



**Transition of Saudi Women Students in South Australia:
Push-Pull Factors, Academic and Socio-cultural
Experiences, Supporting Factors and Acculturation
Strategies**

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ABSTRACT

The number of Saudi women students who are joining overseas universities has been increasing. Many scholars attempt to examine their transition experiences; however, there remains limited research into the transition experience of Saudi women students, especially in Australia.

Thereafter, based in Australia, third on top host destinations for international students, this study examines the transition of Saudi women students in South Australia. It examines three concerns: what push-pull factors informed the decision of Saudi women students to leave their home country in pursuit of education overseas and select Australia for their studies; how they describe their academic and socio-cultural experiences; and what supporting factors and acculturation strategies they have used to adapt to the Australian contexts.

This study follows a qualitative research methodology and data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews with fourteen Saudi women students in South Australia. Drawing on the push-pull model of factors informing the decision of international students to leave their home country and study in an overseas country, this study identified nine push-pull factors of Saudi women students which informed their decision to study in Australia. Moreover, taking into consideration the cultural dimensions theory, the study found that Saudi women students studying and living in Australia had different experiences that were perceived by some students to be challenging. These challenging experiences were found to be related in part to the differences of academic and socio-cultural settings that exist in the home context, Saudi Arabia, and the host context, Australia. Yet, identification and use of available supporting factors helped the participants to navigate the challenges occurring in the educational and socio-cultural settings and to adjust to the Australian context. The acculturation strategies model offered a lens to examine the participants' choices of specific supporting

factors pertaining to their perception of maintaining original cultural values or adapting to Australian ones. Combining all three aspects, the study concluded with a model to illustrate the transition of Saudi women students in those three phases.

The implications of the findings from examining the Saudi women students' transition may assist Australian academic institutions, including universities and English language centres, in determining practices that may improve or enhance the student's experience. This could also be useful to other international students who are attending Australian education facilities, and for prospective students who may be considering studying in the country. Additionally, the study is most valuable to researchers in the cross-cultural field, and stakeholders in international education, or, in the broader sense, individuals who develop an interest in understanding how Saudi women students representing a cohort of international students navigate the transition and adapt their behaviours in unfamiliar academic and socio-cultural contexts while studying and living temporarily in Western countries.

DECLARATION

I Safiah Nasser M Hakami certify that the PhD thesis entitled *Transition of Saudi Women Students in South Australia: Push-Pull Factors, Academic and Socio-cultural Experiences, Supporting Factors and Acculturation Strategies* contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital repository, the Library Search and also through the web search engine, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

Signature: _____

Date: 19/05/2023

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Shariah and Nasser, my husband Zakaria and my children Rafif and Farid.

I love you.

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First and foremost, I thank “Allah” Almighty for the time, ability, persistence and knowledge given me to complete this thesis. Second, Prayers and peace be upon the Prophet Muhammad peace be on him, his family and all of his companions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Since the last decade, it has been assumed that the internationalization of education will grow massively, and more international students will study abroad (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Caruana & Spurling, 2007; Li & Bray, 2007; Wells, 2014). Accordingly, international students are expected to face challenges associated with the perceived differences of learning and living systems among their home and host cultures that may involve changes of attitudes, approaches and perceptions (Foster, 2017; Hellstén, 2002; Wu et al., 2015; Young et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2008). The qualitative study reported in this thesis explores the transition of Saudi women students in Australia. It examines their push-pull factors, academic and socio-cultural experiences and supporting factors, and acculturation strategies. The study also considers the impact of religious and cultural values on their experiences. Coming from a country where Islam is heavily affecting all systems of life and is seen as a major part of the cultural identity (Al-nusair, 2000; Denman & Hilal, 2011; Nevo, 1998; Ochsenswald, 1981) to a Western country, where the culture and language are different, underlies the importance of understanding some religious and cultural values of Saudi women and how it may affect their experience while temporarily studying and living in South Australia. For the majority Saudi women, who have been raised in Saudi Arabia, their educational and socio-cultural lived experience is steeped in the Islamic teachings as interpreted by the State (further details on women's educational and socio-cultural settings are discussed in Chapter 2). A brief discussion is now given on current literature gaps; the significance of this study and its contribution to knowledge (1.2); research questions (1.3); research methodology (1.4); and lastly, the thesis structure.

1.2 Gaps in literature, significance and contribution to knowledge

There is a large amount of literature investigating and reporting the experiences of international students attending overseas universities covering a variety of aspects. Studies have examined: international students' mobility (Nilemar & Brown, 2017; Richters & Teichler, 2006; Wells, 2014); cultural shock (Zhou et al., 2008); intercultural issues and competence (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010; Choi, 1997; Smith & Khawaja, 2011); security and rights (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Marginson, 2012); and homesickness and discrimination (Andrade, 2006; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Yet, most of these studies focused on international students coming from different ethnic groups and backgrounds.

Reviewing the literature highlighted knowledge gaps that exist on the experience of the Saudi international students despite their growing number in many countries including Australia. There is a lack of research examining their motivations, challenges, needs, and unique experiences. More specifically, previous research has not focussed on Saudi women students attending their studies in South Australia. Therefore, the present study aims to respond to this gap in knowledge and investigate the experiences of Saudi women international students who live and study in the South Australia. Saudi women are expected to go through a different experience as international students due to their unique religious and cultural backgrounds. The reality of academic and social experiences of Saudi women in their home country differs from those of women of other nationalities. Further details on these accounts are presented in sections 2.3 and 2.4.

The contribution of the current study is that it responds to the dearth of literature in two main aspects: (1) the limitation of literature on Saudi women as international students in Australia, and (2) the limitation of combined theoretical models to examine their overseas experience. In response to the first aspect, the limitation of studies on Saudi women could be attributed to three factors that restricted women from studying abroad. First, Saudi women have socio-culturally been hindered from studying abroad due to the socio-cultural practice that they

should be fully committed to their family and home just similar to other women in many Muslim countries (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). Second, the government overseas scholarships have only been available to women for the past 11 years through the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) and the employer's scholarship programs. Third, Saudi women cannot travel overseas without a male guardian, so even a scholarship is available, a woman cannot receive it if her guardian is unable or unwilling to accompany her (Alanazy, 2013). For these reasons, not many Saudi women are able to attend their studies overseas which resulted in dearth of literature on their transitional experiences.

In addition, most of the current research on Saudi women reports on their experiences in American universities (Alsabatin, 2015; Altamimi, 2014; Arafeh, 2017; Bar, 2017; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Razek & Coyner, 2013; Young & Clark, 2017). Only a limited number of studies were conducted on Saudi women attending Australian universities (Alghamdi, 2017; Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010; Alsaifi & Shin, 2017; Binsahl et al., 2015). Yet, no one study examines the push-pull factors of Saudi women informing their decision to study in Australia, nor are there any studies investigating their academic and socio-cultural experiences and strategies of acculturation in South Australia. Being aware of the Saudi women students experience and the challenges that they face would help the stakeholders in the host country, South Australian universities, campus leaders, and international students' services increase their support and foster those students' academic success and cultural experience. Such an understanding and support may lead to better academic, social, and cultural experiences not only for those students but also for other international women students.

In response to the second aspect, the present study is also significant in that it considered three theoretical frameworks: (1) the push-pull factors model (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), (2) cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1983), and (3) acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997). This offers a greater exploration of Saudi women students' transition.

Examining the push-pull factors and academic and socio-cultural experiences of Saudi women students in South Australia informs academic authorities about offering appropriate support that would lead to more Saudi and other international students selecting Australia as a study destination.

1.3 Research questions

This study aims to examine the transition of Saudi women students in South Australia through answering the three questions:

- **RQ1:** What push-pull factors informed the decision of Saudi women students to leave their country and select to study in Australia?
- **RQ2:** How did Saudi women students describe the academic and socio-cultural experiences in South Australia?
- **RQ3:** What supporting factors in the academic and socio-cultural contexts helped Saudi women students in their transition?

These questions will help to identify and examine (1) push-pull factors, (2) academic and socio-cultural experiences and (3) used supporting factors and acculturation strategies.

1.4 Research methodology

Qualitative research formed the methodological approach of the current study. The study seeks to understand the transition of Saudi women students who have temporarily settled in South Australia to pursue their studies. For data collection, it utilized semi-structured interviews which allowed Saudi women to share their own stories about the transition from Saudi Arabia to study and live in Australia. Participants were selected as meeting criteria that they were all from Saudi Arabia and: (1) were aged 18 – 40, (2) were enrolled in a South Australian university or an English language centre, (3) were sponsored by the Saudi scholarship program or sponsored by an employer. Further discussions on the study procedures will be presented in Chapter 4.

1.5 Research theories

This study explores the transition of Saudi women students in South Australia. Exploration of the participants' transition is traced through three phases that begin with (1) push-pull factors informing the decision to study abroad and select Australia as the destination, (2) perceived academic and socio-cultural experiences of cross-culture unfamiliar situations and (3) supporting factors and acculturation to overcome encountered difficulties. Each phase is examined through a theoretical model. Figure 1 below demonstrates the transition of the study's participants through the three phases based on the three theories.

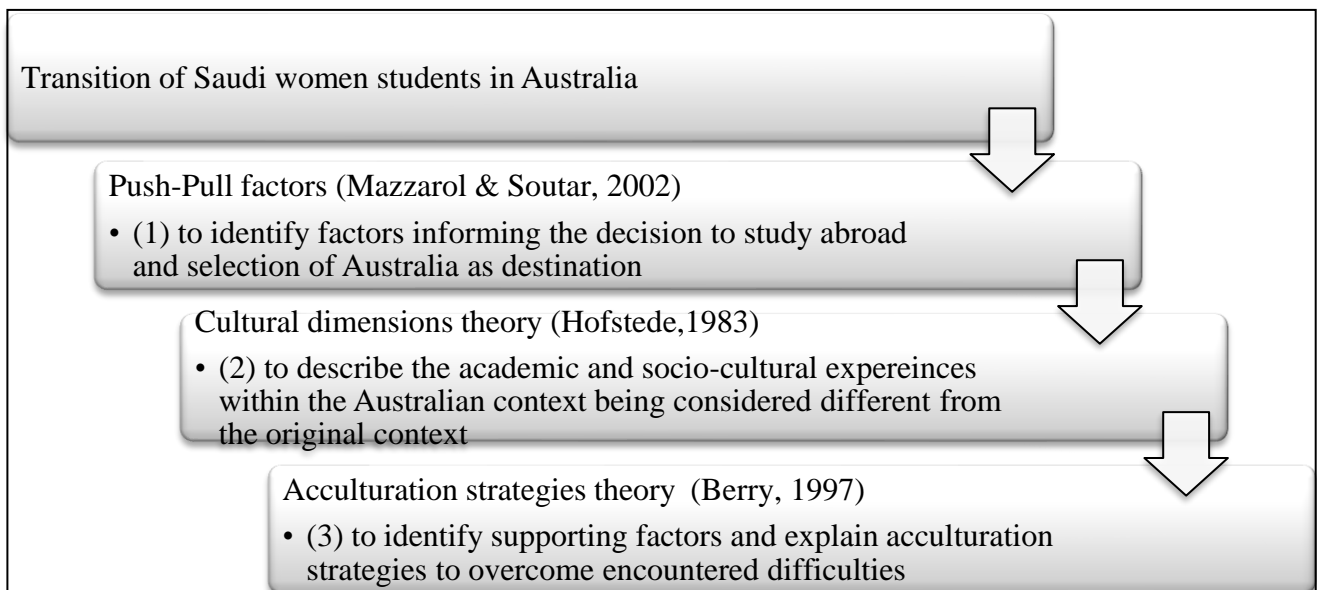


Figure 1. Demonstration of the transition of Saudi women students in South Australia in three phases

The understanding of the transition has been drawn from the work of (1) Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) identifying push-pull factors that informed international students' decision of foreign study; (2) the work of Hofstede (1983) arguing and categorizing cultural differences among nations; and (3) the work of Berry (1997) suggesting four strategies to help navigating the cultural values between home and host country. Chapter 3, the literature review, provides more discussion of these theories and Section 4.7 provides the methodology and methods justifying the use of each theory in the analysis stage.

1.6 Thesis structure

This thesis is organized in eight chapters. Chapter 1 overviews the study introduction, participants' background, gaps in the literature, research significance and contribution, research questions, research methodology, research theories and thesis outlines. Chapter 2 contextualizes and presents the background of research contexts in Saudi Arabia, the participants' home country, and Australia, the participants' host country. This contextualization is significant as it provides salient aspects that help explore relevant religious, academic and socio-cultural dimensions that can be linked to the experiences of Saudi women while temporarily attending universities and living in South Australia. Chapter 3 reviews available and relevant literature concerning three main aspects of this study: internationalization of education and push-pull factors affecting international students' decisions to study abroad, cross-cultural challenges of international students, and supporting factors and acculturation strategies that would help the settlement of international students in the host country. It also examines some literature on Saudis as international students. Chapter 4 describes the qualitative methodology used in this research, participants' recruitment, data collection, analysis method and applied theoretical models, ethical considerations and the researcher's position. Findings and discussions are presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Chapter 5 presents the identified push-pull factors that informed the decision of Saudi women to leave

Saudi Arabia and select Australia as the host country. Chapter 6 presents the academic and socio-cultural experiences as described by participants during their studying and living journeys in South Australia. Chapter 7 presents the supporting factors and acculturation strategies in the academic and socio-cultural contexts. The last Chapter, 8, summarises the study's procedure and concludes the findings, identifying the study implications, limitations and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Research contexts

2.1 Introduction

This study investigates the transition of women who have travelled from Saudi Arabia to Australia as international students. Reviewing the home context in Saudi Arabia and the host context Australia are important to base an understand how the transition from one context to another might be a difficult experience for Saudi women.

The chapter starts with a detailed account of the participants' home context, Saudi Arabia, providing a cultural and historical description. Next, it moves to discuss the Saudi Arabian cultural values and how they differ from the Australian values and culture. Hofstede (1986) claims that the values of a group of individuals are greatly influenced by the culture of their own society. Building on this inspiring argument, studying the values and culture of specific research participants would enable the researcher to identify behaviours and attitudes of the participants. Thus, understand how their previous lived experiences would impact on their new experience. In this study, Saudi women are crossing cultures and attending Australian universities; thus, investigation of their transition adds to the literature of international Muslim and Arabic women students in a Western context. To achieve this, robust knowledge and understanding of specific students' original and host contexts was deemed necessary to provide better environments for international students in their host countries (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005).

2.2 Overview of Saudi Arabian context

Currently, the King of Saudi Arabia is King Salman bin Abdul Aziz who came to the throne in 2015. The son of the King is Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The Crown Prince is known nationally and globally as a revolutionary. His 2030 proposal introduced a

vision that aims to reform the economy and society of Saudi Arabia. This 2030 vision aims to move the country from heavily depending on a petroleum-based economy to a knowledge-based economy (Nurunnabi, 2017; Nuruzzaman, 2018; Saudi Arabian Vision, 2017). The country's vision also aims to involve Saudi women in the development over coming years. His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed stated that in his opening statement:

Our economy will provide opportunities for everyone - men and women...young and old - so they may contribute to the best of their abilities...Saudi women are yet another great asset. With over 50 percent of our university graduates being female, we will continue to develop their talents, invest in their productive capabilities and enable them to strengthen their future and contribute to the development of our society and economy (Saudi Arabian Vision, 2017, p. 7).

Officially, the country is known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or just Saudi Arabia. The latter will be referred to throughout the thesis. The country was established in 1932 when King Abdul Aziz Al Saud united Saudi Arabia regions (Al-bakr et al., 2017; Alhazmi & Nyland, 2015; Sendi, 2019). It is important to mention in this section that Saudi Arabia has no history of being a colonized state and that its conservative, religious and political nature come from its own context (Sendi, 2019).

The flag of Saudi Arabia has a statement which reflects the main pillars of Islamic faith as Allah is the only God and Mohammed is the only prophet, and it is written as there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah, and a sword is placed beneath. This represents the political interwoven with Islam (further discussion in section 2.2.3). The Saudi national anthem was written by Ibrahim Khafaji in 1983 and it stands to represent the pride of the state as being a place where Islam is announced and has the honour to service all Muslims (Al shurafa, 2018; Saudi Gazette, 2017). The translation of the meanings of the Saudi national anthem by Al shurafa (2018) is as follows:

‘Onward toward the Glory and the Height’
Hasten the glory and supremacy!
Glorify the creator of the heavens
And raise the green, fluttering flag,
Carrying the emblem of light!
Repeat (the words): Allah is the greatest!
O my country, my country, may you always live?
The glory of all Muslims!
Long live the King,
For the flag and the country!

What is interesting to highlight is that the Saudi Arabian national anthem combines elements that are not combined in the West or other nations, namely Islam, as the religion, and politics. Therefore, Saudi Arabia is considered to have a central religious position among other countries of the Arabic Gulf (Profanter, 2014) and this position has been rooted in the majority of its cultural and social practices. The way Islam was interpreted by the Wahhabism approach made the state look like ‘the society of men’ (Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013, p. 118). To describe that, authors pictured the society at the time and how it has changed:

About 30 years ago, it was possible to describe Saudi Arabia as ‘the society of men’ because men monopolized professional work, as well as all kinds of political, economic and social authority. But now this image has started to change, and women are carrying out important roles across all of these spheres. There are female doctors, female university teachers and professors and female businesswomen. Today’s Saudi women work in scientific laboratories, in the press and other media and in factories (Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013, p. 118).

2.2.1 Location and culture of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia sits between the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea of the Middle East. There are seven Arabic countries that share the border with Saudi Arabia: United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Yemen, Jordan and Iraq. Thus, Saudi Arabia is in the centre of the Middle East and the surrounding Arab countries. There are five areas dividing the country into the North region, South region, East region, West region (including Makkah and Madinah where the two holy places are located), and the Central region where the capital city is located. The Central region is regarded as the first place of the state establishment. As the capital city is Riyadh, this region has the highest population bulk, and it is the most developed city in the country.

2.2.2 Economic development of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was poor prior to discovering oil. Oil was firstly discovered in early 1930s and since then the economic development of the country has started (Hamdan, 2005). In the early days the whole country and its people witnessed rapid and radical change (Hamdan, 2005; Le Renard, 2008). Saudi women, who used to help their families earn money, stayed home after oil discovery and production. Further, the new style became a cultural aspect that women should stay home and only men should maintain family needs and finances (Le Renard, 2008). Although at that time governmental plans were targeting economic and social development, women and their needs were ignored (Al-Khateeb, 1998).

In recent years, according to Abouammoh and Smith (2013), Saudi Arabia supplied around 60% of the world's oil and that is expected to continue for unforeseeable time. Thus, oil production has changed the economic status of the country and has positively impacted other sectors. Nevertheless, as mentioned early in this chapter, the Saudi Arabian Vision (2017) is developing other strategies in order to decrease dependence on oil and integrate other sources to improve the country's public and private sectors in long term plans.

2.2.3 Islam as the only religion

In Arabic the translation of Islam means “submission or surrender” to the will of Allah, God, (Allen & Toorawa, 2011, p. 3). Islam has five pillars: (1) believing and accepting Allah as the only God, (2) praying five times a day facing Makkah, (3) almsgiving to the needy people annually, (4) fasting for the month of Ramadan, and lastly (5) pilgrimaging to Makkah once a lifetime at least. The following paragraph will present every pillar and how it is practiced, as detailed by Pharaon (2004).

The first pillar is to accept and believe that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is his messenger. The second pillar is to pray five times a day facing Makkah as the Qibla for all Muslim prayers. The third pillar is to give a small amount of the entire wealth to those who are in need annually. The fourth pillar is to fast for the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is the holy month, which represents the mark when Allah selected Muhammad as a messenger and provided Iyat (verses) that are compiled in the Quran. During this month Muslims stop eating, drinking or smoking from sunup to sundown. There are some exemptions for elderly people, children, people with a medical condition and pregnant women. This is because Islam is considerate of the health of all those who fast. At the end of this month, a celebration takes place on the first day of the next month. The celebration day is called Eid al-Fitr and all families gather to enjoy different cultural styles of food and festival activities and are encouraged to donate to charity and exchange gifts. The fifth pillar is the pilgrimage to Makkah which all practicing Muslims must do it at least once in their life if they are in good health and financially able to do so. The pilgrimage is performed in Thu Alhijjah which is the last month of the Islamic calendar. Pilgrimage or Hajj takes place over nine days and on the tenth day all Muslims, including those in Hajj, celebrate Eid al-Adha and sacrifice an animal in the name of Allah, and portions are divided among families, friends and the needy.

This explanation of the five pillars of Islam forms the basics to understand the core religious values of international students who are Muslims, including specifically the Saudi international students. For instance, the need to pray five times a day may academically affect their attendance in classes or examinations. It also informs how being away from the family during the Islamic event times like Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Hajj and Eid al-Adha may affect the Saudi students emotionally as they miss the cultural events which are connected to their religious and cultural identities.

As mentioned earlier, Saudi Arabia is widely known as the birthplace of Islam. Islam was firstly introduced 1443 years ago in Makkah and Madinah, the largest Islamic cities, located in the western region of Saudi Arabia. Both cities have the largest holy mosques in the world, centres which all Muslims hope to visit. Makkah is the place where Islam started, and Madinah is the city where the prophet lived, and his body was buried after he passed away. Islam is an essential part of Saudi Arabian identity as it is the central consideration of all topics affecting major Saudi Arabian factors including political, socio-cultural and economic matters. Thus, the following sections will explain and discuss how it is reflected in the educational and socio-cultural formations of Saudis, and women specifically.

2.3 Education for girls and women in Saudi Arabia

This section discusses one of the thesis' main concerns, which is the academic context in which participants of this research studied earlier in their home country of Saudi Arabia before journeying to study in Australian institutions.

2.3.1 History of girls' education

Early in the 1920s, education in Saudi Arabia started as an informal schooling system allowing little ones to attend local groups that allowed learning the basics of Islamic knowledge. This following quote pictures what teaching involved at the time: "informal schooling took place for both boys and girls, the aim of which was to teach religious rituals.

The goal of education was to learn the Quran, the Hadith...to know how to pray and to follow the rules of behaviour of the Muslim community” (Hamdan, 2005, p. 47). At the time, boys were attending these groups in mosques, whereas girls were taught in their homes (Dakhiel, 2017). For girls, families preferred to hire a notable woman within their particular community to educate girls on the Quran, language and household duties (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991; Hamdan, 2005), aligning this with state’s values during “the olden days” which stressed the role of women was within their homes only (Sabbagh, 1996, as cited in Alsuwaida, 2016; Baki, 2004).

A couple of years later, the country witnessed the development of education systems transitioning from informal to formal schooling. Dakhiel (2017) offers a well-developed discussion and description capturing the movement from traditionalism to modernization of education in Saudi Arabia. According to Dakhiel (2017), the Public Director of Knowledge Centre was established in Saudi Arabia in 1954 governing the implementation of official public education. During the establishment, gender equality for women was a rising objective of the United Nations, yet, the right for girls to be educated was not observed in Saudi Arabia, and education in formal schools was offered initially for boys only, and girls were prevented from attending (Alamri, 2011; Alsuwaida, 2016). Unfortunately, girls’ education was believed to corrupt their moralities rather than to advance their skills and knowledge (Dakhiel, 2017; Hamdan, 2005). Therefore, some families choose to teach their girls privately, and a few elite sent their daughters to study abroad (Dakhiel, 2017).

Following the UN’s focus upon women’s rights, an encouraged movement in girls’ education within Saudi Arabia was started (Alsuwaida, 2016). Such a global focus upon women’s rights further supported the movement towards inclusion of girls in the formal education system, and this was advocated by middle-class, educated men in Saudi society as they demanded their wives to be educated (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991; Baki, 2004). As a

result, girls' schools were formally opened, such as Dar al-Hanan in Jeddah in 1957 (Hamdan, 2005). Although this was considered a progressive step in Saudi women's rights, there was still a particularly strong focus on educating girls with the intention to prepare them for home and mothering duties, thus, equality was far from a reality (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991). A stated general aim of educating girls was "to bring her up in a proper Islamic way so as to perform her duty in life, be an ideal and successful housewife and a good mother, ready to do things which suit her nature as teaching, nursing, and medical treatment" (Alireza, 1987, as cited in Hamdan, 2005, p. 50).

In the 1960s, the structure of education began to shift enormously, and girls were pouring into formal schools (Al-Hariri, 1987; Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991; Alsuwaida, 2016). The development of the "legitimate language" evoked conversation in relation to how a woman's role could best be supported (Al-Hariri, 1987; Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991). It was identified that to be a good housewife, women need a broader plethora of skills than was being covered within the traditional system of the 'ktateb'. Instead of only teaching the basics of religion with minimal language development, it was recognised that an understanding of society, medicine and finances were required in order for a woman to run the family and support her husband (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991; Hamdan, 2005). Hereafter, it is argued that although women of Saudi Arabia were finally allowed to attend formal schools after two decades of being marginalized (Alsuwaida, 2016), their status in the culture has not changed. Hamdan (2005) and Al-Rasheed (2020) doubted that education for Saudi women was able to change the patriarchal nature of the society at the time.

Over the years following this, more and more schools were opened for girls (see Table 1 below). This highlights that, gradually, opinions towards girls' education were changing and opportunities were offered to girls just like their counterpart, boys. However, much opposition against girls' education was seen from the fundamentalist, conservatives and traditionalist

members of society, and it was claimed that controlling girls' education would maintain Islamic teachings via the approval of several conditions. Not only that, but these conservatives knew that they had power over political laws regarding girls' education, therefore, they rejected the teaching of science, languages and art courses to girls, and instead recommended more religious subjects (Hamdan, 2005). These educational practical laws, such as isolating and supervising girls' schools by two elder men at the gate as safeguards as well as limiting subject of study, were not thoughtfully appropriate as it hindered the progress of women to higher education (Baki, 2004; Hamdan, 2005; Syed et al., 2018).

Table 1. Number of Formal Girls' Schools in Saudi Arabia (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991)

Year	No. of schools	No. of classes
1960/61	15	127
1965/66	160	1623
1970/71	357	3645
1975/76	963	8037
1980/81	1810	14,661
1985/86	3155	25,564
1988	3370	29,092

Source: GPGE (1988a, *Concluding Statistics*, pp. 37-39).

2.3.2 Higher education for women in Saudi Arabia

As discussed above, education in Saudi Arabia was firstly only available for men, not women. The case is similar, when the history of higher education for Saudi women is traced. Saudi men were accessing higher education long before women were allowed to (Alamri, 2011;

Hamdan, 2005). The earlier public universities that did offer women access to study after high school were King Saud University which was established in 1957 in Riyadh, and King Abdul Aziz University established in 1967 in Jeddah (Abouammoh & Smith, 2013; Alamri, 2011; Hamdan, 2005). Although these two universities offered some programs for women, delivery teaching methods for women were different to those for men. Women, during the early years of the higher education movement, attended classes through a program that did not require women to leave their houses, except for final exams (Alhareth et al., 2015). This off-campus designed program was a great option for women at the time to start their degrees while accommodating their familial needs. The program perfectly suited the social and cultural norms that discouraged women from attaining a degree. Nevertheless, many Saudi women joined it.

