists the statements (11a-15a) along with the modes and means of the beginner participants' responses.

Table 3: Likert Scale Results of beginner participants' attitudes toward communication with members of the opposite gender in ESL classrooms in the U. S.

| Likert Scale Items 11a-15a                                   | Mode | Mean |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| I learn English much faster in all-female classes.           | SA   | 100% |
| Single-sex classes are more appropriate for female learners. | SA   | 100% |
| My classmate's nationality does not matter to me.            | D    | 70%  |
| I am Saudi, so I prefer to have contact with Saudi men.      | SD   | 60%  |
| I prefer to have contact with men other than Saudis.         | SA   | 80%  |

#### 4.3b Advanced learners' attitudes toward communication with members of the opposite gender in classrooms (U. S.)

In terms of communication with men, the results of advanced learners differed from those of beginner learners. The fact that 90% of advanced participants disagreed with the idea that all-female classes would aid their English Language learning process. Moreover, their complete disagreement with statement 12b visibly demonstrates how differently the advanced participants' thought about the appropriateness of same-sex classes from those of the beginner participants. However, by responding to statement 13b, advanced learners showed that they have nearly identical perceptions regarding their classmates' nationalities to that of beginners, as 80% of them disagreed. Furthermore, the last two statements addressed the participants' preferences for interacting with Saudi men in the class. Finally, the results suggest that most of the advanced learners showed no tendency to avoid Saudi men in a class by strongly disagreeing with the statement 14b and 15b, with the means of 60% and 90%, respectively. Table 4 displays these statements and the modes and means by which the advanced learners responded.

Table 4: Likert Scale results of advanced participants' attitudes toward communication with members of the opposite gender in ESL classrooms in the U. S.

| Likert Scale Items 11b-15b                                   | Mode | Mean |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| I learn English much faster in all-female classes.           | D    | 90%  |
| Single-sex classes are more appropriate for female learners. | D    | 100% |
| My classmate's nationality does not matter to me.            | D    | 80%  |
| I am Saudi, so I prefer to have contact with Saudi men.      | SD   | 60%  |
| I prefer to have contact with men other than Saudis.         | SD   | 90%  |

## 5. Discussions

### 5.1 Shyness among the participants

The results indicate that all the participants' exhibited negative attitudes toward shyness. It can be safely said that shyness may have a detrimental effect on communication skills in general. For instance, a shy person may avoid excessive contact with others, thus, hindering the communication between them and other people. For this reason, it was absolutely necessary to investigate this characteristic in each of the study's participants in order to isolate its possible effects if it was present. However, as described by the results in 4.1, all the participants showed that they were not among the shy type, thereby displaying a high level of self-esteem and self-confidence during communication. Once it was established that none of the participants were shy, the study dived into the investigation of their communication with members of the opposite gender in their home country, which is discussed in the following subsection.

### 5.2 Attitudes toward communication with members of the opposite gender in their home country

The results shown in Table 2 confirm that Saudi female ESL learners preferred to have contact with women instead of men, and they were not used to the interactions with men outside of their families. Moreover, they found it difficult to interact with strange men, and they would not engage in discussions with

men in classes, as shown by their responses to statements 8 and 9, respectively. These responses show a clear tendency for Saudi female ESL learners to avoid communication with men in their home country. However, it has already been established previously that the participants did not exhibit any form of shyness, so now an interesting question arises: Why would they avoid interacting with men if they were not shy? It can be particularly explained by the segregation of the sexes in Saudi Arabia, as mentioned in the literature review. The important point to be noted here is that if the participants were communicating with men within their own families, as indicated by the responses to statement 10, they would not feel any hesitation. This is because the segregation of the genders exists only outside of the families. Thus, the results suggest that in general, and in ESL classes in particular, Saudi female ESL learners find their life in the United States complicated by this cultural separation since they involuntarily tend to avoid men because of the environment they were brought up in Saudi Arabia. The following subsections discuss the attitudes of beginners and advanced learners with men in ESL classrooms in the U. S.

### ***5.3a Beginners' attitudes toward communication with members of the opposite gender in ESL classrooms (U. S.)***

Now that the shyness aspect and participants' attitudes toward communicating with men in the native country have been discussed thoroughly, section 5.3a looks into the beginner's attitudes toward communicating with men in the ESL classrooms in the foreign country. The variable between the beginners and advanced learners in the foreign country that must not be looked at in this position was the level of English Language proficiency. Therefore, the last five statements (11-15) were constructed to reveal Saudi female ESL students' preferences, if any, regarding communication with men in the foreign country.