As more and more women joined higher education, the off-campus program seemed less effective and demands to allow women to attend courses on campus resulted in the establishment of segregated buildings designed for women only. In 1967, the King Abdul Aziz University was the first institution to offer women the chance to attend university on campus and study in person (Alhareth et al., 2015). The following year in 1968, the Imam Mohammad Bin Saud Islamic University became the second institution to allow women on campus (Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013). With a total number of only 30 women attending the King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, and only two women attending Imam Mohammad Bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, it is not a surprise that women were attending part-time because there were no available female lecturers (Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013). Therefore, the only available option was that women be taught by male lecturers through television screens. This method of teaching women used a closed-circuit television with one-way video and a two-way audio broadcast system (Alamri, 2011; Alhareth et al., 2015). For clarity, through television screens women are able to see their lecturer and his background boards, while he only could interact

with them via two-way audio for engagement and discussions (Alhareth et al., 2015). This method is still in use for courses that cannot be taught by a female lecturer for some reason.

Later years witnessed an increased number of women enrolling in higher education which resulted in more universities opening their segregated campuses for women over twenty years of age (Alamri, 2011). In a recent report, Alhareth et al. (2015) identified twenty-six public universities located all over Saudi Arabia, and seven private ones, which offered education for both men and women. Today, it can be evidenced that Saudi Arabia has made gradual progress in advancing women's education to be the same as is offered for men. Since public higher education is free of charge for all Saudis, an increased number of student enrolments has been recorded (Al-bakr et al., 2017; Alhareth et al., 2015; Dakhiel, 2017). The increased number made it necessary to develop a Ministry that establishes policies and governs raising needs in a way that aligned with the country's values and contextual laws. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, and later the Ministry of Higher Education, was opened in 2004 to supervise men and women's education at higher levels (Dakhiel, 2017).

One of the greatest programs that the Ministry of Higher Education initiated was the study abroad program. One can assume that positive changes took place in the country because of the rapid development of education for women in considerably short period. It is true, positive changes have continued to strategically plan for further development through preparing the younger generation with proper knowledge of overseas destinations. This is when the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) was first introduced. Though most Saudi public and private universities at the time were offering a variety of subject courses, there was a need for other areas that are not offered in Saudi institutions (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). Not only that, but as the country of Saudi Arabia developed, it needed to catch up with other advanced countries and benefit Saudi international students with technological, industrial, and

educational resources (Denman & Hilal, 2011; Hilal et al., 2015). More details of the KASP are presented in the following section.

Since King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz came to the crown, he has initiated many projects to further improve the country and specifically give women more public chances to improve their position in the society (Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013). Speaking about the academic improvements, King Abdullah announced the establishment of more public universities and colleges within the state, serving more Saudi women students (Alhareth et al., 2015; Hilal et al., 2015). In addition, King Abdullah launched the scholarship program with the approval for Saudi women to become international students, and successfully started the project with no conflicts within the members of society since the scholarship program prioritizes men over women (Alhareth et al., 2015).

This government-supported program offered Saudi women an invaluable opportunity that cannot be wasted since it was also offered to all the family members of an applicant. The number of successful applicants who joined the program initially reached more than 6,000 students, and based on the data of a recent report, that number has greatly increased to 130.000 students (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Australia, 2015). The program was initiated with a clear vision, mission and expected goals as shown in Figure 2 below.

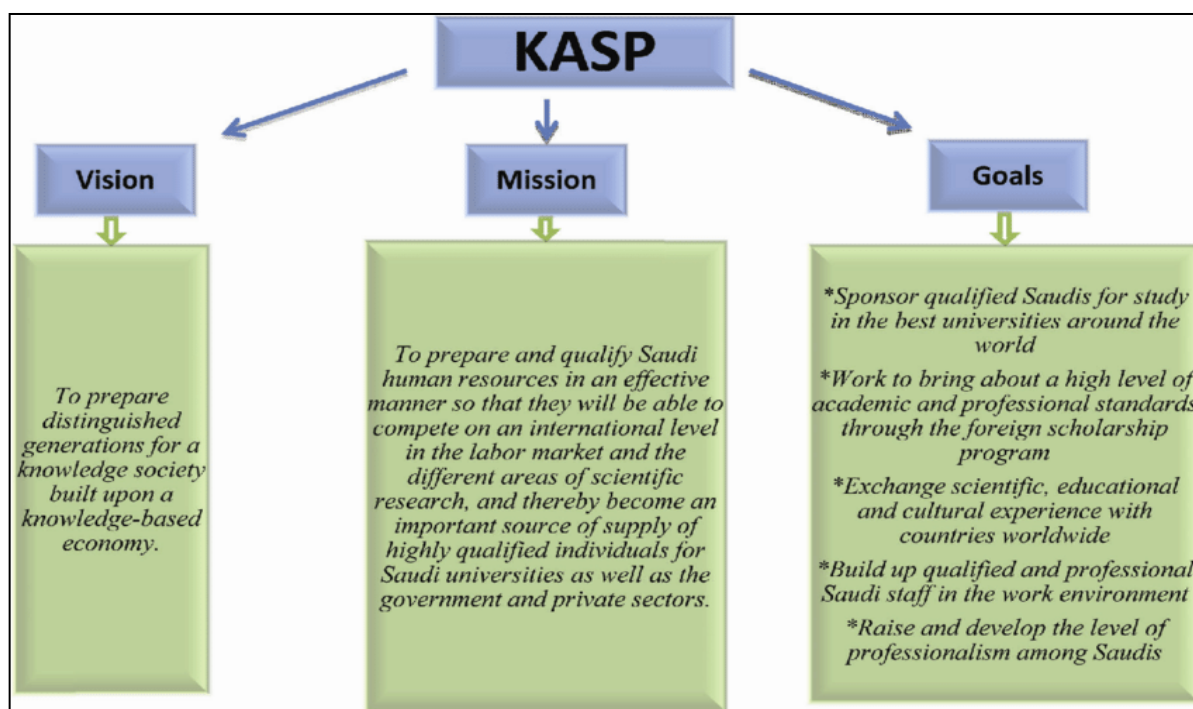


Figure 2. Vision, mission, and goals of KASP (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014, as cited in (Hilal et al., 2015)

The announced vision and mission are very well aligned with the country’s expectation of its younger generation to lead the role of advancing life upon returning from their overseas journeys.

2.3.3 Implications of Saudi education systems on Saudi women in Australia

In reflecting on the former presentation regarding educational backgrounds of Saudi women, it is evident that segregated education systems in Saudi would greatly impact on the transition of international students once they move to study in South Australia. The researcher assumes that Saudi women who attended South Australian institutions might encounter several challenges based on their previous studying experiences in the home country.

The majority of Saudi women did their education at segregated schools where there was no contact with men at all, and then completed higher education with very limited experience, communicating with their lecturer only. Thus, it is assumed that this previous education

experience will be salient for Saudi women when attending mixed gendered classes abroad and they have to actively interact and communicate with male classmates and lecturers. Furthermore, when Saudi women attend South Australian universities, they experience a wide range of differences among the two educational systems in the home and host countries. For all of that, an assumption is made that when Saudi women students identify differences in the academic environment, they would face several academic challenges and, accordingly, they would have to find their own ways to acculturate themselves in the new system.

2.4 Unique socio-cultural aspects of Saudi women

A number of important unique factors, including male guardianship, gender roles and segregation, and hijab, makes the culture of Saudi Arabia, as well as the Saudi women, different from any other Islamic and Arab countries since the state is the birthplace of Islam. There are some connections between these factors and the next paragraphs will explain the impact of each of these on Saudi women's lives.

2.4.1 Male guardianship

As the country represents an Islamic nation, women of Saudi Arabia are expected to be the mirror of an authentic Muslim woman who always obeys Islamic standards. The *Qiwama*, which is an Islamic teaching that asks men to care for their families and their financial needs, was interpreted in the Saudi Arabian context as a male guardianship system that was practically enforced on women. Two verses in the Quran were interpreted, understood and practiced without accounting for a woman's perspective. The first verse states: "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, as God has given some of them an advantage over others, and because they spend out of their wealth. The good women are obedient, guarding what God would have them guard" (The Holy Quran, Chapter 4:34). The second verse states: "They (women) have rights similar to those (of them) over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them" (The Holy Quran, Chapter 2:228). The interpretation of *Qiwama* mentioned in

the verses have empowered men to control women. Al-Hariri (1987) offered a better interpretation from a feminist perspective. She clarified that men are higher than women in these verses because they should support women in economic needs, and argued that there are no implications that men can be in a natural superiority over women, nor there is any inherent inferiority of women (Al-Hariri, 1987). This is one example of how misinterpretation of Islamic teachings placed Saudi women in an unequal position to men in the society, imposing and practicing the guardianship system.

Qiwama was misinterpreted following the patriarchal understanding of Islamic teachings in Saudi society, offering men a higher position than women economically. The economic level of the country led to the expectation of men being responsible for the finance of the family, and restricted women from working and earning money equally as men. As discussed earlier in section 2.2.2, women used to work in farming during the old days to help their families. Later, when oil was discovered, women stayed at home as the economy developed and life advanced, which helped most families live in a stable level of medium to high wealth. As a consequence of this old background cultural practice, Saudi women were prevented from participating in careers other than teaching or nursing, thus the country is ranked 127 among 136 countries according to the Gender Gap Index of 2013 (Al-bakr et al., 2017).

The historical culture of women staying home and only men going to work has affected women of future generations not accessing a variety of careers available to men, and not being admitted to as many subject areas as men (Al-bakr et al., 2017; Baki, 2004; Elyas & Aljabri, 2020). In this regard, Al Rawaf and Simmons (1991) captured the situation at the time as Saudi women “have had unique difficulties realising their educational aspirations in the face of widely held conservative coupled with the belief that a woman's natural place is in the home and aggravated number of restrictions placed upon women's education” (p. 294). Furthermore, women around the world had similar difficulties in accessing education to some extent, but

what makes it different in the Saudi context is that “conservative attitudes to the education of women arose not because of the influence of Islam *per se* but because traditions that grew up around it” (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991, p. 294).

2.4.2 Gender roles and segregation

A third aspect in Saudi Arabia is the gendered roles and segregation that was clearly observed within society systems. First, in the Saudi traditional society, the father is responsible for providing financial needs for family members, whereas the mother is considered the homemaker (Pharaon, 2004). Accordingly, women are not supposed to work or leave their houses, and are expected to stay home, raise the children and do household chores. Therefore, men of the family, such as fathers and grandfathers, have the highest authority to make decisions regarding any familial case (Al-Khateeb, 1998). This patriarchal system in Saudi Arabia gives power to men over women, and also maintains respect for elders (Long, 2005). In this context, extended families are the basic elements of the society with expected gendered roles through which men are considered to provide and protect, and women to be housewives. Hence, it is highly possible to claim that Saudi culture has dismissed women’s rights to be educated equally to men, particularly in the earlier years. Dominant culture and social norms during the earlier years of the country’s establishment has led to the majority of Saudi families prohibiting their daughters from receiving a proper education. AlMunajjed (1997) conducted ethnographic research at the time and noted that many Saudi families hold the belief that their girls should not leave their family’s home unless they get married.

Later, when they were offered the right to attend formal schooling, girls’ education supervision at all levels was under the authority of the Department of Religious Guidance from its establishment in 1960 until 2002 (Hamdan, 2005). It was their responsibility to ensure that women’s education did not diverge from its original goal which was to prepare them to become mothers and wives and to employ them in limited jobs that are culturally acceptable, such as

teaching or nursing. Instead of leaving home to study or work, Saudi parents encouraged their girls to learn cooking, looking after their young brothers and sisters, and doing housework as directed by their mothers until they got married (Altorki, 1986).

Another related aspect of the Saudi Arabian context is gender segregation. This practice within Saudi society encourages less communication across genders who have no familial relations, and limits social mobility (AlMunajjed, 1997; Le Renard, 2008). Moreover, with the obvious changes in the Kingdom after the oil investment, the fundamental rules of the society are still rigid (Le Renard, 2008; Pharaon, 2004). The system of the government is founded upon Article one of the Basic Law, which stipulates that the Quran provides the governing authority of the legal system within Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2013). This highlights the tradition of Saudi Arabian political policy interpreting the Quran in a particularly fundamental and literal fashion (Mtango, 2004). The fundamentalism of Islamic law influences the prioritization of certain social factors that are not considered within Western political policies, such as segregation of gender toward the public morality (Rajkhan, 2014). Therefore, the practice of gender segregation is, to some extent, religiously stated and socially perceived within policy to enhance people's morality. The practice, in reality, is seen through building separate places for males and females, including schools, hospital waiting areas, banks and government departments. Through that, women are limited in their communications with non-relative men except when it is necessary. In this case, most women's opportunities to work are curtailed to be in all-women communities such as in teaching in universities, banks and hospitals. Consequently, Saudi women face several limitations hindering their advancements, and access to many areas that have no divided areas for them (Doumato, 2010, as cited in Al-bakr et al., 2017).

Although in recent years gender segregation is less practiced in public places such as restaurants and shopping centers, the educational and governmental places are still segregated

(Al-Rasheed, 2020). Furthermore, the government has started to reform the gender segregation practice in a way that maintains the sociocultural expectations and aligns with the world's view. Alhazmi (2013) describes Saudi Arabian political reform following the terrorist attack in 2003 regarding segregation practice which separated the Saudi society into opposing sides. The reforms were seen in the establishment of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in 2009 and of the KASP and altered the segregation practice in Saudi Arabia. Both initiatives mean less restriction on the practice because the KAUST campuses are designed with no separated buildings for males and females. In addition, the KASP gives Saudi women the opportunity to study abroad. The Saudi society's position to these governmental actions reflected two opposing opinions: conservatives opposing it and liberals supporting it as they were debating on the issue of segregated gender-eased restrictions in the media (Meijer, 2010). Conservatives who represent traditional religious scholars accused the liberalists of having intentions to westernize the society and believed that approval of the decision may be against the morality of the Saudi society as an Islamic one (Alhazmi, 2013).

2.4.3 Hijab

Another significant unique cultural aspect in social life of Saudi context is the hijab for women. Lamrabet (2019) states that in the beginning, wearing the hijab was derived from an Islamic law to distinguish the Prophet's wives from other women, meaning that the wives are separated from other women in the community through this different style of covering up. Later, Muslims followed the same concepts of wearing a veil and being separated from men, but in different styles because the Quran directs women to wear it, but with no specific description of how it should be worn.

Many Muslim women cover their entire body with a wide garment cloth known as abaya and either veil their faces entirely or show the eyes exceptionally (Slininger, 2014). They strongly believe that it is Allah's request and that upholding this value will protect them against

men's bad intentions (Ali, 2005; Sloan, 2011). In Saudi Arabia, the hijab becomes embodied within the religion and cultural practices (Tonnessen, 2020). However, some Saudi women may wear the hijab as it is expected of them only while being in the conservative Islamic country. Hence the hijab is a religious symbol to Muslim women in their daily practices and is a representation of cultural and self-identities (Slininger, 2014). In reality, some families adopt more conservative behaviours in defining the use of the veil and its style, as well as the boundaries of gender segregation, whereas other families may adopt more freedom in their practices of whether to put the hijab on or take some parts off. That being noted, there are three variations of dressing style that can be described with three different Arabic words: abaya with niqab, jilbab and hijab (El Guindi, 1999). All three dressing styles are worn by Arab or Muslim women depending on their choice and understanding of the Islamic teachings. Arab or Muslim women can choose to wear (1) abaya with niqab to cover the face and the entire body with a loose dress, (2) jilbab to cover the entire body without the face, (3) hijab to cover the head without the face and wear normal dress like blouses or jackets and pants or long skirts (DeCoursey, 2017; Slininger, 2014).

2.4.4 Implications of socio-cultural aspects on Saudi women in Australia

Reflecting on the three sub-sections above regarding three socio-cultural practices in Saudi Arabia led the researcher to assume that some challenges will be encountered by Saudi women students. According to the male guardianship system and the gendered role, they might have to continue depending on their male family member, either husbands or the accompanying relatives, in fulfilling any of their everyday needs. Also, because Saudi women will temporarily be living in South Australia, they might find it difficult to manage various roles of being a student as well as a sister or mother and wife. Additionally, with the hijab being worn by many Saudi women in their home context, continuation of wearing it in the Australian context might put them in a difficult situation due to the fact that they will be living with people from different religious backgrounds.

2.5 Overview of Australian context

Australia is considered a culturally diverse country among other nations due to its population that is made up of many ethnicities and contains various social norms (Ang et al., 2006). The beginning of Australia as a national country is dated to the British establishment in 1788 by the Governor Arthur Phillip at Sydney Cove (Purdie, 2003). Since then, a lot of people migrated to Australia which makes the country culturally diverse (Casey, 2006). Furthermore, Australia is known by its original population who represent the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people; hence, Australia is culturally unique in many aspects (Ang et al., 2006).

Although Australia is a culturally diverse nation of migrants who come from around two hundred ethnic backgrounds (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012), it is a Western and secular nation (Parker, 2011; Parker & Hoon, 2013). Secularisation refers to ‘the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols’ (Berger, 1970, p.107), and it has been a predominant feature of the Western societies and cultures since the First World War (Cusack, 2005). The separation of religious values from governmental and societal places and cultural practices implies and reflects the free and personal choices of the whole population to believe and practice a religion of their faith, with no influence from any authority or traditional expectations.

Secular environments have created a society that accepts many religious faiths, practices and most significantly members. According to the latest Australian census data, there are many faiths practiced by community members. The percentage of Australia’s population who answered the question in the census 2021 reported their religion as Christianity (43.9%), Islam reported by (3.2%) Hinduism (2.7%), Buddhism (2.4%) and 38.9% reported they do not follow any religion (Australian Bureau Statistics, 2022). Thus, it can be argued that tolerance to all religious faiths and practices on the Australian lands is granted. The diversity of Australia is also observed in its language. English is the official language, yet approximately 200 languages

are commonly spoken in the country by Aborigines and immigrants (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012). That mentioned, Australian education policy regards English as the mainstream language of education, despite other languages being taught in separate classes.

2.5.1 International students in Australia

Australia is a desirable destination for students who wish to do their studies overseas and is placed third in the world in terms of its intake of international students. Based on the most up to date statistics from the Australian Government's Department of Education, as of June 2022, 527,259 international students were present in Australia, with the majority coming from China (27%), India (16%), Nepal (10%), Vietnam (4%) and Indonesia (3%) as the top five of source countries (Department of Education, 2022).

Nevertheless, in the recent years Australia has become the study destination for a cohort from Saudi Arabia. In 2019, the records showed that more than 6000 Saudi students were enrolled in Australian universities (Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2019). This number of enrolments can be attributed to the opportunity being offered for Saudi citizens by the KASP, as well as by the employers encouraging eligible Saudis to study abroad.

2.6 Conclusion of chapter

This chapter discussed the differences between Saudi and Australian culture, focusing particularly on values and practices that affect women in both places. The chapter started with an overview of the history and economy of Saudi Arabia in order to understand Saudi women's cultural and religious aspects that resulted in their position in society. It then discussed the way Islamic practices and other unique cultural and social aspects make the country different to other nations, and how these are affecting Saudi women. Following that, a brief overview of the Australian background was provided in order to offer an account of the host context that Saudi women move to as students. The following chapter reviews the literature and the

theoretical frameworks related to scope of the thesis and explains how it informs the understanding of Saudi women's transition.

Chapter 3: Literature review

3.1 Introduction

This third chapter discusses existing literature related to the thesis topic and is organized into four main sections. The first section introduces internationalization of education and its definition. The second section examines push-pull factors that influence the decision of international students to study abroad. The third section investigates and discusses various challenges faced by international students while living in a host country, followed by a specific reference to the Saudi international cohort. The fourth section examines acculturation strategies and adjustments adopted by international students whilst being away from their home country.

Figure 3 shows the organizational structure of literature review sections.

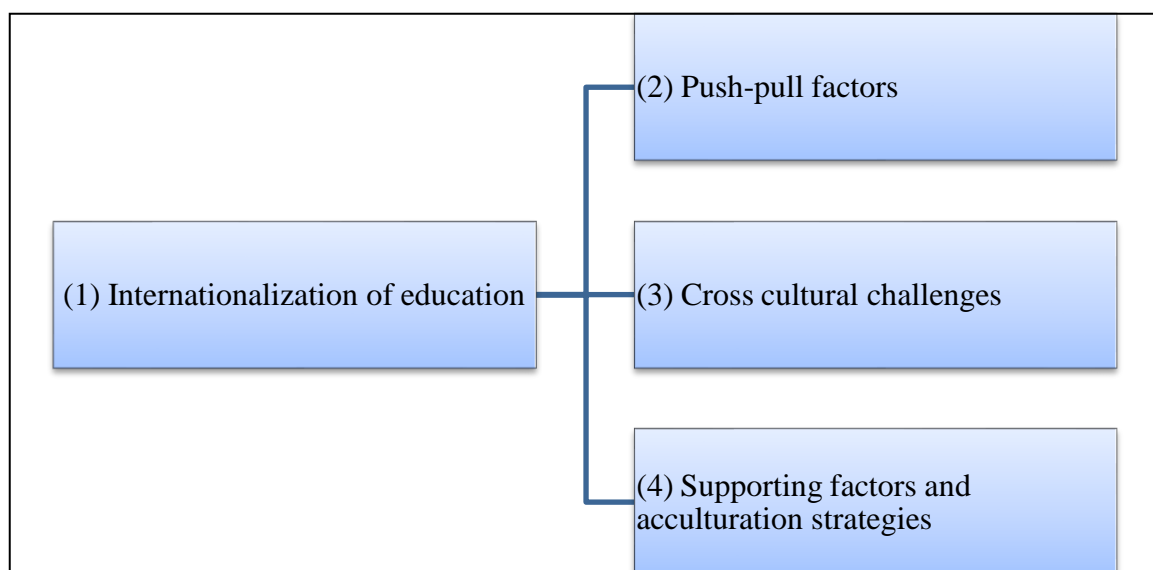


Figure 3. Structure of literature review

Investigating Saudi women students' transition is linked to three theories: the push-pull factors model of international students' decision to study abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002),

cultural dimension theory (Hofstede, 1983) and acculturation strategies theory (Berry, 1997). Section 4.7 in the methodology chapter will explain the use of each theory as an analysis guide for the data.

3.2 Internationalization of education

The first square in the provided organizational structure (Figure 3) refers to the internationalization of education which is strongly related to the context of international students generally, and Saudi women students specifically. The decision to leave their home country and attend education abroad is the beginning of a long journey where students are expected to face some difficulties and use some supporting factors to help them proceed through the transition experience.

Internationalization and globalization are usually defined as a coined term (Altbach & Knight, 2007). However, globalization is more connected to global and economical trades. Further, McCabe (2001) has a similar view on the definition and the difference between globalization and internationalization. With regard to studying abroad programs, globalization is considered as the worldwide process that include sharing several aspects like the cultural, economic, and educational systems, whereas internationalization, in contrast, works on attracting cultures, economies, and education from other countries. For the purpose of this research, the thesis fits into the broader concept of the internationalization of education, arguing that it refers to the exchange of activities that occur between countries' borders (Deresky & Christopher, 2015). There are some advantages that derive from internationalizing education. First, international students will benefit from learning about, and living in, new cultures as a result of settling in new environments and having first-hand experiences (Abukhattala, 2013). Second, the experience of studying abroad will increase the intercultural awareness of international students, thus, they would be prepared for diverse career opportunities and environments (Dalglish et al., 2011). As higher education has become a global experience,

there has been an increasing movement over time for undergraduate and postgraduate candidates alike to seek higher education abroad rather than study in their domestic context (Montgomery, 2010). The reasons for this are complex and involve wide range of factors identified in the following section.

3.3 Push-pull factors

The second square in the provided organizational structure (Figure 3) refers to push-pull factors informing international students' decisions. The increased number of international students attending international tertiary education makes it significant to identify factors that influenced their choices of overseas study. Different factors and motivators affect students' decisions to study abroad, and some other factors pertain to students' choice of a country and institution.

Background of push-pull factor model

Among the early studies which attempted to understand international students' mobility is McMahon's (1992) research. The researcher undertook a longitudinal study to examine the factors affecting the decision of international students coming from eighteen developing countries to study in the US during the time from the 1960s to the 1970s. The findings divided the factors into two categories. The first category named push factors representing the reasons found in the sending countries, including the country's political condition, economic level and availability of higher education (Gatfield & Chen, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). In contrast, the second category named pull factors representing the host country and including political, economic and social factors, referring to the US in this initial model (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wilkins et al., 2012).

By examining the model critically, scholars argued that the processes of decision making to study abroad, the choice of a host destination, and which specific university occur

in three sequential stages (Chen, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). In detail, the first stage starts when students decide to study abroad instead of studying in home country; the second stage takes place during the evaluation process of choosing a host destination; and the final stage is when students make the choice of a specific university in the host country.

3.3.1 An overview of push-pull factors model

Reviewing the historical development of the model shows that in an initial stage, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) collected data over the period 1996 to 2000 from international students, from four countries Taiwan, India, China and Indonesia, who were studying at the time in Australian universities. The study’s significant findings suggested that several home-country reasons were found that influenced the students’ initial decisions to study abroad (push factors), whereas other factors operated as attractions for students to be pulled to Australia as the host country (pull factors). The factors model is shown in Figure 4 below.

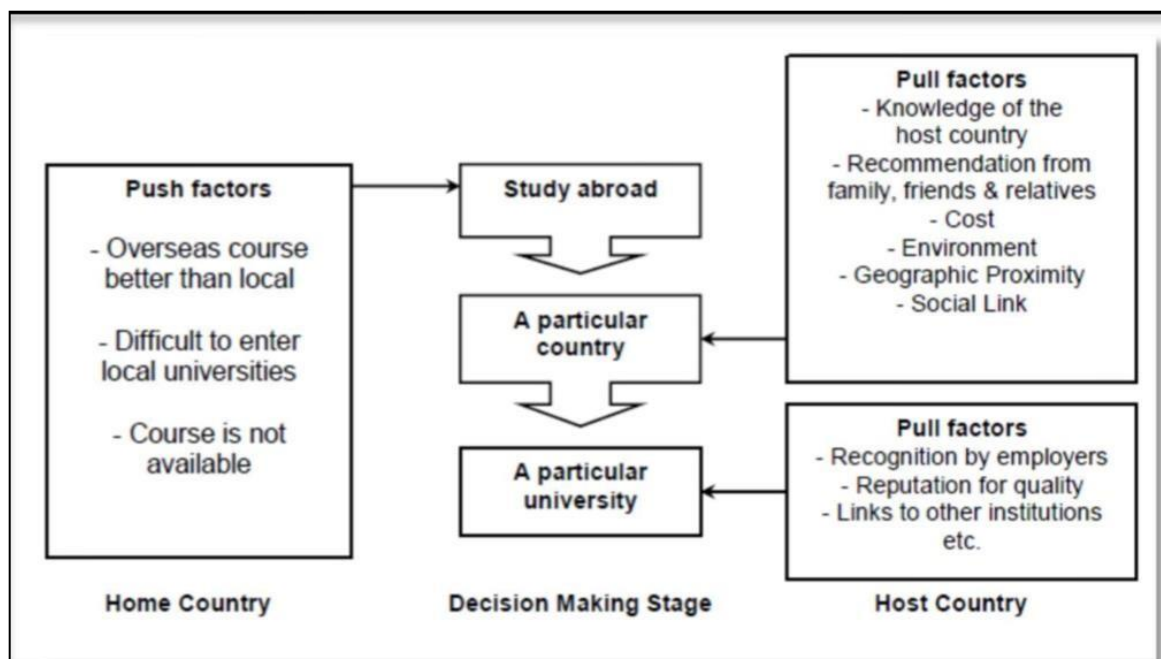


Figure 4. Push-pull factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002)

The shown push-pull model illustrates the students' processes of making the decision to study abroad across three aspects. Push factors of the student's original country indicate a number of reasons that lead to the decision to leave the home country and apply for overseas study. Examples of push factors are: the value of a foreign qualification over a local qualification; and, the inability to gain access to a tertiary education locally or an unavailable course or program of study (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Therefore, as a student makes the decision to study abroad and begins to evaluate pull factors of a host country, those features of one country have more influence than those of other countries. Pull factors of a host country can be: knowledge of the host country, geographical proximity, recommendations of family or peers, and social links between the home and host countries (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Once a student has decided on the country of study, he/she begins to evaluate other pull factors related to a university choice. Factors include: recognition by employers and potential careers, university reputation and ranking quality of education, the variety of programs and relevant facilities, and graduation rates are identified to reflect positive and attractive reasons for a student's preferred institution (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Since this research intends to identify Saudi women's push-pull factors for leaving their home country and studying in Australia (RQ1), it seems reasonable to review and examine the research conducted in the Australian context and other countries respectively to understand the push factors motivating international student to study abroad and the pull factors affecting the choice of a destination and an institution.

3.3.2 Push factors of the home country

Based on the review of available literature, several factors have been identified in relation to home country push factors that impact students' decisions to study abroad: (1) constraints to access tertiary education, (2) the value of a foreign degree and international education, (3) the desire to acquire or improve English language skills, and (4) the desire for

sociocultural experience and personal development. Examining those factors suggests that the process of decision-making to study abroad can be influenced by different personal and external factors (Kotler & Fox, 1995). These factors are further discussed in next sub-sections.

Constraints to access local tertiary education

In many countries, access to tertiary education or courses can be constrained by some economic conditions which lead to various limitations in tertiary education sector. Thus, students' needs to attend tertiary education becomes a factor that pushes students' decisions to study abroad (Bodycott, 2009; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; McMahon, 1992). The quantitative research of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) on male and female Chinese, Indian, Indonesian and Taiwanese students' motivation to study in Australia acknowledged that making the decision to study abroad was derived from the inability to gain access to local universities or programs of their preference. Similarly, other scholars reported that students from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Taiwan had an issue attending education locally due to the unavailability of subjects or the difficulties of admission requirements at local universities, and these led them to decide to study in a foreign country like the US, the UK or Australia where academic institutions have wider options to attract international students (Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Gatfield & Chen, 2006; Shanka et al., 2006).

Students of other backgrounds expressed additional factors that led them to decide on overseas study. The qualitative study of Maringe and Carter (2007) on female and male African students' factors for selecting UK universities confirmed that their home countries lacked the capacity to offer higher education due to adverse political and economic conditions. The authors found that African students were unable to apply at local universities due to the country's unstable political situation, thus escaping the situation and applying to study in the UK seemed a more reasonable option for them.

Likewise, in a recent study by Hailat et al. (2021), it was identified that the poor systems of higher education in some Arab Gulf countries motivated male and female Arab students to study in the UK. The participants stated that universities of their home countries offered limited places for specific programs and those students could not secure them (Hailat et al., 2021). Therefore, they decided to apply to the UK universities where many universities offer similar courses. This claim was previously mentioned in the Saudi Arabian context where Alamri (2011) discussed the strengths and weaknesses regarding the Saudi higher education system. Despite the noticed development of higher education programs, there is still a lack of degrees covering a broad range of subject areas (Alamri, 2011). The issue of being unable to secure a place and attend education locally may motivate students to study overseas. As discussed in section 2.3, women's education in Saudi Arabia is still developing where students face a number of challenges in terms of limited places and traditional teaching methods related to social and cultural context (Al-bakr et al., 2017; AlFassi, 2010; Hamdan, 2005). Accordingly, such a context may form a constraint to Saudi women who intend to study at higher levels and may push them to apply for an overseas scholarship.

Value of foreign degree and international education

The argument on unavailability or limitations of tertiary education in home countries is true to some extent when looking at the numbers of international students who selected to study at developed major host countries such as the US, the UK and Australia. These English-speaking nations are found to host more international students than other countries due to offering high standards in international education with good learning and teaching environments (Andrade, 2006, 2009). It is a common belief that overseas education provides better opportunities for international students and that their overseas degree may enable them to access greater life opportunities going forward. Based on mixed methods research, Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) investigated the perceptions of various male and female international

students in the UK. Although participating students were originating from developed and developing nations, the results reported that students perceived the UK's system to offer quality of education and that the universities have a strong reputation competing against other institutions worldwide. Applying quantitative research methods, Shanka et al. (2006) affirmed that male and female Asian students from Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia chose to study in Australia because they perceived it to have superior quality education and learning resources. Mixed method studies conducted by Bodycott (2009) and Yang (2007) discussed the same viewpoint. Bodycott's study involved 251 mainland Chinese students and 100 parents who reported two findings on the perceived value of international education in Australia. On the one hand, parents highly valued the international qualification suggesting that the overseas education would enhance their children's future job opportunities. On the other hand, students expressed that their motivation for Australian education was linked to their expectation of accessing higher quality education (Bodycott, 2009). Further, Yang's mixed method study on the same population identified the same findings. Mainland Chinese students perceived the Australian education system to be of equal world-class quality compared to other nations such as the US or the UK, and this view had influenced their choice of overseas destination (Yang, 2007).

Several qualitative studies also suggested that in some cases governments and employers encouraged overseas study as it was perceived to be a better quality which would help in developing the nation and workplaces once students are graduates and back in their homes. Relating this to the context of the current study, Hailat et al. (2021) stated that 21 Saudi men and women, among other nationalities, participated in the study and were sponsored by the Saudi government through a scholarship to attend an overseas education in a country of the student's choice that met the scholarship's standards (a detailed presentation of the Saudi scholarship programs is offered in section 2.3.3). Nevertheless, Alsulami (2016) interviewed

Saudi men who were attending universities in the state of Victoria in Australia, and reported that all of them were encouraged by their employers to study overseas. Likewise, Binsahl et al. (2019) indicated that Saudi women who participated in their study were required by their employers to attend one of the quality education universities abroad to attain their higher degree.

Unlike parents who may consider funding their children's overseas study in countries where migration options are higher (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), the Saudi scholarship programs funding Saudi students have specific requirements for the selection of countries, programs and institutions that are mostly known for the quality of their education (Alsulami, 2016; Denman & Hilal, 2011; Taylor & Albasri, 2014). Hence, the decision to study abroad may have been greatly determined and influenced by the scholarship requirements, and not intentions for future migration.

Hereafter, it is highly possible to raise an argument that push factors are not mainly perceived by the students themselves. In some cases, it is the parents' choice, the government's intention or the employer's recognition of international qualifications that make students pushed to study abroad, as foreign degrees are believed to imply a quality of various aspects and skills. Therefore, international students can be pushed to study abroad by government and employers' support, to bring more benefits for the nation as well as for the workplaces in a way that increases future economic wealth and improves quality of life.

Desire to acquire or improve English language skills

Another related push factor that inspires international students to attend overseas education is acquiring or improving their level of English as a foreign language. Sawir (2005) highlighted the role that English language plays within the internationalization of education, especially for non-English speakers. Further, Sawir et al. (2012) found that international

students from Asia and Southern Asian countries are more interested studying in native English-speaking countries to improve their English skills.

As English becomes the lingua franca, increasing numbers of international students' enrolments in countries like the US, the UK and Australia are evident, which implies students have a preference for acquiring English over the languages of other countries (Lasanowski, 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). Chen and Zimitat (2006) applied the theory of planned behaviour to investigate Taiwanese students' individual perceptions when deciding to attend higher education in the US or in Australia. Precisely, the study aimed to identify the relationship between a number of variables in predicting the selection of Australia or the US as the first choice destination for study. By examining 518 students and their influencing factors to study in Australia or the US, the authors concluded that among different factors the main goal of Taiwanese students was to improve their English proficiency and skills (Chen & Zimitat, 2006). This may greatly indicate an inner motivation of non-English international students' toward improving English as a second language from native speakers.

Regarding the context of the current study, the Saudi international students' motivation toward learning English abroad could be linked to their previous education experience in their home country to some extent. Most Saudi international students have attended Saudi Arabian schools where all courses are delivered in Arabic language exclusively. English subject as a foreign language received limited efforts from teachers to teach it or from students to learn it due to the misconception regarding its negative impacts (Al-Saraj, 2014; Elyas & Picard, 2010; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). However, in very recent years, the government of Saudi Arabia has taken rapid steps toward the teaching and learning of English, raising its importance in the current and future needs of the state (Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2017). Thus, more Saudi's become aware of the significant impact of their English language skills on their future careers,

thereafter, determining the choice of host destinations can be linked to the aim of learning English.

Desire for sociocultural experience and personal development

Another factor that impacted students' decisions to study abroad is the desire to engage in an international living experience which involves sociocultural understanding and personal development. Examining international students' intentions when they crossed the borders of their countries and attended education in Australia, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), it was found that students from Taiwan, India, Indonesia and China aimed to live in a different culture and to increase migration prospects. Moreover, Wu (2014) examined factors affecting mainland Chinese students to study in the UK. The researcher found that mainland Chinese students' intentions to study at a British university was driven by their personal desires to live in an English-speaking environment, develop social and cultural awareness and improve personal skills. Another study conducted by Wintre et al. (2015) investigated sixty-four international students in the Canadian context. Findings similarly asserted that students desired to study in Canada as they expected its environment would help improve their personal skills. Interestingly, native English students similar to non-English students desire the experience of studying abroad. A qualitative study on a group of Canadian university students attending an Australian university found that participants aimed to experience living and studying in another English country (Barnick, 2006). The chance to experience a life of different country is seen as an investment to becoming globally competent.

Nevertheless, not only do international students benefit from their overseas journey but the host countries also benefit culturally too. Weerakkody and Jerez (2018) discussed the impact that international students make when settling in a host country. In their discussion they perceived international students as an invaluable population who help enhance the cultural diversity in university campuses and among local students. Also, local students' knowledge

and understanding of other cultures could be greatly enhanced when mixing with various groups of international students (Weerakkody & Jerez, 2018).

Regarding the current research context, overseas study experience is greatly believed to improve social and cultural understanding of Saudi Arabian students. One goal of the Saudi scholarship program is to expand a wider understanding of foreign cultures where Saudi students select to study (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission in the US, 2012, as cited in Taylor & Albasri, 2014). Brutt-Griffler et al. (2020) examined the intentions of Saudi Arabian male and female students of studying in the US, applying a mixed method approach. Findings of the research stated that there are two levels of factors that push Saudi students to study abroad. On an individual level, Saudi students intended to enhance their social and cultural capital aspects, whereas in a societal level they perceived the overseas study to contribute positively to their family, community and country. In that way, Saudi scholarship programs and sponsored Saudi students could extend a cultural exchange as well as deriving mutual benefits for both Saudi Arabia and the host countries of Saudi international students.

3.3.3 Pull factors of the host country

A number of reasons have been identified in the literature as pull factors influencing international students' decisions regarding the host country including (1) knowledge about the culture and environment of the host country, (2) reputation of the host country's tertiary education, (3) the availability of scholarships and cost matters, (4) political relations between the home and host country, (5) recommendations from those who have lived in host countries, (6) proximity, climate and lifestyle, and (7) visa admissions and immigration processing.

Knowledge about the culture and environment of the host country

Once international students made the decision to leave their home country and attend to their studies abroad, they started to seek information on possible options of host countries. Evidence from several studies showed that the students tended to choose a country they knew

better than other countries. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) discussed the importance of having knowledge of a host country and its impact on students' choices. International students' knowledge about the host country can be developed through finding information on that country and assessing whether it meets their expectations and needs during study or after graduation. Hence the more international students know about a host destination, the greater the likelihood of choosing it. For some groups of students, they may be concerned with knowing about the country's and the host people's attitudes toward inclusion of international students on their land.

Thereafter, the multicultural environment can be identified as a pull factor for international students' destination choices related to their needs in the new country. Some studies revealed that the selection of the destination was based on the perceived knowledge of its multicultural values (Nachatar Singh et al., 2014; Trahar, 2014). To explain, these studies found that international students from multiple backgrounds selected Malaysia based on its stereotyped multicultural environments and suitability for various religious believers. Furthermore, the studies examined the perception of international students who selected to study in Malaysia, and the overall findings advocated that Malaysia attracts Muslim international students due to its Islamic communities (Nachatar Singh et al., 2014; Trahar, 2014).

Also, safety is another aspect for international students to consider when making the decision of which host destination. As international students decide to move from their home countries, they expect to live in a secure and safe society for the duration of their study. Some conducted studies supported this argument and found that international students' safety was a significant pull factor for students choosing to study abroad (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

In the context of the current study, Nyland et al. (2010) reviewed the literature on international students' safety and potential risks in the US, the UK, New Zealand and Australia, and compared the way education authorities and governments protect their international students. The study reported that Australia was the least of the four countries to recognize that there was a large problem in keeping international students safe. Relatively, for the population of Saudi international students, Australia is perceived as the safest environment (Alhazmi, 2013; Orth, 2015). Nonetheless, because international students will spend most of their time on the university campus, ensuring their personal safety is significant. This is especially true for Muslim women who may be easily recognised by their dressing style or hijab. The study of Binsahl (2018) identified that Saudi women were concerned with Australia's and the Australians' attitude and treatment of Muslims, and searched information about that before arriving in Australia. Binsahl linked this approach of Saudi women's information seeking to the news about racist incidents in the US and the UK against Muslims that related to female head coverings (Binsahl, 2018). Thus, because the overseas journey can last for number of years requiring a longer stay in a foreign country, Saudi women may select a safe place for them as Muslim international students.

Reputation of host country's tertiary education

International students may be pulled to a country according to the quality of its image in the higher education sector. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) noted that international students tend to choose a host country they know and are aware of its academic services. To illustrate, the US is ranked number one for the majority of international students' selections according to its offered education services (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Thus, when students are thinking of different countries, they select the one that will support their future study. Similarly, Maringe and Carter (2007) reported that African students decided to undertake their tertiary education in the UK due to its international educational quality which raises the recognition of

qualifications in the future. International students are more likely to choose the country where they can receive a quality education and receive a recognised qualification when returning to their home country.

For Saudi students wanting to study overseas, they may choose from a list of selected and approved countries according to “the needs of ministries, and governmental organizations and private sector corporations. This selection aims to meet the demands of labour market in Saudi Arabia by creating a highly qualified and skilled workforce” (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Australia, 2022a, para.3). Accordingly, they would likely select a country where education services are perceived to be of greater quality.

One aspect of perceived quality education is the language of instruction. A main aim for many students may be to learn English, so they select an English-speaking destination. For the context of the current research, Denman and Hilal (2011) and Taylor and Albasri (2014) noted that English is the preferred language for Saudi students studying abroad. In addition, the list of destinations where Saudi students can study includes many countries where English is the main language such as the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and other destinations.

Also, the reputation of the countries in terms of the quality of education and technological advancements can be another aspect linked to the perceived level of education in the selected host country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Because international students come from different countries, it is claimed that they may target a country where a better education setting is perceived in order to advance their knowledge. Some studies conducted in different contexts (the UK, Canada and Ireland) found that the country’s profile in the education sector affected international students’ choices for that specific country. Wu (2014) examined mainland Chinese students in the UK, Wintre et al. (2015) examined multinational undergraduate students in Canada, and Farrelly and Murphy (2018) investigated various international students

in Ireland. All three studies agreed that the host countries, the UK, Canada and Ireland, were selected based on their good reputation for quality education, and innovative teaching and learning practices. The international students expected to experience better learning opportunities. Open libraries, equipped labs, entertainment hubs and recreational centres within a university campus are important to facilitate better learning for attending students (Bodycott, 2009; Padlee et al., 2010).

Related to the current study, Saudi international students were found to be attracted to applying for an Australian university based on its advanced learning facilities. Binsahl (2018) and Mayan (2019) found that Saudi students greatly developed their knowledge and benefitted from the advanced learning approaches that were not available in their previous education experiences in Saudi Arabia. Thus, Saudi international students may be pulled to select Australia as a host destination according to its reputation and use of technology for education purposes. Mayan (2019) investigated the factors that motivated Saudi students to study in Australia and found that the use of technology and demand for a new learning environment was mentioned frequently by participants. Saudi Arabian students often compared the Australian and Saudi Arabian educational systems to describe these new educational experiences. Further, Saudi students were keen to be engaged with advanced approaches to learning via the use of technologies in education (Mayan, 2019).

Another aspect in the perceived level of education is admission to the university which can be a significant pull factor in the international student's choice of country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). A couple of studies have identified that students were not able to secure places in universities in their home country because of strict admission requirements, thus overseas universities may be perceived as having higher admission rates (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Yang, 2007). In addition, for international students who are non-English speakers, an acceptable level of English is required to meet the overseas institutions entry requirements. Although the

required English level can be high, many universities offer range of options through partnering with English centres. Therefore, it can be argued that non-English international students may be pulled to a university if they are offered a packaged English course with their desired program. However, moving across two different education systems can be problematic to some extent, especially for English second language speakers. Detailed discussion of the academic challenges faced by Saudi international students resulting from moving across different education systems will be presented in section 3.4.4.

Availability of scholarship and cost matters

This factor can be a push factor if home countries are providing scholarships for qualified citizens, and a pull factor in the case of the host countries which attract students from foreign countries. The scholarship programs offered by host nations to support international students via partial or full financial assistance have been identified as a factor influencing student study destination choice (Mazzarol et al., 1996; McMahon, 1992). Available scholarships and funding, along with other cost matters such as low living expenses, are a few of the important factors that international students consider when making the decision to study abroad.

Branco Oliveira and Soares (2016) found that students preferred to benefit from overseas universities that provide a scholarship opportunity. Thus, the cost matters in addition to day-to-day expenses and study fees are also relevant factors for international students to consider when deciding on a host country option. Research conducted in different contexts and on different backgrounds of students attending overseas universities reported that this factor has affected the students' selections. This is evidenced in many studies as the cost matters of daily life needs, accommodation rent and study materials have a strong influence on international students' decisions for their overseas host destination (Bodycott, 2009; Mazzarol et al., 1996; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Padlee et al., 2010; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011; Wu,

2014). In particular, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) noted that students who participated in their study selected Australia as a host destination because they would find part-time jobs to cover their economic needs. Hence many international students tend to select a country where short-term jobs are available to off-set a higher cost of living (Maringe & Carter, 2007).

For Saudi international students, the partner of the main scholarship's recipient can be eligible to receive equal funds to study. Thus, the privilege of Saudi international students may be unique to other groups with regard to the available scholarships and other cost matters when making the decision on a host country destination. As presented in section 2.3.2, Saudi scholarship programs offer the recipients full financial cover toward all academic tuition and health needs for them and their accompanying families. Accordingly, most of Saudi international students are fully sponsored to attend international education overseas (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010; Yakaboski et al., 2017) and the availability of a scholarship can be one reason to encourage partners of the main scholarship recipients to study while accompanying their spouses overseas.

Nevertheless, although Saudi students are financially supported, some cost matters and life expenses cannot be avoided especially when bringing family and children. Thus, they still need to consider their financial abilities when thinking of a host country. Alsulami (2016) identified that cost of living was one of the factors that influenced Saudi male students selecting to study in Victoria, Australia. This reflects that as the gender role of Saudi Arabian culture requires men to be responsible for all family finances, when deciding to bring families overseas, they choose a study destination that can offer plenty of work opportunities too.

Political relations between the home and host country

Multiple studies mentioned that political relations influenced the destination choice of international students while thinking of their host destination (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003;

Bodycott, 2009; Mzzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007). Political environment has been identified as a pull factor influencing international students' choice of country.

In the context of the current study, political environment refers to the bilateral links between the home and host countries. According to The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2022), Australia and Saudi Arabia enjoy a friendly relationship that is underpinned by industrial ties and shared membership in the G20. Further, the relationship is enhanced by welcoming Saudi citizens in Australia as international students, with Australia recording over 6000 students in 2019. Thereafter, these positive relationships may attract more Saudi students to select Australia for their overseas education.

Recommendations from those who have lived in host countries

Word of mouth plays a significant role in international students' decision-making for the choice of the host destination (Engelke, 2008; Hall, 2013; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Phang, 2013). In particular, the strength of social relations explained in reference to the presence of family, friends and community members within the host country can pull international students to that specific choice (Mzzarol & Soutar, 2002). To illustrate, once students decide to leave their home country and begin the journey of their studies overseas, they may think of selecting a place where they feel can feel at home. Thus, if a family member or peers and other community groups live in a country it may increase a student's preference for this destination.

Apparently, students from many countries find it attractive to select a country where the presence of same nationality is observed as it proves that the host nation is suitable. Indeed, once a host country has successfully attracted relatively large numbers of students from a particular source country, that will serve as an additional pull factor (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Yakaboski et al. (2017) noted that the institution's alumnus, including friends, family members, or faculty colleges, influenced twelve Saudi students to select a specific institution in the US for their graduate education.

This argument was paralleled by a couple of studies examining Saudi international students' preference of Australia as a host country. Alsulami's (2016) research investigated Saudi men students in Australia and found that they selected Australia based on the positive experiences of previous Saudi students. Likewise, the Binsahl, Chang and Bosua's (2019) study aimed to identify Saudi women's factors to choose Australia as a host destination. The findings noted that most of the women had a positive experience studying in Australia previously, which made some of them reapply to attend further studies in Australia.

Proximity, climate and lifestyle

According to Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery (1996) the proximity of a country is a common factor that may impact on students' choices of study destination. A number of scholars have argued that the geographic distance between the host country and a student's home country appears to be an important influence on many international students. For example, a study conducted on mainland Chinese students mentioned that the UK's location affected their decision when selecting it as a study destination (Wu, 2014). Wintre et al. (2015) found that the location of Canada is an influencing factor for international students in choosing to study there. Likewise, many Asian students selected to study in Malaysia, considering its location and distance to their home countries. To explain, Ahmad and Buchanan (2016) and Nachatar Singh et al. (2014) claimed that a short travel distance between home and study destination was a strong factor to be considered while making the decision of the host country.

Relatively, the choice of the host country can be correlated with its climate and lifestyle. Mazzarol et al. (1996) are of the view that international students may select specific cities according to their weather conditions and perceived lifestyle. Because Australia is known for a warm and moderate climate (Mazzarol et al., 1996), many students from Southeast Asia prefer to study in Australia over the UK or Canada, because the climate is similar to what it is in their home countries. This supports the view that the climate is also of importance to

international students as some may avoid countries that are known for extreme cold climate conditions, for example, Canada or the UK.

Saudi international students coming from a hot climate country may prefer or avoid studying in an extreme cold climate, depending on their personal preferences. A couple of scholars reported that Saudi international students paid specific consideration to climate condition before coming to Australia (Alsulami, 2016; Orth, 2015).

Also, the lifestyle of the country was a factor in international students' consideration of choosing a city, but it has not been cited in the literature as significantly impacting their choice. As a result, some students may express their desire to live in a busy city that offers multiple activities for the community which they might find interesting to join while being away from their own family and friends. Or, on the contrary, some students may dislike living in that kind of city, preferring to live in a small city to ensure they pay more attention to their studies.

For the context of the current study, Australia is described to feature an easy relaxed lifestyle which is an attractive factor and used as a promotional tool in international education marketing (Crean, 1994 as cited in Mazzarol et al., 1996). Indeed, Binsahl (2018) and Mayan (2019) noted Saudi international students' interest in Australia's open lifestyle when compared to their home country. Some elements of Australia's lifestyle include its natural features and advanced life systems making it a preferred destination among other countries for Saudi international students (Binsahl et al., 2019; Orth, 2015).

Admission, visa and immigration processing

Another related significant factor attributing to the host country are admissions and visa processes. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) argued that obtaining a visa is a possible factor influencing international student study destination choice. Further, a host country's visa processing can be linked to other visa matters such as flexibility in terms of work limits and the migration process. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) reported that international students are

interested in applying for study in a country that has a flexible visa processing and migration opportunities.

For the context of the current research, it is found that the Australian government raised the assessment level of Saudi Arabian student visas to level 1 (Bowen, 2011) to support more international Saudi students in their choice to study in Australia. Level 1 visas are the highest level (in terms of ease) that can be granted for international students who are on scholarships in Australia. This means Saudi prospective students can choose to lodge their applications for Australian student visas online (The Australian Embassy in Saudi Arabia, 2011). Furthermore, being a sponsored Saudi student demonstrates there is no intention to migrate after graduation. Saudi students know their stay overseas is temporary. Unlike other international students who may be motivated to study abroad with the intention of getting permanent residency, Saudi women students are well aware of their scholarship terms and conditions, as well as the time constraints within which they must complete their studies (Binsahl, 2018; Shepherd & Rane, 2012). Therefore, residency visa processes may not be considered as a pull factor for Saudi international students when making decision regarding destination country.