The objective of statements 11a and 12a was to elicit opinions about same-sex courses from beginners. The rationale was to assess the integrity of the responses of beginners to the first five statements (Table 1) about gender relations in their native country. The data aligned with the previous responses in that all of the beginner participants expressed their willingness to have same-sex classes and that doing so might increase the rate at which they learned the English Language. Thus, the results suggest that beginners preferred same-sex classes with lower English proficiency and did not prefer to have men as their classmates, particularly Saudi men. However, the responses of beginners to statement 13a indicated that considerable attention was placed on the men's nationalities. Notably, seven female respondents disagreed with this assertion, while only three agreed. The possible reason for certain nationality preferences could be that due to

the segregation of the sexes that influences women's lives in Saudi Arabia, Saudi women are required by society to avoid Saudi men who are not family members. The results of the following statements, i.e., 14a and 15a, also support this projection. The results suggested that beginner Saudi female learners tend to prefer contact with men of nationalities other than Saudis in the foreign country. It might be because of the traditions and customs that Saudi people bring with them anywhere they go. Since beginner Saudi female learners have had little to no contact with Saudi men in their home country, they tend to continue this progression in foreign countries. Therefore, it can be said that due to the influence of their culture; beginner Saudi female ESL learners prefer single-sex classes and non-Saudi men as their classmates.

### ***5.3b Advanced learners' attitudes toward communication with members of the opposite gender in classrooms (U. S.)***

As displayed in Table 4, the attitudes of advanced Saudi female ESL learners toward communicating with men were quite different from those of beginners. 90% of participants disagreed with the preference for all-female classes, demonstrating how their English proficiency had influenced their preference. Their response to the following statement affirmed this assertion, in which advanced learners negated the appropriateness of single-sex classes for female learners. Interestingly, advanced learners showed a tendency to care about the nationalities of their classmates just like the beginners; however, the differences between the attitudes of the two groups could be clearly observed in the results of the following statements. Unlike the beginners, advanced learners did not completely reject the idea of preferring to contact with Saudi men in a foreign country. The reason could be attributed to this finding that acquisition of English as a Second Language had produced considerable development in the personalities of advanced learners that they did not feel the need to avoid men at all.

## **5.4 Conclusions**

The findings of the present study provided clear answers to the study questions. There was a clear distinction between the beginners and advanced groups in that the former tended to avoid communication with men in the classroom in a foreign country, particularly Saudi men, whereas the latter did share this attitude. However, both the groups had a little or no contact with men in their home country. The sole distinction between the two groups can be attributed to their level of English proficiency since cultural background and shyness factors were the same for both groups. Advanced acquisition of English as a Second Language possibly revolutionized the personalities of advanced Saudi female ESL learners, who became more

accepting of communicating with men, Saudi or non-Saudi, despite coming from a cultural background that segregates both genders. It is possible to argue that the participants' period of stay in the United States had an impact on their responses as advanced learners. However, this study infers that the skill level in a target language is implicit in the length of time spent studying abroad. Thus, learning a new language may provide the learner with fresh perspectives on numerous elements of their life.

It was also established from the results that no single participant showed the signs of shyness from their responses to the questionnaire, thus indicating that shyness was not a significant factor that would have a bearing on English learning.

The last question examined whether participants' preferences for communicating with men were affected by the students' competency in the target language. Clearly, the discrepancy between advanced and beginner participants was related to their varying degrees of target language competency. In addition, a comparison of the participants' questionnaire responses describing their lifestyles in Saudi Arabia and the United States depicted that a learning gain in their English proficiency resulted in a shift in their attitudes toward communication with the opposite gender.