3.3.4 Summary of push-pull factors influencing international students' decisions to study abroad

The above section reviewed available literature and discussed previous studies on popular push-pull factors which inform the decision of international students to study abroad. Further, the push-pull factors influencing international students' decisions were found to be multifaceted and unlikely to be counted. There can be hidden reasons affecting the decision of international students to study abroad and their decision to select a specific destination among other options. Within the aforementioned section, relevant factors were categorized in two main aspects. On the one hand, push factors related to the home country of the students, and their personal motivations and perspectives toward international education overseas, and, on the other hand, pull factors related to the host country's educational, social and other

environmental aspects. However, very limited literature was found to examine push-pull factors of Saudi women students in Australia or in any other context. Hence, the insights generated from the literature review emphasize a need to investigate push-pull factors of Saudi women to pursue education in Australia. A lack of empirical studies in this research field in the Australian context supports one of the objectives of the present study: exploring the push-pull factors of Saudi women in the Australian context. In addition, it was noticed that most of the research conducted to identify the relevant factors in terms of students employed quantitative approaches. Thus, the current study adopts the qualitative approach to examine factors for Saudi women that affected their decision to leave Saudi Arabia and choose to study in Australia.

3.4 Cross-cultural challenges

The third square in the provided organizational structure (Figure 3) refers to cross-cultural challenges during their cross-cultural contact experience. The cultural dimensions theory is helpful to identify international students' challenges during their studies in another country. Prior to discussing the experience of international students while crossing from their original culture to another one, it is important to define culture in this context of the thesis. A number of scholars over the past decades have offered various differing definitions explaining 'culture' (Blumenthal, 1940). According to Tylor (1871, p. 4), "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Similarly, Bashkow (2004) expressed that culture refers to a collection of identified values, social traditions, beliefs, and practices that enable the classification of a specific group of people. Moreover, Hofstede (2011, p.3) stated that culture is "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others".

Thus, from the three definitions it is highlighted that the term culture refers to the agreement of one group of people regarding their shared values, beliefs and behaviours and their spread through generations, which then mark groups differently from others. When applying this to the experience of international students who move from their culture to a new one for studying purposes, it is possible to anticipate that they would go through difficulties given the unfamiliarity with the new cultural context where education and living environments are different to the home country. Sometimes these unfamiliar experiences may affect international students' appropriate adjustment and acculturation to the settings of the host country. Therefore, it is important to understand the challenges students encounter in their host destination. One perspective is that international students find vast differences between their home and host cultures, and this is supported through reference to the popular theory of cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1983).

The theory of cultural dimensions has been widely used to explain differences among nations providing a comparison and contrast of specific values, thus demonstrating relevance to the current study. In the following sections, the theory of cultural dimensions is discussed and considered a base line for understanding how differences among Saudi Arabian and Australian cultures may impact on the experience of Saudi women students in terms of their academic and socio-cultural contexts while they study and live in Australia. Then, cross-cultural challenges of international students, and of Saudi international students specifically, are examined.

3.4.1 An overview of cultural dimensions theory

A widely used and well-known theory to identify cultural values of countries is the cultural dimensions model (Hofstede, 1983). It was developed from primary data collected from almost 116,000 attitudinal surveys of workers within IBM subsidiaries in sixty-six

countries. The collection phase was undertaken twice: firstly, from 1967 to 1969, and secondly from 1971 to 1973.

As identified by Hofstede (2011), the six dimensions are: (1) power distance, (2) individualism versus collectivism, (3) masculinity versus femininity, (4) uncertainty avoidance, (5) long-term versus short-term orientation, and (6) indulgence versus restraint. The following explains each dimension and presents the results of Saudi Arabia's and Australia's scores.

3.4.2 Application of Hofstede's cultural dimensions model on Saudi Arabian and Australian contexts

Looking at the estimated countries' scores, based on Hofstede's index table, this section will compare the main contexts of this research - Saudi Arabia and Australia. The comparison is significantly relevant to understanding the differences or similarities across cultures which can influence the transition of Saudi women students studying and living in Australia. Saudi Arabia is strikingly different when compared to a Western country, such as Australia. The religion, language, systems, culture, traditional norms and the daily routines are distinctly opposite in the two contexts. In Saudi Arabia, communications and behaviours are greatly influenced by the Islamic and Arabic cultural values which are rooted and aligned with the values of a collective society emphasizing the family and community social order (Kim & Omizo, 2005). In Australia, where the culture represents individualistic values (Hofstede, 2001) members are less concerned with group needs and rather look after their immediate family and place great value on personal responsibility (Bassett, 2004; Darwish & Huber, 2003). Thus, individuals are encouraged to be self-centred and act independently to achieve their personal individual goals.

In order to clearly represent and understand the differences between Saudi Arabian culture and Australian culture, it is helpful to refer to Hofstede's cultural dimension model. Figure 5 below presents cultural value differences between Saudi Arabia and Australia.

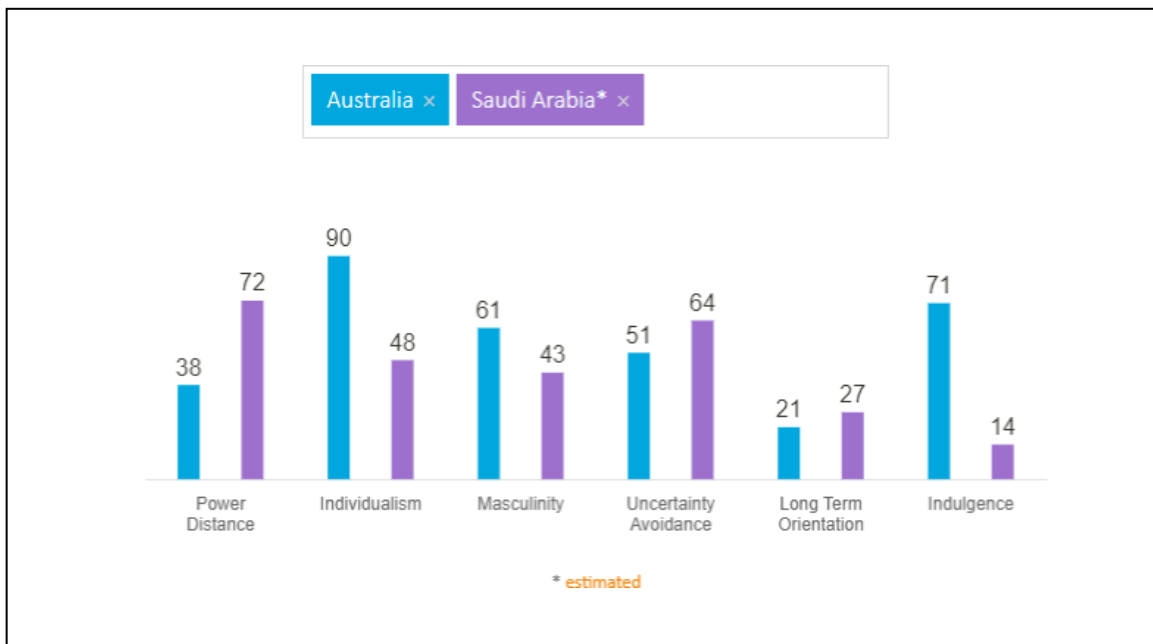


Figure 5. Comparison of Australia’s and Saudi Arabia’s scores on six cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2017)

Power distance dimension

The first dimension of the model is power distance. It represents the power division within organisations, and how people with respect to different societies respond to distributions of power. Hofstede (1983) explains that when a culture scores higher in the power distance value it means the system there is centralized. Furthermore, higher power distance means higher hierarchical level and unequal power division and decisions are made by people in power.

Saudi Arabia scored highly in this dimension, meaning power distance is practiced. According to Samovar et al. (2004), in such a society individuals do not enjoy the same level of authority. Thereafter, leaders at various positions and organisations such as governmental places and public services usually have higher authority and others are usually dependent on them.

In contrast, Australia scored low in this dimension with 38. According to Hofstede (2017), people in Australia live in a low power distance, believe in the limitation of power among them and encourage the equal power distribution. For example, leaders in such cultures are likely to be equally powered as others and share similar status (Samovar et al., 2004). The following quote on power distance dimension within the educational settings summarises and compares the power of teachers in large and small power cultural contexts and its effect on the students.

In large power distance societies, the educational process is teacher centred. The teacher initiates all communication, outlines the path of learning students should follow, and is never publicly criticized or contradicted. In large power distance societies, the emphasis is on the personal “wisdom” of the teacher, while in small power distance societies the emphasis is on impersonal “truth” that can be obtained by any competent person Calloway-Thomas et al. (1999 as cited in Samovar et al., 2004, p.205).

In the framework of this study, the understanding of Saudi women students regarding the power distance might have an influence on their academic experience when they attend their classes in the Australian context. Their previously lived experience of power distance at home, schools and workplaces may influence the interaction and communication with their lecturers at the Australian university, where low power distance is practiced. Having to change the way of perceiving and communicating with lecturers who are considered in higher power position can be overwhelming for Saudi women. Thus, as an assumption, the Saudi women might find it challenging to engage actively in their classroom activities and to meet the expectation in Australian academic settings.

Individualism versus collectivism dimension based on the four categories model

The second cultural dimension is individualism versus collectivism. It assesses the loyalty of individuals to their specific groups. Individualistic culture means the people have

higher interpersonal relations, lesser tied relations, and have personal autonomy (Hofstede, 2001). Various aspects such as personal success and individual decision making are highly associated with this individualistic culture. Australia scores highly in this dimension. Accordingly, in the Australian culture, members are concerned with individual responsibility, looking after immediate family, placing greater value on individual privacy and have less concern for group interests or needs (Bassett, 2004).

Saudi Arabia scores lower in this dimension and therefore it is a collectivistic culture, referring to a strong degree of social unity among members of any group with shared similarities (Hofstede, 1983). The typical stereotype of Saudi Arabians is that they greatly respect their family tribe and its relatives of the nuclear and extended members. In addition, Saudi Arabians are viewed to pay a great attention to their traditional norms, identity and social expectations (AlMunajjed, 1997). Further, connectedness among members in the Saudi Arabian culture is tight and usually interwoven with lifelong relations such as blood, religion, location and history. Furthermore, people are more interested in friendships that exist within their own groups, considering other relations outside their boundaries as factors that might cause risks or threat. Therefore, connection with the same group who share the same values is considered safer and more trustworthy (Triandis, 1989). Aspects such as task cooperation and group agreement are significant features of a collectivistic culture. Also, this cultural context encourages its members to follow their group rules and maintain good relations with other members (Hofstede, 2017). In other words, the group's needs are an important consideration as well as those of members (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Bassett, 2004).

In the framework of this study, the individualism versus collectivism dimension might affect Saudi females' preferences and achievement of sociocultural and academic aspects. First, on the one hand, as mentioned in the previous subsection of Chapter 2, gender roles are strict in Saudi Arabia and women are expected to be raising children and making every effort to

provide for all needs. On the other hand, the decision to live and study abroad might lead Saudi women feeling guilty leaving their parents back home and bringing their children to a new context to prioritize their personal development and academic achievement. When Saudi women are attending Australian institutions, they are expected to fully engage with the academic requirements which might mean long hours of studying and less time to look after the family's needs. Second, as the Saudi females were born and raised in a collectivist culture environment that is embedded in them, this might inadvertently lead them to find it challenging to engage in class projects and group-work in a cooperative context given that they might have to work with foreign males and/or females of different nationalities who may have different expectations of group commitments. Australian academic institutions require them to be involved in classes and prepare for assessments individually or with groups, and that is different from what exists in the Saudi education system (this is further explained in following sub-sections).

Understanding and acknowledging the cultural background of Saudi women students may help to interpret the way they behave and respond in response to their experiences in academic Australian institutions and within the Australian community and society. Furthermore, it might help to identify and explain the strategies they apply to adopt the new living and studying context in Australia, providing the embedded characteristics of collectivist values from their personalities. Nonetheless, collectivistic values may help Saudi females to perceive friendship relations as an acculturation and adjustment strategy, helping feel safe and connected with their original cultural context while sharing the same experience of living and studying in a different country.

Masculinity versus femininity dimension based on the four categories model

The third dimension in Hofstede's model is masculinity versus femininity. It refers to gender roles distributed within the organisations of the culture from a societal perspective and

not from the personal one. Saudi Arabia scores 43, which implies the feminine culture, whereas Australia scores 61 meaning it is a masculine culture. A number of values are observed in the masculine culture, for example, competition, career advancement assertion and ambition (Hofstede, 1983). Furthermore, Hofstede (2011) asserts that masculine cultures are easily accepting of changes and employing new ways to achieve more outcomes.

Linking this to the current thesis, Saudi Arabian culture has a fixed role for each gender, and the expectation that women should be maintaining the household and caring for the family needs whereas men undertake all the duties outside home and care for the financial needs (AlMunajjed, 1997). However, this expectation has changed over the last three decades, and women have been participating with men in various areas, challenging the stereotyped gender roles but in a way that ensures the alignment with the Islamic and socio-cultural expectations. For instance, during 2010 women were given more priority than men and exclusively gained admission to the Faculty of Art and Design at Princess Noura Bint Abdelrahman University (Al-Senan et al., 2018). Also, from the aspect of employment, Adham (2012) mentioned that Saudi women hold different positions in society, including being doctors, deans of women universities and colleges, administrators of banks and this helps respond to women's needs as they occur. Furthermore, from a political aspect, Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud was appointed in 2019 as an ambassador to the United States (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Washington, 2019). The princess is the first Saudi woman to hold this position and it is considered as a signal that women of Saudi Arabia can fulfil ministerial tasks (Jamjoom & Mills, 2022).

With respect to all these changes in the Saudi Arabian system regarding women leaving their homes and joining men to participate in society, the assigned and expected gender practices represent different realities when compared to Australia. This implies that culture has a strong influence on each context and that cannot be the same across two countries.

Describing that from an Australian reality is different. Australia is a context where the government and its cultural values encourage and promote the practices of gender equality, and grant independence for all women and men from an early age (Sex Discrimination Act No 4., Australian Government, 1984). Thereafter, these observed and practiced gender equality values may not be perceived as acceptable by Saudi women and their accompanying men.

Of relevance to this study, masculinity and femininity might be problematic for Saudi women students in Australia with their immediate accompanying families, particularly considering the differences of meaning and practices reported above in the two cultures. In detail, advancement of women's positions and competition with others, especially foreign men, might be challenging from a Saudi Arabian male's perspective. As they perceive themselves responsible for providing all familial financial needs (AlMunajjed, 1997), they might not expect themselves to stay home while their women are out for long hours in pursuit of their academic tasks.

Uncertainty avoidance dimension based on the four categories model

The uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree of discomfort experienced in a new situation (Hofstede, 1986). Saudi Arabia has a higher score on this dimension meaning that Saudi Arabian individuals perceive uncertain and unstructured events as involving risks and unexpected consequences. Typically, they would much prefer to have clear instructions and detailed guidance in order to be able to accomplish any task. They believe that following structured rules and detailed directions would lead to feeling safer in new situation.

In comparison, in Australia, where the score of uncertainty avoidance is low, individuals are less resistant to adapting new innovations and prefer to have fewer rules (Hofstede, 2001). They might be less interested in following detailed instruction and more open to take new directions.

Of relevance to this study, it is expected that Saudi women students might feel concerned about the new experiences they go through, due to their cultural values which can change their intention to study abroad. Specifically, the new experience for Saudi women means that it is guaranteed nothing will be as expected, and they will experience a variety of differences among social and academic systems which they need to adopt while living in the host country for some time. The adoption of the new or different system typically would involve going through challenges arising at the time with no absolute solution that can be applied to all cases. Therefore, resistance to facing challenges, searching for and applying available solutions can be a stressful situation that Saudi women undertake as a part of their transitional and acculturation experiences.

Long-term versus short-term orientation dimension

The fifth dimension is long-term versus short-term orientation. The dimension defines how an individual society maintains its links with the past while dealing with present or future challenges (Hofstede, 2001, 2011). Scoring high in this dimension suggests that the society has a long-term orientation and that people's activities are directed towards the future. Moreover, members of long-term society are eager to sacrifice immediate situations in order to achieve future rewards (Hofstede, 2011). On the opposite side, scoring low in this dimension indicates a short-term orientation society where people are concentrated on the values of the present and the past. Short-term orientation context is referred to as the normative society and people of such society are usually concerned with maintaining their own steadiness, fulfilling their personal obligations and protecting their social norms and cultural traditions (Hofstede, 2011). Scores on this dimension for Saudi Arabia and Australia showed that they reflect normative cultures' values since Saudi Arabia scores 36 and Australia scores 21 as shown in Figure 5 (Hofstede, 2017).

Relating this to the framework of the current study, as Saudi Arabian women come from a normative culture, they may pay further attention to the value of attending tertiary education and living in the Australian society. Therefore, Saudi women, similar to most international students, might expect to achieve the positive results of developing their academic knowledge and improving intellectual skills as a result of selecting to live and study in Australia (Krishnan & Vrceelj, 2009). For instance, Saudi women may value the experience of attending tertiary education in Australia as a positive development through practicing different learning approaches and tasks such as independent learning or working with males. But, referring to their short-term orientation culture, which at the same time guides them to respect their own Islamic and Saudi traditions, Saudi women students may face challenges of adapting and adjusting themselves to the Australian academic culture.

Indulgence versus restraint dimension

The sixth dimension of Hofstede's (2011) theory categorizing cultural values is indulgence versus restraint, and it explains how a culture controls and allows its people the opportunity to speak, relax and enjoy. Once a country scores high on this dimension, it is an indulgence, whereas if a country had a low score, it is a restraint. As presented in Figure 5, Australia scores 71 on this dimension, which is considered a high score in contrast to the Saudi Arabian's score of 52.

Relating this dimension to the context of the present study, if an educational context is developed to promote a relaxing learning environment, implying indulgence values like a full opportunity to speak up and share or discuss ideas, it may pose some challenges for students who come from a restrained culture. For instance, for Saudi women transitioning in Australia, it can be challenging for them to be involved in the Australian academic context because they used to attend in a different educational context in Saudi Arabia where social, cultural, and pedagogical barriers are observed (Khan, 2011). From a socio-cultural aspect, although

Australia is considered an indulgence country where people have more freedom to act (Hofstede, 2017) and it is known as a multicultural nation, it is similar to other countries where racial abuse and discrimination could happen to international students (Gomes, 2015; Nyland et al., 2009). Saudi women may have higher expectations about their safety and security in Australia and it is possible that Saudi women, being Arab and Muslim, may face racism or discrimination in their daily activities in/out the academic environment (Poynting & Noble, 2004).

3.4.3 Cross-cultural challenges encountered by international students

This following section will review the available literature identifying several cross-cultural challenges encountered by international students while being abroad, followed by a review of empirical studies on Saudi women students. Discussed challenges are grouped into main categories including academic, socio-cultural, and emotional aspects.

Academic challenges

Academic challenges refer to the language-related issues or barriers regarding the academic environments where international students spend a lot of time aiming to succeed. Scholars affirmed that leaving home and transitioning to tertiary education level is an important but difficult stage of one's life, especially for those who decide to study abroad (Hellstén, 2002; Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Hellstén (2002) explains that when students shift between familiar and unfamiliar learning environments, the concept of transition is best referred to especially when international students come to a new and foreign country where a lot of uncertainty and disorientation is faced. Thus, at this transitional stage, academic issues cannot be prevented and are encountered by local and international students, yet international students are found to experience more difficulties than local students. For local students, difficulties of academic context can be managed as they usually are familiar with the language, practices and context. However, international students' difficulty adjusting to the new academic context is due to the

unfamiliarity of academic requirements of the host country. Taking into consideration that international students have had a different learning experience in their home country, their views and responses to the level of academic expectations, skills, classroom dynamics, the instructor's role, course structure, assessments and learning styles may result in them finding it daunting and challenging to meet a satisfactory level (Eland & Thomas, 2013; Ramsay et al., 1999; Sawir et al., 2012; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Stoyhoff, 1997).

The first academic challenge that faces most international students relates to English language proficiency. In English speaking countries like the US, the UK and Australia, a higher level of English language competence is required, and this can result in barriers for international students to succeed in their chosen programme. This argument is supported by the view of Andrade (2009) arguing that non-English speaking international students are challenged by the academic language of the American context. Sherry et al. (2010) further claim that regardless of degree subject or degree level, unfamiliarity with the language of instruction may push students to unintentionally avoid interaction in the classrooms and avoid engaging with people of the host society. One interesting study puts forward this argument and reports the personal experience of an international student in Canada. Liu (2011), a graduate-level student, shared her own journey of studying in Canada and indicated that lacking English proficiency became a barrier for her to successfully participate in classes and interact with instructors and classmates. In addition, lacking English proficiency affected her participation in host community even in personal daily practices like getting on the correct bus, shopping at the appropriate grocery or asking for help.

Also, Sawir et al. (2012) suggested that most studies on international students' challenges highlight problems in coping with English language skills with most problems noticed in listening, speaking, inadequate vocabulary, and academic writing areas (Sawir et al., 2012). English second language speakers mostly reported their challenges of acquiring the

required level of English academic skills. It seems that the level of English proficiency would either improve or hinder international students' academic achievement. International students with lower English proficiency may not be able to express their knowledge and meet the academic expectations within class activities and their degree assessments. Nevertheless, lower English language proficiency may lead international students to feel negatively about, or lack confidence in, themselves in academic environments. Baek and Damarin (2008) discussed the impact of language proficiency on international students' academic performance. Using a qualitative design, seven Korean women who were studying in the US, and identified themselves as non-English speakers, were interviewed multiple times over a seven-month period. Baek and Damarin (2008) reported that most participants found it challenging to communicate their knowledge in English as a second language. Accordingly, the Korean women students identified English language as their biggest concern in participating in class discussion. Hence, feeling unable to express their knowledge contributed to their disconnection from class activities and positive academic participation. The academic experience of these Korean women international students may be similar to other cohorts of international students. Saudi women students with low English proficiency levels may encounter the same language difficulties that may cause some issues like learning anxiety and depression, hindering academic achievement and adjustment in the new environment after all.

Another academic challenge for international students pertains to the learning and teaching environment. Taking into consideration that most international students leave their home country for the first time to study abroad supports the assumption that they would face many academic problems adjusting to the new educational system that is very different from their education systems and practices in their home country. Thus, international students are expected to encounter some difficulties related to differences in teaching and learning styles,

different expectations about teachers' and students' roles, as well as engagement and participation in classrooms.

Moreover, within classrooms where students and teachers from multicultural backgrounds work together, there is an assumption of mismatched learning and teaching styles and expectations. For example, Biggs (2001 as cited in Hellstén, 2002) reviewed extensive research and identified that there are misleading beliefs about international students' difficulties based on stereotypes about students' cultures. Such misleading beliefs influenced teachers' expectations of the students' engagement in the 'western' style of learning, classroom dynamics and cultures. One important and identified issue is the notion related to the transferring of Asian-background students from passive to active learning styles. In addition, Carroll and Ryan (2007) suggested that teachers of international students also encounter difficulties while working with students of different backgrounds in trying to meet the academic standards of the institutions as well as responding to the students' needs. To illustrate, the teaching practices in Asian and Middle Eastern countries represent a teacher-centred approach in which students are not taking active roles, but rather are passive learners listening, taking notes and expecting the teacher to be knowledgeable than they are. This leads international students coming from such practices to rely heavily on their teachers or to work much harder to adjust to the new practices. Wong (2004) conducted a study examining the teaching and learning styles of Asian international students in South Australia. Participants of this study were asked about their views of differences in their previous and current learning experiences. Interestingly, Asian international students were clear about understanding the differences between their previous and current learning and teaching experiences, acknowledging their discomfort once they realised that they should depend on themselves to learn, and not on their teachers to spoon-feed them as before. Yet, the Asian international students were found to adjust positively with new learning and teaching practices that used a

student-centred approach leading them to develop ways to learn, participate in classroom tasks, practice critical thinking, raise questions and express their own thoughts (Wong, 2004). However, when linking this with the current thesis, Saudi women students coming from a traditional learning environment of a teacher-centred approach (Abouammoh & Smith, 2013) might experience great difficulty adjusting to the new learning and teaching styles of the Australian academic context.

Thirdly, teacher-student relationships can be identified as an academic challenge in the literature of international students. In some studies, scholars claim that the differences in the power distance between home and host cultures can affect international students' interactions in the classrooms and their engagement with their teachers. For instance, Hofstede (1986) argued that when students and teachers come from different backgrounds, cultural differences of learning and teaching would be seen. He stated:

Teacher and student are an archetypal role pair in virtually any society. When teacher and student come from different cultures, such as in the context of economic development programmes, many perplexities can arise. These can be due to different social positions of teachers and students in the two societies, to differences in the relevance of the curriculum for the two societies, to differences in profiles of cognitive abilities between the populations of the two societies, or to differences in expected teacher/student and student/student interaction (Hofstede, 1986, p.301).

In addition, one study conducted by Rienties and Tempelaar (2013) in the Netherlands involved 1375 Dutch and international students from 69 nationalities. The study was designed based on the main components of Hofstede's (1986) cultural dimensions model which included individualism, masculinity, power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Rienties and Tempelaar (2013) found that power and distance greatly affected the students from Asian backgrounds resulting in lower academic performance compared to students from backgrounds that have lower power distance.

The work of Wong (2004) and Wu et al. (2015) can exemplify a better understanding about international students coming from high power distance cultures studying in a low power distance culture. The scholars found that international students who originate from Asian and Middle Eastern cultures faced academic barriers interacting with their teachers due to cultural differences and expectations from teachers. For example, Wong's study examined Asian international students in South Australia. One of the key findings reported was that participants initially were unable to develop a close rapport with their lecturer, but when they reached out to them it turned out to be helpful. Once students voiced their needs, lecturers were able to provide needed support and respond better to raised needs (Wong, 2004). In the other study, Wu et al. (2015) involved students from China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Mexico and the findings were similar to Wong's work. Therefore, it is possible to assume that Saudi women international students can be affected by cultural factors when working closely with their teachers. As these students come from a high power distance culture, their previous learning experience may impact on their academic experience in South Australia, which is identified as a low power distance culture (Hofstede, 2017).

Socio-cultural challenges

Socio-cultural challenges indicated by difficulties encountered by international students in terms of engaging with host people, culture and society, making friends with locals, bringing family along, discrimination, maintaining cultural values and other external factors will be reviewed.

Engaging with the host society is a popular issue facing international students. A general fact is that international students living in their home countries do fit within their same society and people sharing the same language, views and practices. However, after leaving the home country and settling in a different destination, international students disconnect from their familiar and known systems and accordingly should establish new ones (Eland & Thomas,

2013; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The feelings of being deprived of familiar community and social systems might compromise international students' levels of confidence and increase levels of tension and confusion (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Not actively engaging with the host society and people may lead to social loneliness problems. When international students feel themselves to be different from the host society and find themselves connected more with their home culture, they may rather cut ties with the mainstream communities instead of seeking integration.

From a psychological perspective, scholars affirmed that minorities being rejected, excluded or ignored from dominant people and wider ethnic groups can lead to negative feelings of anxiety and loneliness (Sawir et al., 2008). Rejection and other unwelcoming minority groups in the society can be a result of stereotyped media announcements. For instance, Lee and Rice (2007) found that international students entering the US as a 'minority' brought new reflections on race and status to the American society. Participants in Lee and Rice's study noted their feelings of inferiority and suggested that it could be due to media portrayals of specific cultures or race. In addition, there was an opposing experience of white international students and those of colour (Lee & Rice, 2007). The latter scholars noted that students from Asia, India, Latin America, and the Middle East reported discrimination, while other students from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand did not report any discrimination related to their race or culture.

Making friends and interacting with the host culture is another sociocultural challenge in the literature of international students' acculturation experiences. In a Singaporean university, Tsang (2001) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the adjustment of sixty-three mainland Chinese students and ninety-one Chinese academics. According to findings on the students' survey, the author reported that mainland Chinese students perceived socialising with their local peers as a hindrance to their academic achievement and they preferred to spend

more time working on their studies. This view of mainland Chinese students may reflect the understanding of international students that more engagement with the host society and people may lead to failure of academic progress which is their first goal. However, the notion that finding ways to belong in the host culture and society is strongly recommended “to maintain a minimum quantity and quality of interpersonal relationships” (Sawir et al., 2008, p.152). But, often making friends with local community is not easy for international students, as it happens among same-culture individuals.

Sawir et al. (2008) identified that international students who engage more with people of their own culture and share one language generally viewed the friendship as a source of support. A study took place in Australia by Wang et al. (2017) investigating Chinese nursing students in terms of their living and learning experiences. Authors noted that none of the participants made friends with locals or joined university groups yet making friends with same-culture people was easier and turned out to be an important source of support. Because both studies of Tsang (2001) and Wang et al. (2017) examined the group of Chinese international students in different contexts and the findings suggest the same conclusions, similar assumptions can likely be generalized to other groups of international students.

Bringing family along is another sociocultural challenge facing international students. Scholars like Meloni (1986) and Duru and Poyrazli (2007) found that marital status influences the kind of challenges international students encounter, pointing out that single students seem to have fewer social, personal, and academic problems than married students. To explain this, Duru and Poyrazli (2007) conducted an online study in the US with 299 Turkish students from seventeen universities. Researchers developed their online study based on a number of instruments such as a demographic questionnaire, an adjustment difficulties scale, a social connectedness scale, an acculturative stress scale for international students and the big five inventory. One of their results highlighted that marital status was found to affect the cross-

cultural adjustment with single students less likely to experience difficulties in comparison to married students. This finding suggested that while singles students try to adjust to their own educational and social problems, married students have to navigate educational, cultural, and familial problems of their own and their families too. Problems here related to the social differences of balancing married life and parenthood as well as being a student. For example, in the UK, Pinter (2013) examined the challenges experienced by international students who were also parents studying overseas. Following a qualitative methodology, Pinter interviewed twenty-five male and female parent international students from various countries including Columbia, Cyprus, Mexico, China, Denmark, Greece, Korea and Taiwan. An important finding reported in this study was that participants with children had difficulty managing their new role as students, and parenting their children in a new cultural environment.

In addition, married students may face huge cultural challenges with their children being raised in a different context (Meloni, 1986). Most international students bring their families along to an overseas country believing that this is a great opportunity for their children to broaden their cultural and educational abilities. However, the decision to bring or not to bring family can be a difficult one for intentional students to make as it seems to add a heavier responsibility on their new main role as a student. Mehdizadeh and Scott (2005) conducted a qualitative study on seventy Iranian international students in the UK to investigate their adjustment problems. The findings of the study reported parents' concerns about bringing up their children and raising them in a new culture. This parental view explicitly reflected how Iranian international students perceived the positive aspects about the host culture; however, they also perceived the different implications to their own cultural and religious values which seem unrelated in the new context.

From another aspect, the decision to bring or not to bring family can be a difficult decision for intentional female students to make, as it seems to add a heavier responsibility on

the main students' roles. For instance, Scheyvens et al. (2003) conducted a study in Massey university, New Zealand, examining the barriers of international postgraduate students' learning experiences. A key finding of their study was that female participants mentioned the burden of familial challenges they faced while undertaking their own studies. The authors explained that issues regarding supporting the family onshore were raised exclusively by female participants due to the expectation that taking care of family is primarily the role of women. This expectation is strongly relevant to the context of current thesis. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the cultural gendered role of Saudi Arabia categorizes women as responsible carers for the children's and husbands' needs. Thus, an assumption can be made that when Saudi women international students undertake their studies abroad, married ones with children may encounter an adjustment difficulty managing the different roles of studying and caring for children.

Discrimination is another highlighted challenge encountered by international students after arriving in the host country (Lee & Rice, 2007; Poynting & Noble, 2004; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). In the US, for example, Lee and Rice (2007) examined the experiences of fourteen female and ten male international students from India, East Asia, Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Gulf Region, the Caribbean, Canada, and New Zealand, all studying in a large public university. Their study shed light on the difference of experienced discrimination that can be linked to cultural or race backgrounds of the students. To clarify, authors found that students originating from Western and English-speaking countries reported minimal to no discrimination experiences in comparison with students from the other backgrounds and cultures identifying more discriminating verbal and non-verbal situations.

Practicing religion in the host country is often identified in the literature as a factor of religious discrimination or insensitivity encountered by the cohort of international Muslim students. Speaking of Islamic practices as relevant to the context of the current thesis, daily

practices such as five times prays, might not always be understood in non-Islamic host countries. For instance, Novera (2004) undertook a qualitative study and interviewed twenty-five Indonesian students who were studying in Victoria, Australia. A number of the seventeen participants were Muslims, and seven of them perceived difficulty finding a place to wash and pray. Other participants in the same study found it difficult to accept the secular practices due to their strong beliefs of religious practices which led to difficult sociocultural adjustment experiences in the new context. In another large study in Australia, Poynting and Noble (2004) examined how Muslims of Arabic and Australian backgrounds live with racism. The findings identified increased cases of discrimination, abuse and violence, especially since the US eleventh of September incident, towards both Muslim women and men. The study was conducted in Sydney and Melbourne, where the greatest numbers of Muslims live. Employing mixed methods, the online questionnaire reached over one thousand participants, and thirty-four individuals took part in the qualitative interview. Highlighting one important finding, scholars indicated the greater reporting of incidents made by women over men, and, sadly, wearing the hijab was mentioned as the reason for experiences of racism, and was far more likely to provoke abuse than males having beards or wearing traditional clothes. Showing commitment to Islamic practices cannot be hidden; women are expected to wear hijab and show modesty, whereas men need to attend five prayers at mosque daily.

The work of Siraj (2011) examining thirty Muslim women in Scotland and their views and understanding of modesty and hijab identifies some assumptions about Muslim women students' practice of wearing hijab in a non-Islamic country. Siraj (2011) interviewed thirty Muslim women of different ages, backgrounds and occupations. Half of the participants identified as wearers of hijab and the other half did not. Findings identified two opposing views where those wearing hijab viewed it as an example of modesty, virtue and respect, and the other women regarded it as an unnecessary piece of clothing. However, despite their

contrasting views on wearing and viewing the hijab, both groups of participants held remarkably similar meanings on the importance of Muslim women's modesty. Therefore, when living in a non-Islamic society, Muslim women's adherence to the Islamic practice of wearing the hijab may not be easy, which adds another challenge for international Muslim women students. Relating this argument to the current thesis, one can expect Saudi women in South Australia to encounter some difficulties when deciding whether to wear hijab and uphold religious values or to take it off partially or fully to integrate in the new culture.

Maintaining cultural values is an important challenge encountered by international students. The maintenance of cultural values of one's home country can be discussed in relation to the differences between the home and host countries where international students must navigate their cultural values and identities in balance while living in a different country. Hofstede et al. (1997) stated that cultures influence the way we learn to some extent. Considering the case of international students, especially when being abroad for first time, they should pay attention not only to the new academic situation but also to integrating themselves into the culture of their destination country where they choose to study and live.

Besides the aforementioned socio-cultural challenges, there are some external factors like finance, transportation, accommodation and food that can create difficulties for international students' adjustment upon arrival in the host country. A number of studies reported financial problems as a challenge facing the majority of international students (Nyland et al., 2009; Sherry et al., 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Financial difficulties can arise from factors like limited scholarship payments, visa restrictions on work permits and rates of accommodation and daily life costs. In some cases, international students receiving a scholarship that covers only academic fees means that students must work to cover other financial needs. In Duru and Poyrazli's (2007) study of Turkish students, they report the financial difficulties related more to married participants. Difficulties for married participants

were due to scholarship payments only covering the main applicant and not accompanying spouses or children. As a result, financial responsibilities created more stress on Turkish married students.

Transportation was also reported as a problem facing some international students in the host country (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Zhang & Zhou, 2010). In the US, Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) conducted a qualitative study involving fifteen students, three females twelve males, from different countries with focus group interviews to examine their barriers of attending a university campus located in an urban area. One finding stated that students had difficulty learning about the public transportation system especially during early arrival stages when they needed to use it frequently. Students spent some time learning how the American public transportation system works. There was a similar finding reported in Canada in relation to Chinese students' experiences. Zhang and Zhou (2010) applied a mixed method study to understand international students' adjustment in Canada and reported that Chinese students had known very little about public transportation which was different from their home country. Relocating from one country to another may present problems which international students did not consider. Although students may be prepared for the academic requirements and living arrangements before travel, the above studies demonstrate that even a small experience, such as learning to use public transportation, can be challenging. In the current thesis, using public transportation in South Australia can be challenging for Saudi women due to the private sphere in their home culture. Prior to 2018, Saudi women depended on male relatives, hired drivers, or private transportation to get to work (Williams et al., 2019). Thus, most women are not accustomed to using public transportation which may become a new task for them to learn after moving to study abroad.

Accommodation also becomes a difficulty upon arrival. Not all students are able to pay for private housing and many may choose to live in dorms. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007)

discovered that initial efforts of finding an appropriate living place and settling into a new routine created major concerns for students at the start of their study. For single students there were fewer problems living in campus housing; however, married students with families reported dissatisfaction, claiming that campus housing was not appropriate for married students with families. Yet, they were unable to move due to the expense of renting a private house. Relating this to the current thesis, Saudi women students settling to live and study in South Australia could be faced with same issues due to application and payment processes that are different between the two contexts.

Food options are another issue reported in the literature on international students' challenges. The availability of food that meets the individual's dietary and religious needs may not be easily found by Muslim students who adhere to halal food standards. Novera (2004) examined Indonesian international students in Australia, including Muslim and non-Muslim students. The Muslim participants highlighted the difficulty in finding a variety of food options in the market or even at university campuses. Indeed, universities' canteens and restaurants should provide various foods catering for most of the needs of students, including the provision of halal options.

¹ The term halal means (permitted under Islamic law) can be used in the context of food such as halal meat (Saeed, 2003).

Emotional challenges

As mentioned in the above challenges, international students expect to go through various difficulties related to academic and socio-cultural aspects of their journey in the new context. Thus, facing these challenges can have a negative impact emotionally. The following excerpt captured the scene and demonstrated how international students, whilst facing all challenges, could feel emotionally unwell.

Many students are away from their families for the first time and must learn how to deal with finding a residence, cooking and caring for themselves, and learning how to navigate the new environment and how to manage their time. Some students do not yet have the life skills to live independently, such as getting enough sleep, eating nutritious meals, and getting along with roommates. Undergraduate students, in particular, may have had their schedules and activities managed by their parents before coming to the United States, while graduate students may not have had to juggle as many responsibilities in their home countries. This can lead to not feeling well physically or emotionally, which ultimately can affect students' ability to be successful in their studies. Compounding these problems, many students also experience loneliness, isolation, and uncertainty about how to make friends because they are away from family and friends at home and they are not sure how to connect with US students. (Eland & Thomas, 2013, p.147).

While the above quote did not mention any specific group of international students, it referenced the context of the US, and it is possible to raise the assumption that emotional issues can be experienced by international students in any context. A number of scholars identified specific issues such as loneliness and homesickness as common emotional challenges (Sawir et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2015). To explain, in Australia, Sawir et al.'s (2008) study offered a different aspect of international students' adjustment issues, focusing on loneliness and isolation among other issues.

The authors interviewed two-hundred international students from over thirty countries and studying at nine Australian universities. One argument highlighted that the perception of loneliness, and how people cope with it, differs among individuals and between cultural groups (Sawir et al., 2008). Further, scholars noted the significance of considering possible variations when considering international students who come from many different nationalities, cultural and religious backgrounds, ages, and life circumstances (Sawir et al., 2008). For instance, the authors affirmed the view that when international students miss their own cultural and linguistic settings, they would feel lonely, which highlights the importance of cultural factors and their impact on students' feelings. This will be further linked to the Saudi international students' perspective when discussing their own emotional challenges in the following section of empirical studies.

3.4.4 Examination of empirical studies on Saudi women students' challenges

The majority of international students may experience the same challenges; yet, others might experience additional challenges related to their cultural backgrounds. Table 2 below presents some empirical studies on Saudi international students in different countries. All identified studies were selected according to their relevance to the scope of the current thesis and are discussed to point out academic or sociocultural challenges related specifically to women students. The systematic literature review involved a comprehensive and structured search of the literature, using specific search terms or keywords, to identify relevant studies that meet predetermined inclusion criteria. Examples of the keywords identified for the search are "Saudi international students," "Saudi women students," "Saudi female students," "sociocultural challenges," "educational challenges," "cultural adjustment," and "study abroad experience". Once the relevant studies were identified, each study has been assessed for its relevance to the research question, and then synthesized and analyzed to draw conclusions and identify key topics as: academic challenges and sociocultural challenges.

Table 2. Empirical Studies on Saudi Women Students' Challenges

No.	Author, Year & Country	Type of study	Topic of study	Participants of study
1	Alhazmi (2013), Australia	PhD thesis	What does it look like to be in a mixed-gender environment? A phenomenological study of the experience of Saudi international students in a mixed-gender environment	2 men & 2 women
2	Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015), the US	Journal article	The Cultural Adjustment of Saudi Women International Students: A Qualitative Examination	25 women
3	Ahmed (2016), Canada	Master's project	Saudi Women's Experiences Studying At Canadian Universities Through The King Abdullah Scholarship Program	6 women
4	Al Remeih (2016), the US	PhD thesis	Social and academic challenges facing Saudi female students in the United States of America	20 women
5	Alhajj (2016), the US	PhD thesis	Learning to manage: How Saudi female doctoral students in Education manage academic and motherhood roles in US universities	14 women

No.	Author, Year & Country	Type of study	Topic of study	Participants of study
6	Alghamdi (2017), Australia	Master's project	The Experience of Saudi Female Students Attending Mixed Gender ESL Courses in Melbourne, Australia	4 women
7	Alqahtani and Pfeffer (2017), the UK	Journal article	Intercultural Adjustment: Female Saudi Students' Experiences of Adaptation and Acculturation in the United Kingdom	25 women
8	Alsahafi and Shin (2017), Australia	Journal article	Factors affecting the academic and cultural adjustment of Saudi international students in Australian universities	78 men & 22 women
9	Barasayn (2019), Australia	Master's project	Saudi women's understanding of the stereotypes they experience at Flinders university	7 women
10	Yaghi (2019), New Zealand	PhD thesis	Language, identity and parenting in acculturation: A case study of Saudi Arabian mothers sojourning in New Zealand.	9 women
11	Alfurayh and Burns (2020), Australia	Journal article	Redefining 'me': identity change among female Saudi study abroad students in Australia	5 women

While some challenges can be experienced by most international students, some of the literature argued for different challenges that may only be faced by Saudi students, given their unique cultural and religious backgrounds. The next sections discuss the challenges of Saudi women based on the categorized aspect of the academic and socio-cultural challenges. The identified academic challenges are (1) moving from segregated education environment to mixed gender ones, and (2) English language issues. Additionally, the identified socio-cultural challenges include (1) the guardianship system, (2) getting involved with the Western culture and societies and (3) balancing multiple roles.

3.4.4.1 Academic challenges

Moving from a segregated education environment to a mixed gender system is a serious challenge facing Saudi international students (Alghamdi, 2017; Alhazmi, 2013; Orth, 2015). In their home educational context, Saudi students experience only gender-segregated schools, thus when transitioning to a mixed-gender academic context abroad it presents new educational issues. While such a transitioning challenges both genders, it is even more difficult for Saudi women. Alhazmi (2013) used a phenomenological qualitative approach to specifically investigate the gender segregation aspect of Saudi culture and how it may affect Saudi students' engagement within the Australian educational environment, interviewing two male and two female Saudi students in Australia. The findings of this study demonstrated that the Saudi culture practice of gender segregation has affected Saudi students' experiences, especially in their ability to relate to their peers in a coeducational environment. Further, Alhazmi (2013) argued that adjusting to a mixed-gender educational environment was initially more difficult for Saudi women students than men as they did not know how to interact with men and chose to avoid them which required longer times to adjust to the new environment. Alhazmi (2013) also argued that due to the social traditions and cultural restrictions placed on women's roles in Saudi Arabia, Saudi women faced difficulties adjusting to the new academic context

overseas. The findings were also reported by Alghamdi (2017) who examined the experiences of Saudi women in Australia in the context of studying ESL (English as a Second Language). The research of Alghamdi (2017) offered an explanation for the hidden reasons Saudi women had difficulty engaging in conversation with men. According to her study, Alghamdi (2017) noted that some Saudi women felt that their level of English, their marital status and the attitudes of other students created concerns at times. For example, with regard to the students' levels of engagement in classroom tasks, the researcher noted that "participants preferred to disengage when required to either work solely with males or participate in physical activities with males impacting both on the female students' educational experiences, and on their sense of comfort and of appropriateness in that social environment..." (Alghamdi, 2017, p.45).

These studies point out that the transitioning from segregated to mixed gender learning and teaching environments may be more problematic for women than men. In Saudi Arabia, men spend a great of time outside homes, whereas women mostly stay home or go to work in a women-only private sphere, so they are not accustomed to engaging with men.

A similar study was conducted by Alsaifi and Shin (2017), applying a mixed methods design to examine the factors affecting the academic adjustment of Saudi international students studying at seventeen Australian universities. They collected quantitative data representing seventy-eight males and twenty-two females. Additionally, qualitative interviews were conducted with seven participants, but the study did not clarify their gender. With regard to the academic issues, Alsaifi and Shin (2017) reported that quantitative results did not show any gender differences in the level of language difficulties. Male and female participants affirmed having English language difficulties, especially in written assignments, engaging with class activities and the various assessment tools. Yet, understanding lectures was not reported as an academic difficulty.

Summarizing these studies suggests that the differences between the previous learning experience in Saudi and the current one studying in Australia can cause some academic challenges for Saudi women international students in terms of mixed gender environments and learning activities in addition to the English language problems.

3.4.4.2 Socio-cultural challenges

The guardianship system requires Saudi women international students to be accompanied by a family male member during the overseas study, unlike Saudi men. For Saudi women candidates, the opportunities are open via the scholarship program to join study abroad with the approval of a family male member to accompany in accordance with Saudi interpretations of Islamic teachings. The selection of the male guardian is subject to approval by the Education Ministry, and there is a further expectation that the guardian is willing and able to be present for the whole duration of study period; this needs to be evidenced during the application process (Bukhari & Denman, 2013). Being accompanied by the guardian in many cases can be helpful for most women and challenging for others. Ahmed (2016) conducted a qualitative study involving six Saudi women studying in Canada and their experiences as recipients of the scholarship program. Findings uncovered that guardianship law plays an important role in each of the participants' positive experiences where they received encouragement from their male guardian to apply and study overseas. However, participants had different opinions about the role that their guardians offered while being with them. Married participants were accompanied by their husband and reported a smoother experience of study with their partners taking up some responsibilities. In contrast, the experience was more difficult for unmarried participants accompanied by their fathers or brothers. Although, the guardianship law was deactivated as mentioned earlier (Section 2.3.2), it is still a requirement for all women applying to study abroad with very limited exceptions. For Saudi women, this law may act as a hindrance to engage in overseas travel and education,

representing an interpersonal barrier impacting both educational and social experiences. Alternatively, it may become a supporting factor while studying and living abroad.

Getting involved with the Western culture and society and forming friendships are considered key factors in the acculturation process of international students. Nevertheless, some studies identified the case of Saudi women preferring to isolate themselves from proper engagement with the host society and its people. A number of studies indicated they tend to isolate themselves from the host community as they preferred to live alone or with co-cultural students. For example, employing a qualitative approach, Al Remeih (2016) and Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) examined the social integration of Saudi females in the American contexts. Scholars concluded that participants had either no, or limited, friendships with Americans. Furthermore, scholars reported that due to the cultural and religious differences between home and host countries, the Saudi women's establishment of friendships were limited and shallow. Relatively, feeling different in/out of the host university may affect the integration of Saudi women in their new academic and social environments. Barasayn (2019) investigated the understanding of stereotypes related to the social experience of seven Saudi women doing undergraduate and postgraduate study at one South Australian university. Emerging themes from the individual interviews revealed positive and some negative experiences. In detail, within the university campuses the participants reported great and positive experiences; however, participants also encountered some situations of racism, discrimination, taunting, or Islamophobia. In addition, outside the university campuses, several participants struggled with a mixture of homesickness, loneliness, depression and feelings of being an outsider. The researcher suggested that such challenges were related to the stereotypes associated with the norm of marginalising Saudi women due to their religion and culture. Indeed, being easily identified as Muslim and Saudi women through dressing style or spoken

language may make them hesitant to get involved with people outside their culture and religion. Thus, they withdraw from the host societies.

Feelings of being an outsider in the host society can be greatly linked to the strong impacts of home cultural and religious identities. Alfurayh and Burns (2020) examined the development of identity and its impacts on the experiences of Saudi women in Australia. They interviewed five women from Saudi Arabia who were studying postgraduate and undergraduate courses in Melbourne, Australia. Through an in-depth interview, the researchers found that Saudi women had negotiated their religious and socio-cultural identities during their transition in Australia. The negotiation of identities was perceived from the participants' views on their evolving understandings of what it means for them to be Saudi, women, wives, and mothers in a different country where social and cultural norms are different from the home country. Some participants found they were able to uphold their existing identities and preserve strong connections with their home traditions and norms, while others reported they modified their personal and social identities through exposure to the Australian culture. All aforementioned studies in different Western countries suggested Saudi women students find it challenging to formulate friendships or engage with the host society because of the stereotypes surrounding them. For instance, as most Muslim women and the Saudis are identified by their hijab, some people avoid interacting with them unless the women themselves initiated it. Hence, the overseas study experiences may allow Saudi women to negotiate, understand, uphold or modify their identities, and understand their evolving roles within their new environment according to their perceived understanding of their religious and cultural values.

Balancing multiple roles is another issue reported in the literature of Saudi women challenges. Several scholars reported that gender role practices in Saudi Arabia were carried to their host destinations adding to more stress on the international students (Alhajj, 2016; Alqahtani & Pfeffer, 2017; Yaghi, 2019). Women within Saudi cultural norms are expected to

care for husbands, children and attend to their various needs; however, as they move to study overseas, there are additional responsibilities related to managing all roles together. Alqahtani and Pfeffer (2017) studied twenty-five Saudi women doctoral students from different locations within the UK about their intercultural adjustment. By interviewing and having the participants complete adaptation and acculturation scales, researchers identified challenges related to parenting and studying overseas. Findings indicated that participants who were accompanied by their children had positive and negative experiences. Some positive experiences identified by participants about their children included developing fluent English language and social awareness, and a number of emerging themes noted negative aspects such as the lack of some Arabic language skills, lack of original social and cultural skills, and fluidity of cultural identities. Also, in the US, Alhajj (2016) interviewed fourteen Saudi women who were all mothers at the time and studying their doctoral courses. More than one theme of the findings identified challenges related to the husbands' as well as children's adjustment in the American context. For instance, more than half of the participants stated that their husbands, children, or both, had experienced some issues while adjusting to the linguistic, cultural and religious differences. Not only that, but also mothers shared that their children had lost their identities living in a different country, not knowing where they belong in addition to a limited use of Arabic language while studying in a different system. The length of residency while those mothers attend their doctoral course was found to be one of the challenges facing Saudi mothers studying abroad. Another qualitative study by Yaghi (2019) had similar findings when examining Saudi women's perceptions of language, identity and parenting while living in New Zealand. Nine Saudi women took part in the study, with seven of them being mothers. Participants who were mothers commented on their difficulty upholding their children's language and identities. Furthermore, living in a country where Islamic culture is limited, mothers were concerned about the influence of the host culture on their children's Islamic and

cultural identities. However, they accepted some aspects of the culture given it did not oppose their religious and cultural values. Accordingly, such examples of studies suggest that Saudi women international students who are married and mothers may encounter additional challenges over single students when living and studying overseas. Yet, one point noted from all these studies is that Saudi women developed different strategies to help themselves manage various roles and responsibilities, as well as paying special attention to their accompanying children needs. Researchers identified strategies such as teaching Arabic lessons at home to improve linguistic skills and meeting with the Saudi community to maintain religious and cultural aspects. Accordingly, such examples of studies suggest that Saudi women international students who are married and mothers may encounter additional challenges to single students when living and studying overseas. Therefore, it is possible to assume that Saudi women international students are expected to experience social differences or challenges due to living and studying in other countries with different educational, social and cultural systems than Saudi Arabia.

3.4.5 Summary of cross-cultural challenges

This section of literature argued that international students' challenges can result from cultural differences among countries. This argument was further supported by the discussion and presentation of cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede, 2017) to explain the current thesis context, Saudi Arabia and Australia. Also, this section covered academic, socio-cultural and emotional challenges as representing the main difficulties encountered by international students. However, most of the reported literature exploring the challenges encountered by international students was found to be homogenous. Limited studies focused solely on the experience of Saudi students, in different countries, with few in the Australian context found to investigate various areas and not accounting for the Saudi women academic and sociocultural experience in South Australia. Therefore, the current thesis attempts to

contribute to the context of Saudi women students' challenges in South Australia. The following section will focus on the acculturation and adjustment strategies that international students employ while living and studying overseas.

3.5 Supporting factors and acculturation strategies

The fourth square of the organizational structure of the chapter (Figure 3) presents the acculturation strategies which international students may apply to fit in to the new environments while being overseas. The preceding section discussed how international students may feel stressed and face several challenges resulting from moving to study and live in another context. Consequently, responding to the challenges requires international students to find their supportive means and use acculturation strategies to fit into the context.

According to Eland and Thomas (2013), international students encounter various academic and non-academic challenges, thus to achieve their goals they should seek external help and have an inner desire. The following sections will discuss several factors within host universities and host societies to help international students settle in their new experiences.

3.5.1 Factors in the academic context

As evidenced in previous sections, available literature documented various challenges faced by international students during their overseas study experience. Therefore, host universities strive to ease the transition through offering orientation programs and a variety of student support services.