To conclude, the majority of the participants were quite confident and did not exhibit shyness. However, due to the sex segregation that exists in Saudi Arabia, they were not used to communicating with men in their home country. Consequently, the study found that the beginner Saudi ESL learners preferred to learn in single-gender classes. They felt this way because they had grown up avoiding men in their home country, not because of gender prejudice, but because of the Saudi culture, which condemns the mingling of men and women. On the other hand, due to acquiring English as Second Language, the advanced Saudi female ESL learners in this study demonstrated obvious preferences for contact with men. According to the data, their predilection for contact with males was clear; however, the reasons for this preference may be the subject of future research. It is obvious that the second prediction of this study was proven to be correct through the results, as advanced Saudi female ESL learners were more confident in having contact with men than beginners. This prediction confirms the Gardner Socio-Educational Model of L2 acquisition hypothesis, which states that advanced Saudi female ESL learners acquire new norms as a result of learning a new language.

## Endnotes

- (1) Saudi Vision 2030 is a strategic framework for reducing Saudi Arabia's reliance on oil, diversifying the Saudi economy, and developing public service sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, recreation, and tourism. Alotaibi, Saudi Women: 2, 3.
- (2) Le Renard, Only for Women: 2, 3, 5, 9
- (3) Al-Saraj, *Exploring foreign Language anxiety in Saudi Arabia*: 2, 5.
- (4) Alexandrowicz, ESL and cultures resource: 2, 4
- (5) Lado, Linguistics across Cultures: 2, 5. Byram, & Feng, Teaching and researching intercultural competence: 2,5.
- (6) Alfurayh, & Burns, Redefining 'me': 2, 7.
- (7) Gardner, Integrative motivation and second language acquisition: 2, 3, 15.
- (8) Alghamdi, *The Experience of Saudi Female Students Attending Mixed Gender ESL Courses in Melbourne, Australia*: 3, 5, 6
- (9) Javid, Al-Asmari, and Farooq, Saudi undergraduates': 3
- (10) Weinzetl, King Abdullah Scholarship Program: 4.
- (11) Bollang, American colleges see more Saudi students on scholarships: 4.
- (12) Shaw, Bridging differences: 4. Tago, US ambassador salutes success of 2012 graduates: 4.
- (13) McCroskey, & Richmond, Willingness to communicate: 5.
- (14) Contrastive analysis hypothesis is a branch of comparative linguistics concerned with comparing two or more languages to determine their differences or similarities, either for theoretical or non-theoretical reasons.
- (15) Ara, Contrastive Analysis and Its Implications for Bengali Learners of ESL: 5.
- (16) Glowacki-Dudka, Usman, and Treff, Intercultural conflicts between close friends: 5.
- (17) Slobin, From "thought and language" to "thinking for speaking":
- (18) Bubshait, *Saudi women's education: History, reality, and challenges for Saudi women*: 5.
- (19) Sallam, Where Is Saudi Arabian Society Heading?: 5.
- (20) Alqahtani, Fluid Cultures and Identifications: 5, 6.
- (21) Al Hareth & Al Dighrir. I. Review of Women and Society in Saudi Arabia:
- (22) Alhazmi, Nyland, Saudi international students in Australia and intercultural engagement:
- (23) Wagemakers, Salafi scholarly views on gender-mixing (ikhtilat) in Saudi Arabia: 5.

- (<sup>24</sup>) Meijer, Reform in Saudi Arabia: The gender-segregation debate: 5, 6, 7.
- (<sup>25</sup>) AlMunajjed, *Women in Saudi Arabia today*: 5, 6
- (<sup>26</sup>) In Islam, the ulama means literally "the learned ones", (also spelled ulema; feminine).
- (<sup>27</sup>) Atawneh, Islamic Politics and Governance: 6.
- (<sup>28</sup>) Alwedini, Ikhtilat as patriarchal expression: 6.
- (<sup>29</sup>) Muhammad ben Abdel Wahab (1703-1792) was an Islamic scholar, preacher, religious leader, reformer, activist, and theologian from Najd in central Arabia, considered as the eponymous founder of the Wahhabi movement.
- (<sup>30</sup>) Alsuwaida, Women's Education in Saudi Arabia: 6, 7, 9.
- (<sup>31</sup>) Shari'a is a type of religious law that is part of the Islamic culture. It is developed from Islamic religious principles and is based on interpretations of Islamic scriptural texts, primarily the Quran and Hadith.
- (<sup>32</sup>) Turjoman, Willingness to Communicate in English among Saudi Female University Students: 6.
- (<sup>33</sup>) Chu, Shyness and EFL Learning in Taiwan: 8.
- (<sup>34</sup>) Baki, Gender-segregated education in Saudi Arabia: 6.
- (<sup>35</sup>) Nakshabandi, Videoconferencing; King Saud University: 7.
- (<sup>36</sup>) Saleh, Malibari, Saudi Women: 6.
- (<sup>37</sup>) Duff, Identity, agency, and second language acquisition: 7, 8.
- (<sup>38</sup>) Anwaruddin, Learner identity in second language education: 6.
- (<sup>39</sup>) Gezi, *The acculturation of Middle Eastern Arab students in selected American colleges and universities*: 9.
- Kuo, "Linguistics across Cultures: 9.