Orientation program

A welcoming university, as well as supportive academic environment, are key factors helping the transition of international students upon arrival (Sherry et al., 2010; Sümer et al., 2008). One important service is the orientation programs that Australian universities and other institutions in the global realm provide to help the settlement of students at the beginning of

their university studies (Burge, 2018). Specifically, the service is important for international students who left their home country to begin the academic journey abroad and are going through a major transitional shift in their lives. For example, the main universities in South Australia, which relate to the scope of current thesis, offer online and offline tours, group sessions and information for pre-departure and after arrival guidelines for international students (Flinders University, 2021a; University of Adelaide, 2021a; University of South Australia, n.d.-b).

Orientation programs intend to inform students about the university, provide information about campus facilities and available courses, establishing various connections with students (Sidoryn & Slade, 2008). Moreover, orientation programs can be designed to introduce international students to the host culture and its educational system, aiding their adjustment to the new culture and the educational environments (Burge, 2018; Cowley & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2018). Since the majority of Australian universities conduct the orientation programs in the first weeks, it provides students with important information such as campus services, enrolments, accommodation, health systems, employability and immigration laws to communicate their needs upon the commencements of their studies. However, when designing the orientation programs, universities should consider students' diverse needs which may warrant other sets of information. Linking this with the scope of the current thesis, the population of Saudi international students may require a special orientation due to their unique cultural values. Binsahl et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study on thirteen Saudi women's information seeking behaviours. The participants shared their own ways of findings needed information before and after arriving in Australia as international students. Findings indicated that participants looked at academic study requirements and specific information regarding their accompanying families. The later concern for participants was linked to their cultural context affecting their needs to find more information besides that required for their own needs.

Noting the Saudi cultural context, authors suggested Australian universities design specific pre-departure orientation sessions for Saudi students' groups to meet the needs their transition.

In addition to the content of the orientation programs, choosing an appropriate presentation time and length of duration are also important to achieve the aim of such programs. Scholars highlighted that the early experience of university education is crucial in establishing students' attitudes and expectations, and that forming positive social relationships, and making connections with their institution can play a significant role in fostering adjustment (Burge, 2018; Sidoryn & Slade, 2008). In the same view, scholars also advised the positive outcomes of pre-arrival orientation programs taking place offline before international students depart their countries. Burge (2018) presented the findings of an online resident induction program, authorised by the residential service at Deakin University. The online, interactive, five sessions needed around twenty minutes to be completed by offshore students who have been offered a place on campus residency. This pre-arrival induction session was found to improve students' awareness and understanding of the main rules and guidelines applying to behaviour, community values, security, and general living environments around the campus. The study indicated that such online orientation programs effectively supported the transition of residents to their new learning and living environments.

To assist with an easy adjustment to the new environment and to avoid potential issues, universities may also offer cultural and social orientation programs to international students in an informative style. Indeed, designing and offering different orientation programs can be beneficial for international students attending universities overseas.

Student support services

Australian universities acknowledge the different needs of international students compared to local students. Therefore, universities offer many services to support both international students in their academic and non-academic aspects. Examples of services

provided by universities in South Australia include academic and enrolment services, counselling, employment information, library assistance, learning centres, students associations, and religious needs (Flinders University, 2021b; University of Adelaide, 2021b; University of South Australia, n.d.-a).

However, with a greater number of different services made available for international students to make their journeys easier, not all international students access these services when needed. A number of scholars raised an important argument claiming that availability of support in a standard manner, and not accounting for unique individual's needs, will not encourage students to avail themselves of this support (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008). In addition, offering a more student-centred service will be beneficial for users (Roberts et al., 2015). Hence, the provision of services should be designed in a way that effectively meets the student's needs. Another argument was that students may not use the university services due to a lack of knowledge about it or about their eligibility to use it. To illustrate this, Owens and Loomes (2010) conducted a study at Central Queensland University including different campuses in Brisbane, Gold Coast, Melbourne and Sydney, to examine international students' sense of connection with their university. Four-hundred-and-forty-six participants joined the study and results suggested opinions differed. Asking about the use of student services at the campus, about half the participants stated that they did not know or understand the services available to them, or in what situations they would be able to access those services. Not only that, but about a third of participants acknowledged they had never used any of the available services out of their classes, believing that it was not appropriate to ask for such services (Owens & Loomes, 2010).

Not too long after, another study had similar findings on the views of international students regarding the usage of available university services. Roberts et al. (2015) conducted a mixed methods study to examine international students' views of support services at their

university. At one Australian university, 333 participants from four academic disciplines responded to the survey and results showed opposing opinions about using or not using twenty-four identified student services. The findings of the study indicated that more than 85% of participants stated they were aware of twelve services; however, not all services were used effectively. Their study identified factors like “not needing to use the service”, “did not know how to access the service” and “couldn’t find any information about the service when I needed it” which reflected barriers to the students to avail themselves of the provided services. Thus, the authors suggested a number of recommendations to enhance international students’ experiences at the university.

Therefore, the literature identifies a gap regarding the availability and efficiency of universities’ student services. Even though Australian universities offer a range of services for students, factors such as a lack of awareness or a misunderstanding about them prevented international students from accessing the services. The lack of awareness and misunderstanding may lead to stress and difficulty dealing with different issues which all can impact the adjustment of international students in their new contexts. To this end, universities, through their supporting services, should enhance the advertisement of provided services and design them based on the diversity of all student’s needs.

Self-regulated learning as a motivational factor

This sub-section reviews research studies which explain the self-regulated learning theory working as motivational factor to help the adjustment of international students. A review of the literature concluded that international students settle in their host destinations and commence their studies while encountering some challenges in their learning the new academic/sociocultural environments. However, international students eventually become keen to overcome issues by regulating their behaviours and adapting to meet their learning goals. From this point of view, self-regulated learning theory relates to the current study.

Self-regulated learning is defined as “an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning, and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation and behaviour, guided and constrained by their goals and contextual features in the environment” (Pintrich, 2000, p. 453). This definition presents students’ goal-oriented behaviour and suggests the positive outcomes of involving a number of practices in achieving planned goals related to learning context. Thus, self-regulated learning is largely triggered by planning goals which all influence the level of made efforts (Sitzmann & Ely, 2011). For example, once a student sets a higher order goal of meeting the requirements of their courses and eventually accomplishing their intentional degree, he or she may regulate one or more aspects of their thoughts and behaviours, such as to identify study needs, manage personal and study times, work hard to successfully complete a task and think about their future positively. Such behaviours encourage identifying resources and using appropriate strategies. This process of self-regulated learning in a directed manner demonstrates how learners integrate mental capabilities and the needed academic skills to achieve their academic goals (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001).

The application of self-regulated theory in the context of international students can potentially lead to better adjustment in the host environment so that learners adapt specific skills and change some behaviours to meet the requirements of studying in a different academic environment. The current study may identify that Saudi women students utilize self-regulated learning as one practice to change their behaviour, aiming to engage more with the Australian academic and sociocultural contexts.

To sum up, the above section presented a number of services offered by the universities to help the academic adjustment of international students. In addition, it reviewed the role of self-regulated learning working as motivational factor to enhance the adjustment of international students. Both university-offered services and motivational factors were

identified in the literature as helpful to international students' adjustment to the demands of the host academic environments.

3.5.2 Factors in the socio-cultural context

As discussed earlier (in this section cross-cultural transition into academic and social environments can be very challenging. Therefore, it is critical that individuals find and maintain social support networks from resources to meet new demands. The following will discuss the social networking and interaction with the host society, international students' societies and co-national connection as factors helping the adjustment of international students outside their academic environment.

Social networking and interaction with host society

The social networking and constant interaction with local people and community undoubtedly would benefit international students in using their second language, assist in overcoming emotional difficulties like loneliness and homesickness, and aid in understanding the host systems (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006; Trice, 2004). This networking and interaction would allow the establishment of two ends of communication and relationships between international students and the host people, which eases a practice of integration and encourages involvement in the society (Hendrickson et al., 2011).

Such an argument highlights the importance of connecting with society and culture outside the academic environment so that international students can improve their academic and social experience. The importance stems from an assumption that "If sojourners are carefully introduced into a new society by close, sympathetic host-culture friends, the evidence indicates that they may encounter fewer problems than if they are left to fend for themselves" (Furnham & Bochner, 1982, p. 171). This view was further evidenced in several studies examining relations with locals in host countries as a factor in life satisfaction. Scholars found that more satisfied international students had a higher ratio of host nationals in their friendship

networks (Hendrickson et al., 2011), and that more social contact with local students was associated with higher levels of life satisfaction (Ward & Masgoret, 2004). Hence, the greater connection with the host society would increase international students' satisfaction while living in their host countries.

From the Australian context, researchers claim that networking and interaction with host people and society can positively improve various skills of international students and can result in better adjustment to the Australian culture (Gomes, 2020; Wang et al., 2017). However, within the Australian society, international students often felt isolated and struggled to integrate (Gomes, 2015; Hellstén, 2002; Sawir et al., 2008; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wang et al., 2017). One recent study examined the perception of Chinese international students in Australia and reported that making friendships with domestic students was so difficult that none made friends with local students or joined university groups (Wang et al., 2017). Researchers conducted their study employing qualitative methods including interviews, focus group discussions, field notes and observations with one male and five female Chinese undergraduate nursing students in Western Australia. One of the challenges reported by participants was the forming of relationships with their Australian peers. Participants valued making friendships with local students and perceived it as significant factor for their overseas study experience. However, it was challenging for them and none was able to make friends with local students. This study reflected that international students are interested in completing their foreign degree in addition to establishing friendships with local people.

Connecting with same culture group

International students might find it easier to communicate with individuals of their same culture (Sherry et al., 2010). For example, speaking the same language and respecting the same cultural values makes a sense of connection with others when feeling alone in the different host country. Furthermore, sharing one faith was found to provide a sense of belongingness and

connection. Sawir et al. (Sawir et al., 2008) argued that religion is one of a number of ways of promoting and augmenting social networks. In a comparative study, 679 university students in New Zealand completed scales to assess spiritual, religious, and personal beliefs. Regardless of stress levels encountered or whether participants were international or domestic students, international students of Asian backgrounds were more likely to rely on their spirituality to overcome challenges than local students (Chai et al., 2012). Nevertheless, Arab Muslim students identified religious values and practices as making them feel connected with their own culture (McDermott-Levy, 2011; Mostafa, 2006; Yaghi, 2019).

Contacting a group of same culture can be one of the strategies international students follow while living in different context. Furthermore, communicating with family and friends back in home country plays an important role in the student's ability to adjust to new country environments. According to Mesidor and Sly (2016), students who have strong connection with their family were found to have a better transition to a new culture. Therefore, receiving family and friend's social support could be a factor in international students' adjustment to and satisfaction in their overseas experience.

In summary, this section identified that adjustment and acculturation are complex and multidimensional processes. It also suggested that a combination of university services and society network efforts would lead to better outcomes. Achieving such results will positively impact the international student's experience and offer more well internationalized environments. The successful academic and sociocultural adjustment in the host country can inevitably affect international student satisfaction in their overseas study journey.

3.5.3 Defining acculturation

One definition of acculturation describes it as a “dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005, p. 698). This definition denotes that at the

individual level, a person may experience an inner change when living in two cultures. The cross-cultural contact occurs when individuals relocate from one cultural context to another for short or long periods of time. International students, immigrants and refugees similarly come to the new cultural context with their own language, cultural values, traditions and various experiences which may not exist in the host country. Thus, the two contexts of different cultures involve continuous cultural contact and acculturation, theoretically, this takes place at the stage when people perceive the differences due to cross-cultural contact and start to consider a strategy to deal with it.

Another definition of acculturation describes it as a process of two aspects. Searle and Ward (1990) discussed that the acculturation definition and styles were inadequately incorporated with the psychological and sociocultural adjustment. From their view point it is argued that the psychological adjustment refers to the “feelings of well-being and satisfaction”, whereas, the sociocultural adjustment refers to the “ability to “fit in” and negotiate interactive aspects of the new culture” (Searle & Ward, 1990, p. 450). Therefore, it is important to differentiate both psychological and sociocultural dimensions when examining the adjustment experiences (Searle & Ward, 1990).

Both definitions of acculturation by Berry (1997) and Searle and Ward (1990) align with the scope of the current thesis examining the acculturation strategies of Saudi women students, and how they fitted in the Australian academic and sociocultural environments through employing one or more of the acculturation styles.

3.5.4 An overview on acculturation model

The acculturation strategies model established by Berry (1997) offers four strategies that can be adopted to acculturate when living in another cultural context. Acculturation theory is centred on two aspects, namely the cultural values and the individual’s contact with the new context, based on a bi-dimensional model that considers orientation to the home and host

cultures (Berry, 1997, 2005). Berry (2005) argued that the bi-dimensional approach gives individuals space to practice various levels of acceptance and adherence to the original and new cultures. Following is a brief presentation and discussion to each strategy of acculturation as offered by Berry.

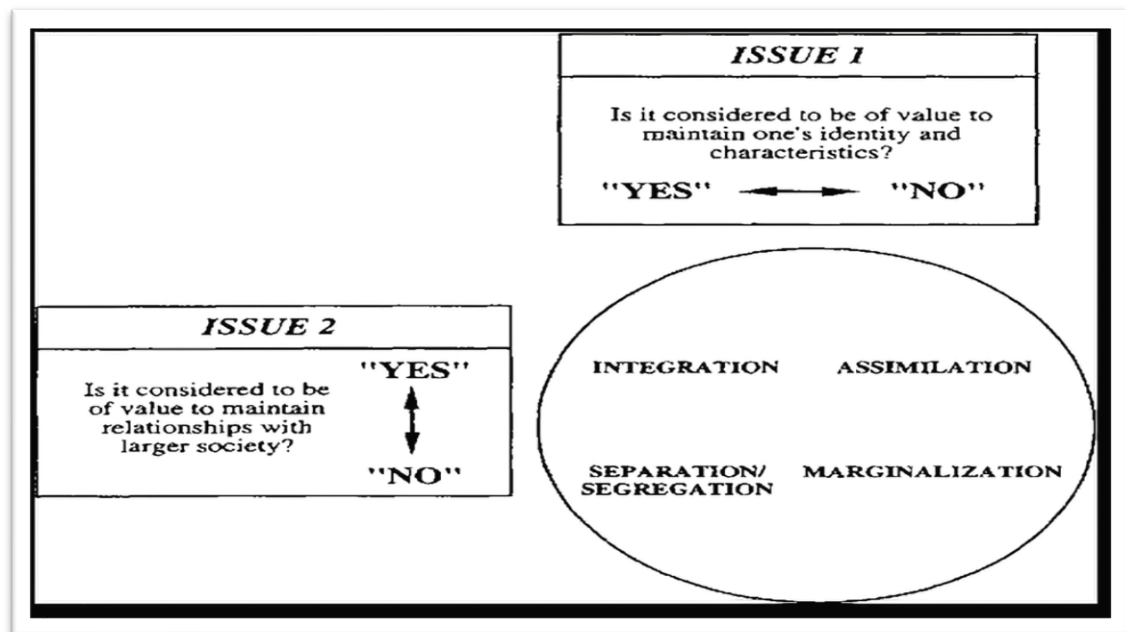


Figure 6. Acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997)

Integration

The integration mode of acculturation strategies means the person is willing to keep the heritage culture while at the same time exploring the host culture and having close contact with its people (Berry, 1997). This style of acculturation allows for a balance between keeping the original identity and maintaining an interaction with the new context (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Assimilation

The assimilation mode of acculturation strategies means an individual avoids being connected to the home culture and, at the same time, gets more involved with the host culture (Berry, 1997). Further, according to Sam and Berry (2010) those who choose this style avoid

interaction with people originating from the same background and prefer close communication with group of the host culture.

Separation

The separation mode of acculturation strategies represents the individuals who greatly value their home culture and avoid interaction with the host community or the exploration of the host community's cultural values (Berry, 1997). Thus, people following the separation mode consider their cultural identity more important than the culture of the new context, therefore, they do not wish to establish any communication with the host group (Berry, 2008).

Marginalization

The marginalization mode of acculturation strategies represents individuals who select to avoid contact with both home and host culture (Berry, 1997). Additionally, Berry (2008, p331) explains that the avoidance of communication with the original culture can be referred to the experience of “enforced cultural loss”, whereas the avoidance to interact with the people and the host culture can be linked to “reasons of exclusion or discrimination”.

Besides practicing one of the acculturation strategies to keep connection with their original culture or integrate with the host culture, other means may help international students to overcome challenges. The following will review the literature on some external factors that can impact international students' acculturation and lead to positive outcomes.

3.6 Conclusion of chapter

This chapter has presented several sections around the internationalisation of education forming the basic of the current thesis. Sections were structured to begin with relevant theories to the study, namely, push-pull factors, cultural dimensions and acculturation strategies. These theories help explain international students' push-pull factors to study abroad, cross-cultural challenges and acculturation practices while living in a different country. The push-pull factors

section described the reasons that influenced students' decisions to study abroad. The subsequent section identified the main challenges of international students while being overseas, indicating their needs to make some adjustments and be acculturated in their host countries. Thus, the final section reviewed acculturation styles and practical factors that could positively enhance the transitional experience of international students. This chapter has also examined, critiqued, and reviewed some empirical studies on the international Saudi students' experiences.

The literature review suggests a limited number of studies on Saudi women students' transition in overseas destinations and few empirical studies for this particular topic in Australian context. Concurrently, there are no empirical studies of Saudi women international students' push-pull factors, academic and socio-cultural experiences and acculturation and adjustment strategies in Australia. As a result, for the Australian context, further research is justified given the lack of research in this area.

It was further revealed that studies of Saudi women students in Australia involved a small number of participants with the focus on the linguistic area and none involved the Saudi women in South Australia. A qualitative research approach is warranted with an appropriate design to examine their case. The following chapter will discuss the qualitative methodology and methods used to conduct the current study.

Chapter 4: Methodology and methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodology and methods applied in this thesis. It starts with a discussion on the qualitative research approach used in this thesis. Following that, the chapter continues explaining the ethical considerations accounted for while undertaking the research, recruitment of participants, process of data collection, use of theoretical models for data analysis, and the researcher's position.

4.2 Qualitative research methodology

Qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the meanings, values, and reasons for those values held by individuals when responding to human cases or social phenomena (Creswell, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Consequently, qualitative research seeks value from written or spoken words as the primary data source, rather than numbers (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In research it is the researcher's role to interpret the examined phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

In this thesis, the aim is to explore push-pull factors involved in Saudi women studying in Australia as international students, their academic and socio-cultural experiences and their supporting factors and acculturation strategies. Therefore, qualitative research is considered to be appropriate to answer the research questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest that when using qualitative research methodology, the research question, methods and theory should all be linked appropriately. Applying this in the current thesis, the study is qualitative in nature as it intended to explore Saudi women's experience through answering the three

research questions (see Chapter 1) using appropriate method and theories (see Section 4.5 Data Collection and Section 4.7 Theoretical Frameworks).

Furthermore, the suitability of qualitative research to explore the experiences of international students has been approved by different researchers working in the field (e.g. Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sawir, 2005; Sawir et al., 2008). Also, qualitative research has been reported in previous studies as an appropriate methodology to study the case of Saudi women students' overseas experiences in different aspects (e.g. Alfurayh & Burns, 2020; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Sandekian et al., 2015).

4.3 Ethical considerations

As this study involved interacting with Saudi women students, the ethical approval was granted by The University of Adelaide's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for the project to be conducted by the researcher on 28/02/2019 with an approval number H-2019-030 (Appendix A). The approval ensured that there were no risks to the participants during or after the processes of data collecting and reporting. Relevant documents including the invitation email (Appendix B), participant information sheet (Appendix C), and consent form (Appendix D) were provided to each participant to explain that any collected data and all gathered personal details will remain confidential. Furthermore, the audio recordings of all interviews were saved on an encrypted desktop device and were listened to by the researcher only. Additionally, the confidentiality has been guaranteed to all participants through the use of pseudonyms when referring to their quotes.

4.4 Recruitment of participants

Selecting participants in any given research area should be done with caution whether research findings can be generalized to all or not. Research participants play an important role in the study since they help to answer the study's main questions (Creswell, 2007). Indeed, the

purpose of involving appropriate participants, as indicated by Merriam (2002), is to gain knowledge and understand the examined situation according to individuals who the researcher can learn the most from. Accordingly, the inclusion criteria of participants in the current thesis were: (1) aged 18 – 40, (2) enrolled in a South Australian university or an English language centre and (3) sponsored by the Saudi scholarship program or by an employer. These criteria represent the target cohort of interest. The age limit for Saudi Arabian applicant who aim to study overseas has been determined by the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education. When submitting an application to study abroad through any of the scholarship programs, the candidate's age should be between 17- 25 years for undergraduate level; not more than 30 years for the master's level and not more than for 35 years for the doctoral levels, respectively. Therefore, this study aimed to invite participants who are in the age limits 18-40. While conducting the study, the Ministry of Education announced it will exempt applicants from the age limit if they are accepted in a field of study at one of the top 100 universities in the world.

To recruit potential participants, the researcher contacted the Saudi Students Association in Adelaide who suggested advertising the study to the women students via their social media channel. One of their channels was a women-only WhatsApp group. This WhatsApp group is created only for Saudi women who live in South Australia for various reasons such as visiting, studying, or coming with their husbands. At the time, the researcher was not a member of the WhatsApp groups. Thus, the group administrator worked as liaison and posted the invitation in Arabic and English languages along with the researcher's email address for contact (Appendix B). Several days later, the group administrator suggested adding the researcher to the group to facilitate communication with potential participants via private chat.

Becoming a member in the WhatsApp group appeared to be a successful suggestion, and fourteen Saudi women students privately messaged the researcher and expressed their interest in taking part in the study. The researcher at this initial stage replied to each of them individually and asked some questions to check that they meet all selection criteria.

Once a participant was found to meet the criteria and had agreed to participate, the researcher shared a copy of the information sheet (Appendix C) and the consent form (Appendix D) to be read and signed before the interview session. Potential participants were repeatedly encouraged and reminded to share their concerns and ask questions about the study at any time.

Creswell (2007) and Patton (2002) suggest that the researcher should consider times suitable for participants to conduct the interview. Therefore, taking into consideration that all participants were students, several were married, and some had children, the priority of their studies and family needs were significantly accounted for when deciding on the appropriate time to conduct the interview. Accordingly, before the day of interview, the researcher communicated with each participant to remind her of the interview time and location and check if there was any need to reschedule the interview.

4.5 Description of participants

In this study, the participants were fourteen Saudi women students who ranged in age from 18 to 40 years. All participants were sponsored by their employers or by the KASP scholarships. A number of eleven participants were married, two had no children and nine were accompanied by their husbands and children. The remaining three participants were single and accompanied by their brothers. Most of the participants were undertaking postgraduate degrees as follows: seven at Master's level and three at Doctoral level.

Also, there were two participants doing a diploma, one doing a Bachelor's degree, and one was studying English in an academic course. Further descriptions about individual participants are provided in Appendix E. The following tables provide demographics information of participants.

Table 3. Participants' demographics (n= 14)

Number of Participant	Pseudo name	Group of age	Attended degree level	Subject	Length of residency	Marital status	Accompanying member
P1	Hasnaa	35-40	Master	Education	4 years	Married with a child	Husband & children
P2	Miram	25-34	Master	Psychology	less than 1 year	Married with children	Husband & children
P3	Lulu	25-34	Master	Early years education	4 years	Married	Husband
P4	Nora	25-34	Master	Business	3 years	Married with child	Husband & children
P5	Latifah	25-34	Diploma	Marketing	less than 1 year	Married with a child	Husband & children
P6	Wardah	25-34	Master	Chemistry	3 years	Married with children	Husband & children
P7	Jamilah	35-40	Doctorate	Chemistry	1 year	Single	Brother
P8	Nahla	25-34	Doctorate	English literature	1 year	Married with children	Husband & children
P9	Hadeel	25-34	Academic English course	-	1 year	Married with children	Husband & children
P10	Mona	25-34	Master	Project management	1 year	Married	Husband
P11	Farah	18-24	Diploma	Nursing	2 years	Single	Brother
P12	Zara	18-24	Bachelor	Nursing	3 years	Single	Alone
P13	Arwa	25-34	Doctorate	Business	2 years	Married	Alone
P14	Dalia	25-34	Master	Education	4 years	Married with children	Husband & children

4.6 Data collection

As the guiding research questions of the current thesis explore subjective topics, qualitative research methods were optimal for exploring participants' own views. Thus, data collection consisted of two steps: (1) answering a short demographic questionnaire and (2) taking part in one-on-one semi-structured interviews (see Appendix F). Short and closed-question responses to the demographic questionnaire helped in understanding the backgrounds that might affect participants' experiences. Development of the interview protocol was designed to avoid yes/no responses and to allow participants to openly share what they feel is important for them (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

To collect the qualitative data, a single one-on-one semi-structured interview was used. A semi-structured interview is developed based on a number of open-ended questions that have been pre-determined by the researcher, allowing participants to choose an open response (Creswell, 2020). Further, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to vary the words or the order of the questions during the interview session (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). In the current thesis, semi-structured interviews were used to: (1) identify the push-pull factors contributing to Saudi women students applying for overseas study in Australia, (2) explore their academic and socio-cultural experiences, and (3) investigate their supporting factors and acculturation strategies in their new environments.

Like most methods of data collection, one-on-one interviews are a time-consuming process for the researcher (Creswell, 2020). To clarify, the length of interviews ranged between 27- 77 minutes. Using this type of interview offers the researcher (1) rich and detailed data generated from small number of participants, (2) the flexibility of asking prompting questions as needed, (3) the chance to ask about sensitive topics and access specific groups, (4) the opportunity to take advantage of the various experiences of the participants and (5) the control over all collected data for generating links and producing evidenced based knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2020).

This study, therefore, was conducted using one-on-one interviews to gather information on the participants' perceptions of their transitional experience.

The first part of the interview included several demographic questions to develop a quantified representation of the participant's background including their age, degree level, attended university, subject and level of study, length of residency, marital status and whether they had children.

Then, the second part of the interview included open-ended questions categorized into three main sections each covering a specific topic of the experience about moving from Saudi Arabia to Australia. The questions of the first section asked about factors that made the participant decide to study abroad and in South Australia particularly, in addition to questions about the preparation for leaving and the post arrival period. The second theme's questions investigated the actual experience after arrival in South Australia, focusing on the academic and socio-cultural aspects. This section of the interview aimed to shed light on the differences or similarities across participants' home and host contexts where they might encounter challenges within academic and socio-cultural aspects. The third theme of the interviews inquired about the participants' supporting factors in overcoming their difficulties while studying and living in South Australia and evaluated how they feel about transitioning to South Australia so far.

All interviews were audio recorded, with data collected occurring from June to September 2019, and were conducted mainly in Arabic, the national language of Saudi Arabia and the first language for the researcher and participants. However, most participants used words and some sentences in English during interviews. This was expected given the nature of the research examining their experience being international students. Furthermore, this research took place in the state of South Australia in which more than 532 Saudi students were enrolled in various undergraduate and postgraduate courses and subjects (Department of

Education, 2019). Thus, it makes a suitable research ground for the exploration of Saudi women's experiences.

4.7 Data thematic analysis

As the current thesis investigated three concerns, thematic analysis fits better with the research questions. It was considered an appropriate approach for this study to identify common or unique responses across participants in relation to the shared experiences. The thematic analysis approach involves a precise process while dealing with data to gain meaningful and useful findings. Therefore, the six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed in the current study, as outlined in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
Familiarizing with data	Transcribing, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
Searching for themes	Gathering data and collating codes into potential themes.
Reviewing themes	Checking the themes in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine each theme and generate clear definitions and names for each theme.
Producing the report	Selection of vivid, compelling text extracts relating to the analysis to the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly report.

Adapted from (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

To be familiar with collected data, the researcher transcribed all interviews in the Arabic language (see Appendix G for an example). Having transcribed all interviews in Arabic, the researcher had a good opportunity to begin the data familiarisation process which is a key phase of analysis. Then, the files were translated from Arabic to English language (see Appendix H for an example) and the English version of interviews was checked against the Arabic ones for accuracy.

After checking the accuracy of English versions, the researcher read through all interviews a few times, and statements were highlighted to help the researcher familiarise herself with the content. Notes were made regarding any common codes or emerging ideas. While doing so, the researcher was aiming to categorize codes at the implicit or explicit level to generate meaningful themes of data later.

Then, each English transcript was read line-by-line to extract a meaningful text that highlighted codes to develop a theme. Once the initial coding of all of the transcripts was complete, a number of initial codes were combined due to their similarity with others. Then, emergent codes were grouped into appropriate initial themes that meaningfully contributed to each sub-research question. These initial themes were considered overarching, linking the data together, and related to answering the research questions.

After the construction of initial themes, all were reviewed and checked against pre-existing models whether they matched or added to the new ones. In order to check each theme, a number of statements and extracted codes should represent a theme across the entire data set that captures “something important in relation to the overall research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). Thus, all developed themes were considered based on the number of participants who reported similar responses that explicitly or implicitly indicated the same meaning.

Moreover, it is also recommended that “data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). This means that each theme should represent a meaningful idea, and, at the same time, all themes should be distinct. To ensure that, extracted statements and developed themes were reviewed at this stage and some were merged due to the similarity of the data. As a result, themes were redefined and named for presentation in the final phase.

4.8 Theoretical models used in the analysis

This study aimed to explore the transition of Saudi women students in South Australia. The transition is traced as a three-phases process that moves from (1) push-pull factors informing the decision to study abroad, (2) described academic and socio-cultural experiences and (3) investigate supporting factors and acculturation strategies used to overcome difficulties. Each of these phases was based on a theoretical model as shown in the Figure 7 below.

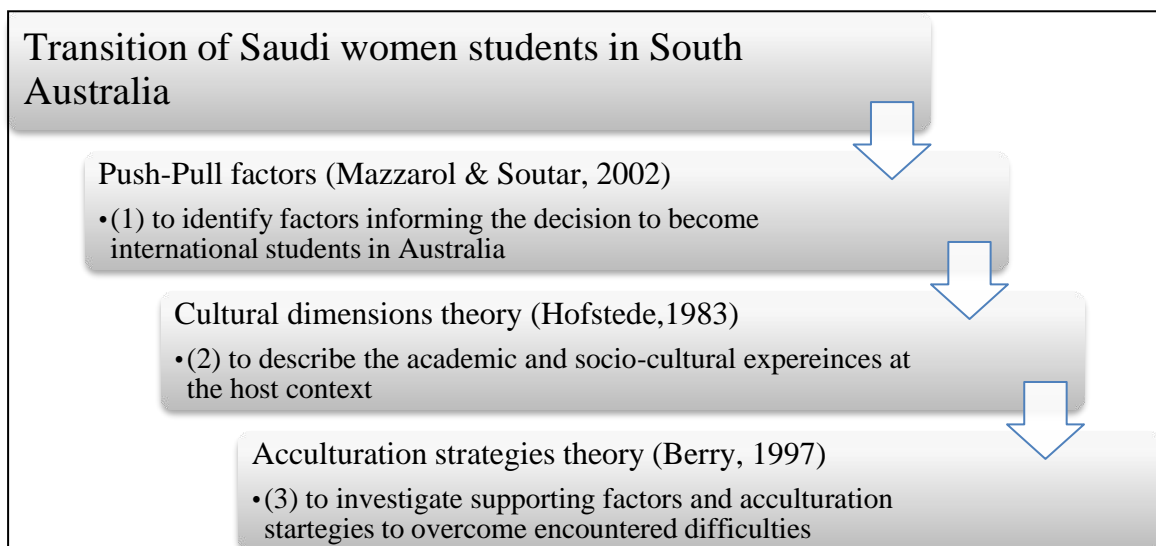


Figure 7. Demonstration the transition of Saudi women students in South Australia in three phases

Push-pull factors model

The push-pull factors model of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) is used in the current thesis to guide the analysis of first section of the interview protocol. Justifying the suitability of the model in relevance to the current study is supported by two arguments. First, the push-pull factors model is a valid one that is commonly referred to when examining students' influential factors to study and live overseas. Many scholars have applied the model to various groups of international students to investigate possible factors that might influence students' decisions to study in a foreign country. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) are among the first researchers who attempted to examine international students' selection to study in Australia through demonstrating the concept of push-pull factors. Since then, the push-pull model of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) became popular and was used dominantly in the majority of conducted research on international students' factors to understand their mobility in different host countries, (e.g. Bodycott, 2009; Li & Bray, 2007; Maringe & Carter, 2007). Second, with the available literature on factors influencing international students' decision making, there is limited research into Saudi international students. Thus, in the current study the Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) push-pull model helped identify the factors involved when Saudi women decided to leave their home country and study in Australia. The push-pull factors model may also identify various factors that motivated Saudi woman to undertake international education in Australian institutions.

Cultural dimensions theory

After presenting, discussing and describing the cultural dimensions on Saudi Arabian and Australian contexts (Chapter 2), it can be concluded that the cultures of Saudi Arabia (home culture) and Australia (host culture) are not the same, specifically in academic and socio-cultural aspects. Every cultural context represents the values and behaviours of its people, and having lower or higher scores on dimensions indicates the existing cultural differences to some

extent (Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede, 2017). This indicates that Saudi women moving from Saudi Arabia to Australia as international students may have to face many cross-cultural challenges. Thus, the current research examines the transition of Saudi women students in terms of encountering challenges due to the differences across academic and socio-cultural environments. Relevant data were identified based on several key questions on the cultural similarities or differences of both Saudi and Australian contexts. The use of such a theory to examine Saudi students' challenges across cultures is evident in previous research, for example, Alyami (2016) and Bar (2017) proving that cultural differences may create difficulties for Saudi students when temporarily studying and living in a country with a different culture.

Acculturation strategies theory

While cultural dimensions theory helped to identify challenges encountered by participants due to differences between home country and host country in terms of educational and socio-cultural settings, the examination of their supporting factors to overcome their noted difficulties is needed. The acculturation model (Berry, 1997, 2005) is used in the current thesis to identify Saudi women's acculturation strategies following the use of different sources to support them in their academic and socio-cultural experiences. Justifying the suitability of the acculturation theory to examine how Saudi women students managed studying and living while being in a different cultural context is based on the following arguments.

In the first instance, the acculturation model could be relevant to examining international students because they moved to another country and are expected to go through an acculturation process. Also, international students may experience the process of temporary acculturation with some difference to migrants. This is because most of the international students go back to their home country after graduation while migrants' acculturation lasts longer (Berry, 1997). Relating this to the current thesis, the participants of the current study are Saudi women who

moved to South Australia for academic purposes and have no intentions of migrating to Australia after graduation. Therefore, the scope of the current thesis is to examine the acculturation strategies of Saudi women students while temporarily studying and living in South Australia. The acculturation model is used to examine participants' choices about dealing with the two sets of cultural values while being in South Australia. The analysis will focus on the extent that participants maintained their home cultural values while engaging with the host cultural ones.

Secondly, Berry's model (1997) argued that acculturation styles are selected by considerations such as maintaining the home culture and engaging with the host culture. The acculturation in this perspective is seen as "a two-way process between international students and their host society" (Smith & Khawaja, 2011, p.709) which indicates the significant role of the host society impacting international students' acculturation. In addition, individual student's variables such as personality, motivations to move to new context, ethnicity, identity, duration of stay and whether they received support can impact the acculturation process to some extent (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). It is notable in Smith and Kawaja's view that individual factors and the host society may play a significant role in distinguishing the choice made by international students of following one or more of the acculturation styles. Thus, the specific cultural features of both contexts, Saudi Arabia and Australia, presumably highlight the different acculturation experiences that Saudi women may go through while hosted as international students abroad.

Based on the aforementioned arguments, the acculturation model (Berry, 1997) deemed appropriate for the current scope of this thesis examining Saudi women's acculturation experience because it allows the investigation of acculturation styles from an individual's perspective regarding original and host cultural values.

4.9 Researcher's position

The researcher's identity as a Saudi Arabian woman is likely to have an influence on the approach to the study and interpretations of the data. Most of the core values instilled in the Saudi Arabian culture, including a commitment to Islamic teachings such as gender segregation and hijab, approaching women and cultural topics with sensitivity, and respect for own views, are reflected in my selected area of research and research methods. My previous experiences prior to commencement of the Doctoral study have also influenced my position. Being an international student in two different countries before coming to Australia, I had diverse experiences in terms of factors affecting my choice of a country, challenges faced and the various coping strategies I had adopted and felt that the other Saudi women students may have had a similar or different perspective that is worth examining.

The witnessed increase in the number of Saudi students in Australia (Jameel et al., 2022) was a motivational factor for me to specifically explore and examine the case of Saudi women. Furthermore, due to the shortage of research studies on Saudi women students within the Australian context, I felt encouraged to shed light on their experiences and closely listen to their stories.

4.10 Conclusion of chapter

The choice of qualitative methodology and methods to answer the research questions has been discussed in this chapter. Ethical considerations, participants recruitment and description, data collection and analysis processes were also presented. Additionally, a justification on the use of theoretical frameworks in the study as well as the researcher's position were discussed. In the following Chapters 5, 6, 7, findings obtained from the data analysis will be presented and discussed. Chapter 5 will present findings and discussion on factors that informed the decision of Saudi women to become international students in Australia. Chapter

6 will present findings and discussion on the academic and socio-cultural experiences. Lastly, Chapter 7 will present the findings and discussion on supporting factors and acculturation strategies used by Saudi women students to overcome challenges or navigate differences in the academic and socio-cultural environments.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion: Push-Pull Factors

5.1 Introduction

This first chapter of findings presents and discusses the analysis of push-pull factors that informed the fourteen participants' decision to leave Saudi Arabia and chose to move to Australia as international students. The chapter addresses the first research question: What push-pull factors informed the decision of Saudi women students to leave their country and select to study in Australia?

The analysis of data reports two main themes: the first theme describes the participants' push factors which made them decide to leave their home country and consider overseas study, and the second theme identifies the participants' pull factors which influenced their selection of Australia as the host destination. Figure 8 below provides an overview of two themes as presented in this chapter.

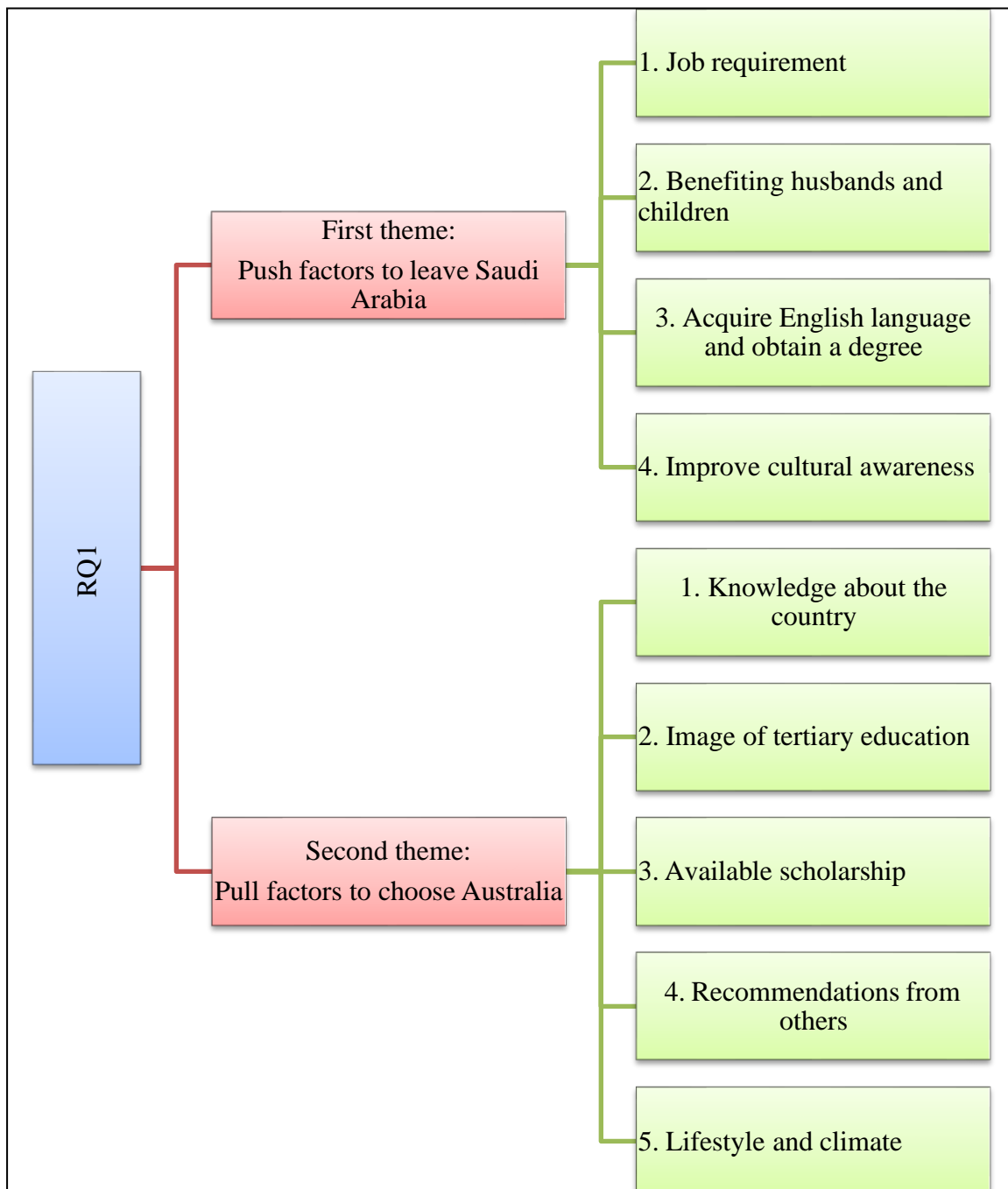


Figure 8. Themes answering RQ1

5.2 First theme: Push factors to leave Saudi Arabia

This theme presents the push factors of Saudi women students leaving their home country and deciding to study abroad, in Australia. For the Saudi women who participated in

the current study, the chance to become an international student studying and living on shore was perceived as a valuable experience. The current study discovered that (1) job requirements, (2) constraints to access local education, (3) benefiting husbands and children, (4) acquiring English language and obtaining a degree and (5) improved cultural awareness informed Saudi women's decision to leave their home country in pursuit of education abroad.

1. Job requirement

Seven participants who were employees in academic and medical fields referred to the encouragement from their employers to study overseas. The employers required their employees to obtain an overseas degree in order to secure their jobs, thus those participants decided to study abroad in line with their employers' policies.

Lulu (P3) mentioned that when she was offered an academic position as a teaching assistant, she had to sign the requirement of overseas study. Lulu said: "I got an academic job at a university that required employees to study abroad". Without hesitancy, she accepted her employer's decision to attend foreign education and signed the job's contract. Nahla (P8) shared a similar experience that she was required by her employer to pursue studies abroad. Nahla said: "I am an employee at university. So, the university encourages us to study abroad. I signed for the requirement to study abroad when I accepted the job". Repeatedly Dalia (P14) commented on her employer's requirement to pursue her study abroad saying: "Because I am a lecturer at a university, I should study abroad. It is one of the job's requirements".

Also, two other participants who were working in the medical field were required to study abroad. The two women were accepted in nursing positions; however, they had to pursue their degrees abroad before officially starting their career. Thus, their employer pushed them towards overseas education and stated that as a requirement in their job contract. Zara (P12) explained "The scholarship was obligatory for admission of a medical profession. The job was

offered to be granted after studying abroad. I found it as an opportunity to achieve one of my goals”. Similarly, Farah (P11) shared the same factor:

There was a position to become a nurse and I applied for it. However, the employer compulsory requires me to obtain an overseas degree before I can start my job. So, when I accepted the requirement, they gave me the choice of going to the US or Australia and I selected Australia.

In contrast to the employers who imposed overseas study on their employees, other employers showed flexibility allowing their employees to decide whether to study in Saudi Arabia or to travel abroad on a full scholarship. Two participants selected to join the overseas scholarship perceiving that as a better chance compared to the local one. Wardah (P6), preferred to continue her postgraduate studies abroad, although she has had the chance to study in Saudi Arabia. Wardah said: “I applied for a lecturer position in the university. One of the job's conditions was to complete postgraduate studies either in Saudi Arabia or overseas. I thought it was better to decide to study abroad”. Arwa (P13) also acknowledged her employer’s offer to study in Saudi Arabia or abroad and that she freely chose overseas aiming for better opportunities. She stated:

I am an employee at the university and pursuing postgraduate study is a requirement. It is not necessary to be abroad, but I felt if I studied abroad, the quality of the study would be better, and the output is higher.

The seven participants indicated that they had been granted a scholarship to study abroad which represented the government’s, as well as sponsoring employer’s, perception about the benefits of international education for their qualified sponsored students, and this significantly links to two aspects. First, the sponsoring employers apparently perceive overseas education as a chance to bring back advanced knowledge and strategies of teaching based on the assumption

that overseas universities would provide international education that meets the 21st century learning demands. This finding supported the research of Yakaboski et al. (2017) which discussed the value that Saudi Arabian employers place on international education. Evidencing this is that half of Saudi women participating in the current study were employees and accordingly there was either a requirement or support from their employers to study overseas. Additionally, considering this benefit from the employee's view, Saudi women participants, aimed to secure their jobs by agreeing to the requirement to study abroad, which aligned with Binsardi and Ekwulugo's (2003) claim that when international students consider core benefits of their overseas journey, they aim to buy the benefits that a degree can offer them in terms of employment. Therefore, the employment prospect perceiving a value of overseas education plays an important role motivating international students to study overseas (Cubillo et al., 2006) and leads to the personal motivation of international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Indeed, employed participants have clearly considered the core benefit of securing their job positions by attending their education abroad.

Moreover, this finding indicated that employers in Saudi Arabia strongly encourage their workers to improve their knowledge either by attending local or foreign education or, for some employers, more value was placed on an overseas education believing that it produces better outputs. Hence, they pushed their employees to take it. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that both some employers in Saudi Arabia as well as some of the Saudi women who participated in this study regard overseas education as of better quality. To explain, employers who sponsor their workers to study abroad have perceived the value of overseas degrees to advantage their organisations as high (Hilal et al., 2015; Taylor & Albasri, 2014) which has been discussed in section 2.3.2. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development in Saudi Arabia strongly encourages employees in public organisation such as universities and hospitals to develop their academic knowledge and practical experiences through obtaining higher degrees,

aiming to enhance the general advantageousness for all (Human Resources and Social Development, 2022). Some employers mandate the requirement study overseas for prospective employees upon their acceptance to the offered job. Thus, many qualified Saudi employees are funded to study abroad which is believed to attain high levels of academic and professional standards that would contribute to building up a qualified and professional workplaces and practices (Hall, 2013).

Second, some participants mentioned that they signed agreements upon starting their jobs entailing overseas study. This practice may reflect the impact of power distance in the Saudi employment context. Section 3.4.2 discussed how power distance is practiced within governmental places and public services, which usually authorize employers and leaders over their employees. Confirming Hofstede's (1983, 2011) view, this research found that participants always referred to their employer's encouragement as an external push factor to study abroad and secure their careers. Once Saudi women signed the agreement, it became a pressure for them to study abroad and to academically succeed in order to secure their position. This finding aligns with earlier findings arguing that Saudi students' influencing factors to study abroad could be perceived through the culturally specific features identified as a more collectivist society (Hilal et al., 2015; Yakaboski et al., 2017).

2. Benefiting husbands and children

Four participants who were the main recipients of the overseas scholarship considered expanding the benefits of overseas education to their husbands as well as their children. Miram (P2), Wardah (P6), Nahla (P8) and Dalia (P14) clearly stated that their decision to study abroad was to some extent informed by the desire to offer same opportunity of studying abroad to their husbands and children. Miram (P2) said: "I applied for a scholarship so that I and my husband can attend the postgraduate studies abroad". Likewise, Wardah (P6) mentioned that she decided to study abroad and share the beneficial offer with her husband. Wardah said: "The decision to

study abroad would allow my husband a chance to study too”. Also, Nahla (P8) and Dalia (P14) commented on the decision to study abroad to benefit their children as well. Nahla (P8) explained that the decision to study abroad was not an easy one, however, it seemed beneficial for herself and children after all. She said: “It was an opportunity for me and for my kids too to live and study in a country that speaks English”. Similarly, Dalia (P14) acknowledged the same factor of deciding to leave Saudi Arabia and study abroad, she stated: “It was an opportunity for my children to acquire English language”.

This push factor is unique in the literature of international students’ motivational factors to study abroad. It seemed that studying abroad was perceived as a valuable chance for the Saudi students and they wanted to share it with their family members, wife or husband and children, and reflected one of the Saudi cultural values and social expectations. Section 3.4.2 discussed the collectivist values in the Saudi Arabian context and how individuals may place the needs of their family together with their personal ones (AlMunajjed, 1997). This factor in the findings confirms this concept, whereby two participants explicitly identified their husbands’ academic benefits as they were offered a chance to study overseas. To make the benefit achievable for their husbands, the three women participants decided to apply for the scholarship aiming to gain an international degree for themselves and meanwhile benefitting their partners too. So, having a chance study overseas does not mean that she is going to leave them behind. For these women, being offered a scholarship to study overseas meant a valuable qualification and therefore, they anticipated that their husbands and children would be able to achieve the same advantage.

3. Acquire English language and obtain a degree

Two top goals from studying abroad that participants aimed to achieve were: acquire the English language and obtain a degree. Some Saudi women expressed that their intention for enrolling in an overseas scholarship program was to learn English in a native English-speaking

country, among other available destinations, and obtain a degree. Farah (P11) expressed that she enrolled in the overseas scholarship because she liked to challenge herself learning English in a different context to her home country. Farah shared: “I am an ambitious person. I like to learn English and studying in a different country”. Sharing the same goal also, Mona (P10) decided to leave Saudi Arabia, aiming to develop her English language. Similarly, Jamilah (P7) identified that she significantly relies on speaking English in her classes while teaching. Thus, it was important for her to improve the language: “I want to learn English because in the college where I work teaching is in English. I need to be excellent in my second language”.

Beside the significance of learning English, Saudi women who participated in this research wanted to obtain a degree at different levels. Speaking of personal motive, Wardah (P6) noted: “I had an ambition to complete higher studies overseas”. Likewise, Mona (P10) commented that her goals from overseas study were to learn English and gain the Master’s degree. She stated: “It had always been on mind to study English abroad and obtain the master. Therefore, I enrolled in the scholarship program”. Lulu (P3) similarly had the aspiration to attend education overseas because she had been taught by someone who studied abroad and shared their great experience. Lulu said: “I always loved listening to her stories, and wish to experience living in a different country and seeking a higher degree”.

In this factor, six participants perceived that studying abroad would help them to acquire better English language and to obtain a degree from an overseas country. These participants expected that studying overseas would offer an invaluable chance to become proficient in English, reinforcing the value of learning English as a global language (Elyas, 2008), in addition to gaining an international degree. This finding accords with the argument of scholars who suggested that non-English international students are motivated to study abroad with great expectations of improving their English language skills (Choi & Nieminen, 2013; Counsell, 2011). According to the semi-structured interviews in this study, nine of the participants (P1,

P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, P10, P14) needed to enroll in English language courses prior to starting their degrees and the remaining five (P5, P8, P11, P12, P13) started directly as they proved they had met the required level of English. This obviously highlighted that the fourteen Saudi women participants had a clear goal of deciding on overseas study to acquire or improve their English skills. In addition, the participants in this study expected to gain better English language skills and believed that an international degree innately proved a high level of competency in the English language. Additionally, they believed that such competencies would be highly needed when they returned and worked in their home country where English is spoken as a foreign language. Therefore, the desire to learn the English language found to push Saudi women to make the decision of studying abroad.

4. Improve cultural awareness

Apart from the academic qualifications to be gained while studying overseas, six of the participants in the current study expressed their aim to improve their knowledge and awareness of other cultures. Miram (P2) expressed her opinion that studying abroad offered a great chance to get to learn of others, which would not be available if studying in Saudi Arabia. She stated: “The overseas study will help to discover and learn many social and cultural matters and to live a different experience, which is not the case if I study in Saudi Arabia”. Also, Hadeel (P9) agreed that living and studying abroad provides a unique experience that cannot be lived if they studied locally in Saudi Arabia. Hadeel (P9) said: “It is a chance to live and discover a different lifestyle. Experience of a different life and a diverse world could not happen if we studied in Saudi Arabia”. Similarly, Wardah (P6) expressed that according to the positive experiences of her friends who lived in a different country, she considered the overseas study as an opportunity. She informed: “I wanted to learn about a different culture and experience of a different life because we had friends who studied abroad, and their positive experience

encouraged me”. Lulu (P3) also described how she became interested to experience living in a different culture a long time before she applied for the scholarship. Lulu stated:

During the bachelor’s degree there was one of the doctors who taught me. She used to talk about some situations, experiences that she benefited from during her studies and living in a different country for a long time during the scholarship....so I was inspired to discover other cultures and live in a different context.