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## الآداب

### للدراستات اللغوية والأدبية

مجلة علمية فصلية محكمة - تعنى بالدراسات اللغوية والأدبية - تصدر عن كلية الآداب

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مجلة علمية فصلية محكمة

تصدر عن كلية الآداب

جامعة ذمار، ذمار،

الجمهورية اليمنية.

العدد (13)

مارس 2022م

ISSN:2707-5508

EISSN: 2708-5783

الترقيم المحلي:

(2020 - 1631)

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## قواعد النشر

تصدر مجلة "الآداب" العلمية المحكمة، عن كلية الآداب، جامعة ذمار، بالعربية والإنجليزية والفرنسية، وفقا للقواعد الآتية:

- 1- أن تتسم الأبحاث بالأصالة والمنهجية العلمية السليمة.
- 2- أن تخضع البحوث للتحكيم العلمي حسب الأصول العلمية المتبعة.
- 3- تكتب البحوث بلغة سليمة، وتراعى فيها قواعد الضبط ودقة الأشكال -إن وجدت- بصيغة (Word)، بحجم (14)، وبخط (Simplified Arabic) بالنسبة إلى الأبحاث باللغة العربية، وبخط (Times New Roman) للأبحاث بالإنجليزية والفرنسية، وتكون العناوين الرئيسة بخط غامق، وبحجم (16). على أن تكون المسافة بين الأسطر (1,5 سم)، وهوامش (2,5 سم) من كل جانب.
- 4- أن يصحح لغوياً من قبل الباحث.
- 5- أن يُرفق معه ملخصان بالعربية والإنجليزية، على ألا يتعدى كل منهما 200 كلمة في فقرة واحدة، ويشتملان على العناصر الآتية: الموضوع، المنهجية، والنتائج، ويرفق معهما كلمات مفتاحية بحيث تتراوح بين 4-6 كلمات باللغتين.
- 6- أن يُرفق معه ترجمة لعنوان البحث، والوصف الوظيفي للباحث، والمؤسسة التي ينتهي إليها، والبريد الإلكتروني الخاص به.
- 7- لا يتجاوز البحث (30) صفحة، بما فيها الأشكال والجداول والملاحق، وفي حال الزيادة يدفع الباحث ألف ريال يمني عن كل صفحة.
- 8- توثق الهوامش في نهاية الأبحاث على النحو الآتي:
  - أ- المخطوطات: اسم المؤلف، عنوان المخطوط، مكان حفظه، رقمه، الورقة.
  - ب- الكتب: اسم المؤلف (المؤلفين)، عنوان الكتاب، بلد النشر، ومكانه، وتاريخه، الطبعة، الصفحة.
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  - د- الرسائل الجامعية: اسم صاحب الرسالة، عنوانها، القسم، الكلية، والجامعة، تاريخ إجازتها، الصفحة.
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- 11- ترتب الأبحاث عند النشر حسب تاريخ ورودها إلى المجلة.
- 12- يدفع الباحثون من داخل اليمن أجور النشر البالغة (25000) ريال يمني، ومن خارج اليمن (150) دولارًا أمريكيًا أو ما يعادلها، في حين يدفع أعضاء هيئة التدريس في جامعة ذمار مبلغًا وقدره (15000) ريال يمني، كما يدفع الباحث أجور إرسال النسخ الورقية من العدد.
- 13- تورد المبالغ إلى حساب رقم (211084) في البنك التجاري اليمني - فرع ذمار، الجمهورية اليمنية. ولا يعاد المبلغ إذا رُفض البحث من قبل المحكمين.

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# Arts

ISSN: 2707-5508

EISSN :2708-5783

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A Quarterly peer Reviewed Scientific Journal for Linguistic & Literary Studies

**Published by the Faculty of Arts,  
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