Similarly, Arwa (P13) considered living abroad while studying as one way to learn many things of other cultures and people. She said: “I like to learn about different cultures and people of other countries”. Zara (P12) uniquely mentioned another aspect of learning about another culture while living overseas. She was inspired to study abroad and to establish a voluntary group of different people to help refugees and who are in need. She said: “The overseas study experience was an opportunity to share my ambition with others and achieve one of my goals. Establishing a volunteering group under my supervision was one of my objectives from the scholarship program”. This participant thought of how to pay back to the host society which is something beyond her academic push factor. So, an advantage of being abroad is to develop and share good deeds with those in need. This woman, Zara (P12), reflected a great example of Weerakkody and Jerez’s (2018) argument that international students help by enhancing the cultural diversity within the host country. In their paper, they showed the benefit for the host nation brought by international students being present in shared aspects from diverse religions and values which form a multicultural environment of multiple experiences derived from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds of international students (Weerakkody & Jerez, 2018). Zara (P12) as a Muslim woman had the intention to share some Islamic values and traditional aspects, planning to develop voluntarily humanitarian groups while attending her education abroad.

The current study confirms the findings of previous research reporting that improving cultural knowledge is a push factor influencing the decision of international students. Several scholars argued that the experience of living and studying abroad is an important factor that motivates students to select overseas universities (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Li & Bray, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). More specifically, researchers who examined international students in different countries like Australia (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), the UK (Wu, 2014) and Canada (Wintre et al., 2015) found that one of the students' primary push factors was to gain a better understanding of Western culture. The scholars all discussed the notion that international students are motivated to attend education overseas to enjoy the international experience in a Westernised culture. Indeed, there is no doubt that the cultural exchange which takes place while international students live in a new country and interact with people of various backgrounds creates a new experience which could motivate one to apply for overseas education.

In a relative aspect to the current study, Brutt-Griffler et al. (2020) reported that Saudi international students who enrolled in the US intended to exchange cultural values and engage with the American cultures. Equally, Saudi women participating in the current study expected their overseas experience to develop their awareness through cultural interaction with members of the host culture. Participants mentioned their overseas experience was a valuable one that cannot be lived if they had studied locally. Saudi women were aware that by deciding to study abroad, the chance of meeting other people, exchanging ideas, and learning other traditions would be great. This perceived positive aspect reflects one goal of the Saudi scholarship programs. According to Hilal et al. (2015), the Saudi overseas scholarships allow Saudi students to share their Saudi culture and meanwhile interact with and live in the Western culture. The sharing and exchanging of cultural understandings would help enhance the

economic and social relations between the government of Saudi Arabia and the host countries of Saudi students.

5.2.1 Summary of push factors to leave Saudi Arabia

The section above provided analysis and discussion on the push factors that influenced the decision of Saudi women to leave their home country and pursue their education overseas. The identified four push factors are: (1) job requirement, (2) benefiting husbands and children, (3) acquiring the English language and obtaining a degree and (4) improve cultural awareness. Being required by the employer to pursue higher education overseas presented the strongest external and influential push factor, whereas the remaining factors seemed to associate with the intrinsic motivational goals which informed the decision to study abroad.

5.3 Second theme: Pull factors to choose Australia

The choices of host destination and university are one of the most significant decisions that international students make. In the following section, a number of influential pull factors are presented as identified by Saudi women who selected Australia as their host destination.

1. Knowledge about the country

This factor refers to the participants' gained knowledge or personal opinions about Australia in ways that make them assured of their choice. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) argued that gaining knowledge about the host country has an impact on international students' choices. The participants of the current study stated that their knowledge about the country was developed based on its safety and multicultural environments accepting and welcoming Arab and Muslim groups.

Safety

Participants concerned with the level of safety in Australia read to learn whether international students in Australia have experienced negative situations compared to other

countries. Because most participants, nine out of the fourteen, were crossing the borders for the first time, it is understandable that they needed to be assured of safety in the prospective country. The following two quotes explain Saudi women's expectations about racism in Australia compared to the US, which was another option for them. Farah (P11) shared her thoughts on selecting Australia among other destinations: "Racism is less compared to other countries... Of course, the comparison was between America and Australia, I had to choose between them, and I found that Australia suits me". Also, Miram (P2) stated: "I had a choice between America and Australia, but I decided to choose Australia because I was looking for a country that welcomes everyone and is not racist; I found that applies to Australia more than America". Dalia (P14) was concerned about her safety because she wanted to continue wearing her cultural dress code, abaya and niqab. She said:

I read to know about different countries before I made my decision on selecting Australia. I was particularly concerned about the issue regarding my safety and of public acceptance because I would wear the abaya and niqab. I read about Australia and found it to be safe for Muslim women and for international students.

Furthermore, Jamilah (P7) came with her younger brother and was concerned about their safety as foreigners in Australia. Thus, she read about the experience of international students in Australia before making the decision about it. Jamilah said: "I used to read the students' experiences and I found that Australia has no incidents involving international students, which encouraged my choice". Also, Mona (P10) stated that she could select other countries, however, Australia's level of safety influenced her choice. Mona said: "Although I could have chosen America, Canada, or the UK, I found out that Australia is the safest". Nevertheless, Hadeel (P9) affirmed the participants' reasons for selecting Australia according to the level of international students' safety compared to other destinations. Hadeel stated: "The

first thing my husband and I were looking for was Australia's safety. It is more secure than in America and other countries like Britain and Canada". Likewise, Latifah (P5) explained that she was terrified after the tragic attack against Muslims in New Zealand (Sulaiman-Hill et al., 2021) which made her especially careful while looking for a place to live. After deciding to move to Australia, Latifah said: "Of course I was eager to learn about the level of safety".

Based on the statistics of Saudi international students in the academic year 2019, when data for this research was collected, the number of Saudi students in Australia was more than 6000 (Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2019), whereas the number in the US was 5351, in the UK was 2454 and in Canada was 1122 students (Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia, 2018). Australia was found to attract the Saudi women students who participated in the current research among other respected destinations as they perceived it as a safe environment for them as international students. To further clarify, some participants compared racial incidents towards international students. Following the news in the media, there were number of unfortunate and aggressive incidents against Saudi students which ended in death. One such incident in the UK was of a Saudi woman student who passed away after suffering stab wounds and investigators claimed that the hijab might have made her a visible target for haters (Culzac, 2014). In contrast, there was nothing reported of such incidents of Saudi students in Australia. Based on the participants' interviews, the tragic stories involving Saudi students encouraged them to select Australia, especially the Saudi women who would be easily identified by their dressing style wearing hijab, abaya and niqab. Accordingly, the safety of the Australian environment influenced the choice of the current study's participants to select it over other countries.

Multiculturalism

Taking into consideration that international students would spend quite a long time in the host country, it seemed important for them to consider the society of the potential host

country and its openness for individuals from different backgrounds, faiths and ethnicities (Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007). In the current study, five participants identified the multicultural society in Australia as a significant positive aspect when they decided to select it as the host country. Linking this with the previously mentioned statement that not all participants have been overseas before coming to Australia, it was imperative for Saudi women to ensure that Australia was a good choice for them. Australia's multiculturalism in this regard is defined as the broader societal acceptance of the cultural rights of minority groups within mainstream society, including others who originated from various backgrounds and religious values (Mansouri, 2015). This definition depicts what Saudi women as international minority students aimed to experience while living in Australia. Jamilah (P7) offered her view and reflected the views of other participants:

As for choosing the country, many countries were available, but I used to read on the internet about the most receptive country to other cultures. I noticed that Australia is the best for me. It meets my expectation presenting a country that accepts others and their culture and their differences.

Likewise, Arwa (P13) was assured by her friends of the kindness of people in Australia. She said: "My friends have always mentioned that the people in Australia accept and welcome students of other backgrounds and that they are friendly". Also, Lulu (P3) agreed with the two previous quotes and stated that her choice of South Australia was based on her reading about the state. Lulu (P3) said: "I was reading about South Australia and found the majority of the people are okay with students from other nationalities".

Seemingly, the attitudes of Australians, as well as other residents, towards international students was a strong pull factor that influenced Saudi women students' choice of Australia. The way Australia is perceived by Saudi women confirmed the discussion on multiculturalism

aspects of Australia and its openness to respect others' values and cultures was raised (Elias et al., 2021).

Presence of Arab and Muslim groups

It is interesting to report that not only safety and multicultural aspects have influenced the choice of Saudi women to select Australia, but the presence of Arab and Muslim migrants did too. Lulu (P3) felt attracted to select South Australia by knowing that many Arab and Muslim groups live there. She commented: "Another reason to select studying in South Australia is the presence of Muslim and Arabs so religious practices and cultural customs can be shared without feeling different". Indeed, the presence of Arab and Muslim people means availability of community resources meeting Arab and Muslim students' needs. This was Nora's (P4) indication while making her decision prior arriving in South Australia. Nora explained: "Presence of Arab and Muslim communities will offer the places for halal food, groceries, and religious events. These things would help me fit in the new environment".

Thus, the Arab and Muslim's presence was a pull factor that was found to influence the choice of Saudi women students to select Australia. In this regard, it is worth mentioning Australia is considered a religiously and culturally diverse nation (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012). In detail, the 2016 census data highlights that Islam is the second practiced religion and Arabic is the third most commonly spoken language in Australia (Australian Bureau Statistics, 2017). Thereafter, the presence of Arab and Muslim groups would be clearly noticed in Australian societies, which had influenced some participants of the current study to feel comfortable living with similar groups and sharing similar values.

Participants were thus found to be pulled to choose Australia because they perceived it as safer and a multicultural destination when compared to other countries like the US or the UK. In this regard, Mansouri and Modood (2021) discussed that Australia, compared to other

countries such as the US and the UK, had lower levels of anti-Arab sentiments following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This may explain why participants, who were Saudi Arabian and Muslim women, selected to study in Australia over other destinations. It seemed that participants wanted to ensure their own safety and increase their chance of joining the cohort of international students with less discrimination because they can be easily identified by their dressing style or spoken language. Also, this finding was confirmed by Binsardi and Ekwulugo's (2003) research which suggested the cultural inquiry of the new destination as a factor that defines a student's identity. In one specific example, one participant expressed her intention to wear the hijab which would make her religious identity very clear. So, her choice of Australia was linked to the intention to practice her religion while attending the university and living with others in the society. As a result, participants were pulled to choose studying in Australia based on its perceived positive, safe and welcoming society which corresponds to previous research suggesting that personal safety is an important factor to be considered when international students decide on a study destination (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

2. Image of tertiary education

This factor explains the image of tertiary education in Australia. Australia was selected by participants of the present research based on its language of instruction, quality of education, availability of subject and program and university admissions.

Language of instruction

Two of the participants identified their intention to improve their proficiency in the English language as one of the reasons they decided to apply to study in Australia. Accordingly, their knowledge about Australia as one of the English-speaking countries guided their choice

of Australia as their destination. Thereafter, the choice of Australia was mostly linked to the aim of learning English in a native English-speaking country. Jamilah (P7) stated:

I was looking for a country, which speaks English as a mother tongue, and it was Australia. I had a chance to choose Japan before Australia, but I decided to choose Australia since they speak English as a first language while it is considered a second language in Japan.

Similarly, Mona (P10) responded: “I chose Australia because it is one of the countries that speaks English as the main language”.

Quality of education

Another relative goal mentioned by Saudi women who participated in the current study was to attain their degree from an overseas country, so they were interested in studying at an Australian university, perceiving its quality of education to be a result of the different academic system. Thereafter, the perceived level of Australian tertiary education influenced Saudi women’s choices. Jamilah (P7) stated: “I decided to study in Australia because I think that teaching and using technology in universities will be better and I care about it because it is significantly related to my major”. Likewise, Arwa (P13), studying at doctoral level, expressed that her decision to study in Australia was driven by the expectation that it would provide her with unique knowledge compared to others who attended different countries or studied locally. Arwa (P13) said:

Many of my colleagues are studying in America and I believe that the outputs might be similar if I choose the same destination. As a result, I selected Australia for my PhD study and was lucky to get the admission. My studies in Australia in a multidisciplinary field will shape my knowledge differently from others.

Another participant described that she has studied English courses previously in Canada and, in the second opportunity to study abroad, she aimed to experience studying in another country. Lulu (P3) who was studying a Master's degree said:

In the past I have studied English language courses in Canada. This time when I had the opportunity to study in another country, I selected Australia aiming to experience studying my Master's course in a different system. I was attracted by the quality and the universities' ranking levels.

Likewise, Mona (P10) mentioned that the different styles of learning influenced her decision to select studying in Australia, besides the university's academic level. Mona said: "I only cared about the university's quality. I like to have a different studying experience than what I had previously in Saudi Arabia".

Availability of subject and university admissions

For two participants, the choice of Australia was based on the availability of the subject they wanted to study and the admission to their desired university. At Master's level, Mariam (P2) considered the course availability when deciding to move from Canada. She stated: "I studied only English language courses in Canada, and when I had to move to another country, I was looking for a university that has a specific field of psychology". Similarly, considering the speciality of the subject pulled another participant to study in Australia among other countries. Wardah (P6) expressed: "I selected Australia based on the availability of my specific major in many universities".

Moreover, the admission to a desired university was a pull factor that influenced the choice of two other participants. They were pulled to a university based on its special pathway program where they can attend English academic courses and then start their Master's course. Lulu (P3) said: "The university admission was easy to secure in Australia because some

language centres offered a pathway program designed for students who do not speak English and by completing the program, they can start their postgraduate degree”. Similarly, Dalia (P14) mentioned that: “Studying the language and getting the university admission through English pathway programs seemed more encouraging in Australia than other countries”. Although participants’ replies in many cases demonstrated their desire to learn English and obtain the degree from Australia, a number of language barriers faced Saudi women in Australian education. These challenges will be presented and discussed in the next chapter.

This factor under current discussion concerns the attributes of tertiary education in Australia including language of instruction, the quality of education and availability of subjects as well as the university admission which positively influenced participants to choose Australia as a host destination. Participants reported they were reading to gain knowledge about their selected Australian university, their program structure and available facilities. This finding echoed the literature on Saudi scholarships and the recipients’ intentions to join high quality education services that would enhance the nation’s academic, economic and cultural levels (Alsulami, 2016; Hilal et al., 2015; Yakaboski et al., 2017). Hence, when Saudi students graduated from an overseas university, they would be able to offer greater contributions to their jobs and society.

In addition, the participants mentioned that they perceived the higher quality of education in Australia with reference to the use of technology as one of the tools they lack in Saudi education. So, involvement and the use of technology in Australian education attracted international students (Hunter, 2009 as cited in Mayan, 2019). Yet, participants reflected very little knowledge about the Australian education system or its teaching and learning environments, which caused some participants to face several challenges relating to teaching and learning approaches. The first theme in next chapter will further elaborate on the

participants' academic experiences, comparing some elements of education in Saudi Arabia and Australia.

In general, many participants viewed the opportunity to study in Australia as a valuable opportunity to learn English in an English-speaking country and to gain an international degree from a well-known advanced education system. This finding affirms the literature that argued the quality of education in Australia is an attracting factor to non-English speakers, including Saudi students who aim to improve their English language and gain a degree from a reputable country (Alsulami, 2016; Binsahl et al., 2019; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Shanka et al., 2006).

3. Available scholarship

Three participants, Nora (P4), Latifah (P5) and Hadeel (P9), initially came to support their husbands who were the main recipients of the scholarship. After arrival, the three women were eligible to benefit from their husbands' scholarship and could be funded to study. Accordingly, two women, Nora (P4) and Latifah (P5), decided to take that opportunity and joined the university whereas Hadeel (P9) decided to study English language courses. Nora (P4) explained how she decided to study after arrival in South Australia:

I am here with my husband who was awarded the scholarship to study in Australia from his employer. It was an opportunity to study on a full scholarship, whether at Saudi universities or elsewhere and my husband chose to study abroad. At first, we went to Britain and my husband studied there for seven months then he requested a move to Australia, and by then I decided to apply for the scholarship as well.

Although Nora and her husband went to the UK first and settled there for about seven months, she did not study. Yet, Nora was able to make her decision to study after they moved to Australia and ensured that her husband has gone well with his own study. Similarly, Latifah (P5) came to Australia with her husband. She explained that initially they went to Canada

before moving to Australia. At all times, Latifah was supporting her husband while he was studying and did not enrol in any program. However, when they moved to Australia, she decided to use the available scholarship and join a university to study a diploma degree. Latifah (P5) commented: “My husband is the main recipient of the scholarship, and I came here with him. The first time we were in Canada and this time we came to Australia. So, I decided to take advantage of the opportunity and study”. Also, Hadeel (P9) came to support her husband then made the decision to apply for the scholarship. She explained:

The decision to study abroad was a personal choice. My husband is an employee. So, when he got the opportunity to complete graduate studies in Saudi Arabia or overseas, he chose to go abroad. After arrival, I decided to attend the language centre to learn English.

This factor describes the decision process of three participants who came initially to support their husbands and eventually decided to study. It is an interesting pull factor that encouraged three Saudi women to study in Australia with no previous intention to do so. Once those women arrived in Australia, they were eligible to benefit from the same scholarship fund to study. This factor is in line with the available literature around international students’ factors to study abroad. Scholars agreed that international students may be pulled to study overseas by the availability of a granted scholarship (Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016; Mazzarol et al., 1996; McMahon, 1992). When participants became aware of their option to study equally with their husbands, they decided to benefit from this chance. All three women were able to study for the same duration as their husbands. Accordingly, Latifah (P5) studied a diploma, Nora (P4) studied a Master’s degree and Hadeel (P9) attended English language courses. This finding complies with a finding from a previous study whereby the participants of their study reported the same factor initially coming to support their husbands then becoming students in Australian universities themselves (Binsahl et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the previously noted push factor that is some participants wanted to benefit their husbands and children when deciding to study abroad implies a distinctive factor concerning the Saudi student cohort in Australia. Specifically, the decision of those participants to study in Australia reflected a partner's choice to advantage the other partner. Whether this was by women who decided to study abroad offering their husbands a chance to study also, or by men who brought their wives along making them eligible for their own funded studies. Worth noting, these factors have been rarely reported in the literature (Binsahl et al., 2019) and are interlinked with the cultural context of Saudi Arabia. If a wife was awarded the overseas scholarship, a husband's support is key to proceeding in the decision due to the scholarship obligation that a female should be accompanied by a mahram, who is, in the in case of married woman, the husband. In the present study, three married participants (P2, P6, and P14) decided to study abroad, wanting their husbands to study too. The three participants opened doors of opportunity for their husbands who were willing to accompany their wives while studying abroad. In parallel, three other participants (P4, P5, and P9) stated that they had not intended to study abroad, and they came to support their husbands initially, but after arrival the women decided to apply for the scholarship and were able to study too. These cultural complexities resulted in offering Saudi students a better chance by accompanying their partners and getting the opportunity to study in Australia.

4. Recommendations from others

Eight participants noted that the choice of Australia, or specifically South Australia, was based on recommendation from others, including family members and friends. When international students decide to leave their home country, they usually consult family or friends who are studying abroad or have studied previously in one of the potential host countries (Hall, 2013; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Phang, 2013). More than half the participants of the current

research were found to be influenced in their choice to select Australia by one of their family or friends.

In detail, three participants were influenced by the experience of a family member studying in Australia. Nora (P4) stated: “When my husband thought of moving from the UK, the choice was between America and Australia. At the time my brother was studying in Australia, and I was inspired by his great experience and selected it”. Likewise, Nahla (P8) did not think of another country other than the one where her brother was studying. Nahla stated: “Actually, I did not think of any country other than Australia because my brother was studying there”. Similarly, Wardah (P6) noted that she decided to study in Australia according to her husband’s previous experience. Warda (P6) said: “My husband has studied in Australia previously. When I applied for the scholarship, I found Australia is a suitable country”.

Additionally, friends’ recommendations also were significant in influencing the choice of five Saudi women to select Australia. Hasnaa (P1) stated: “I had been reading and looking for many universities, and then I got some admissions in several countries. So, I consulted some friends, and they told me Australia is better”. Also, the experience of friends who studied in Australia influenced the choice of another participant. Lulu (P3) stated that after deciding to come to Australia, she started to read about South Australia especially because her friend was there. Lulu explained: “I selected South Australia because one of my colleagues studied there and her experience was great”. Repeatedly, Jamilah (P7) consulted her friend before proceeding in her decision to study in Australia. Jamilah said: “I know a friend who got a Master's degree from Australia. She encouraged me to choose Australia”. Likewise, Farah (P11) said: “I asked some friends who started studying before me and I was influenced by their experiences especially as they were students in the same university and major”.

This factor supports the earlier studies in which scholars suggested that families and friends have a great influence on the students’ decision-making processes to select a destination

to study abroad (Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2004). The current study confirms this point of view, proving that participants explicitly described their situation in consulting a family member or friend who were, or had been, in Australia when selecting it as a host country. The views on Australia as a suitable country for international students were perceived as positive and convinced participants to proceed in their decision to select it over other destinations.

Moreover, the way that Saudi women consulted their families or friends typically reflects their cultural identity in which people value being with others who share the same values and understand their needs (Hofstede, 2011). This also confirms the findings of Alsulami's (2016) study arguing that recommendation of others was a factor that influenced Saudi students to study in Australia over other countries. Indeed, the Saudi women participants consulted and asked the advice of a family member, friends and colleagues in selecting Australia as the study destination. Participants showed respect for others' advice, similar to the findings of previous studies (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2004) where international students, especially of Asian background, exhibited the same attitudes. A possible explanation for such attitudes can be linked to the strong cultural feature which identified the participants, Saudi women, as coming from a collectivist background in which strong relations exist among people (Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede, 2017).

5. Lifestyle and climate

For eight participants, the choice of their specific country or state where they will study and live was linked to their reading on the country's lifestyle and climate. Speaking of the participants choices to select Australia, its idyllic lifestyle, unique landscape, nature and moderate climate (not being too hot or too cold) all contributed as pull factors. To illustrate, Arwa (P13) appreciated her choice of the country and the state as well. Arwa highlighted Australia and its features as the top of the list of best countries to live and stated: "Living in

Australia is great especially that South Australia is one of the top cities to live in". Another woman favourably commented on the uniqueness of South Australia among other Australian states. Nora (P4) stated: "Thankfully, I am satisfied that I chose Australia, and especially South Australia. The nature and the atmosphere are better for me than other cities". Similarly, Hadeel (P9) shared the same opinion: "My husband and I chose South Australia because it is a small state and suits our situation that we are busy studying...this state has everything I need... It is very suitable for families". In addition, the two participants who had lived in Canada benefited from their experience when came to Australia. Latifah (P5) said: "In Canada, we lived in a large state. However, we live in South Australia now. The experience of living for a while in Canada helped me a lot to get facilities when arrived in Australia". Also, Miram (P2) appreciated her previous experience of studying in Canada in the way she found lifestyle is similar in Australia. Miram said: "I had felt great, and it was not new to me due to my previous experience of travelling to Canada... many things like lifestyle and customs are similar between Canada and Australia".

Climate

Some participants clearly stated their choice of Australia was affected to some extent by the climate. Warda (P6) considered the health of her child, thus she did not select Canada because of its extreme cold weather. She stated that: "I wanted to choose Canada... but the cold weather was not suitable for my child". In contrast, Farah (P11) thought of the climate from a spiritual context considering the time she would be fasting as an Islamic religious practice. Farah said: "Fasting here is only a few hours in winter so that it will be much more comfortable than other countries during the study".

According to the participants' responses, this factor described how lifestyle and climate aspects identified to pull them to choose Australia generally, or South Australia specifically. Participants reported they were reading to gain insight into the country's lifestyle, climate,

activities, living arrangements and needs before arrival. Although, that information seemed simple, superficial and general, it offered the participants some understanding and expectations of the living situations, indicating a preference for a living style in the host country. This finding relates to previously conducted research arguing that the level of the country's living arrangements, nature, climate and other features, are key factors in the destination choice for international students (Bodycott, 2009; Cubillo et al., 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Typically, lifestyle and climate features were found to inform the decision of Saudi women to study in Australia. As the context of this study refers to Australia, and particularly South Australia, both were perceived as a distinctly good place amongst other study destinations due to the modern lifestyle, wide-open nature and stable climate conditions. Therefore, the lifestyle and weather conditions appeared to be one of several pull factors influencing Saudi women participants to choose Australia.

5.3.1 Summary of pull factors to choose Australia

This second theme reported and discussed the pull factors that informed the decision of Saudi women to choose Australia as the host destination. Pull factors referred to: (1) knowledge about the country presenting a safe, multicultural and welcoming environment for Arab and Muslim groups, (2) an image of tertiary education based on the quality of education and language of instruction, availability of subjects and university admission, (3) available scholarships, (4) recommendation from others and (5) lifestyle and climate. Some of these factors are linked to the push factors that initially informed the decision to overseas study.

5.4 Conclusion of chapter

This chapter responds to the first research question. It explores Saudi women students' push-pull factors deciding to leave Saudi Arabia and select to study in Australia. The analysis of data for this research question was done following the push-pull model of international student decision-making (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) and the available literature which

examined the same concept of factors influencing the choice of international students in various countries. The literature around the push-pull model offered substantial knowledge of the theoretical framework and informed some of the interview questions asked of participants. Accordingly, the analysis of data identified four push factors referring to reasons that encouraged Saudi women students to leave their home country. In addition, the identified pull factors identified five elements that attracted Saudi women students to Australia as a host country.

In summary, the findings from this study concerning RQ1 discovered significant factors that informed Saudi women's decisions to become international students in Australia. The following points highlight some of the factors that were found to be exclusive to the context of Saudi women students.

Some participants expressed that they had decided to study abroad aiming to benefit their husbands as well, and similarly three participants noted they initially came to support their husbands then decided to avail themselves of the chance to study as well in Australia. These distinctive factors add to the push-pull current literature concerning the Saudi women context in Australia. The decision of those participants to study in Australia reflects a partner's intention to advantage the other partner. Some of the women decided to study abroad to offer their husbands a chance to study too, others decided to come and support their husbands, which made them eligible to be funded in their studies equally. Worth noting, these factors have been rarely reported in the literature (Binsahl et al., 2019) and are interlinked with the cultural context of Saudi Arabia.

Unlike other studies on the financial concerns of international students while attending their studies overseas (e.g. Gatfield & Chen, 2006; Shanka et al., 2006; Yang, 2007), participants were not very sensitive to the associated issues concerning the cost of studying abroad, mostly because they all were financially funded by the scholarship to cover the study

tuition, health insurance or any other fees for themselves and their accompanying partners and children.

In contrast to the literature on international students' intention to emigrate to Australia after study (Yang, 2007), the Saudi women participants of the current study seemed clear on their decisions and expected goals to undertake their studies in Australia with no intention of migration after graduation. However, reasons for not migrating were beyond the aims of the current study, and further research would be needed to investigate this aspect.

To sum up, the push-pull factors presented, interpreted and discussed above intended to add to the current knowledge regarding international students' decision-making in Australia, specifically the cohort of Saudi women students representing a different group that have not been examined enough in the literature. After all, interviewing Saudi women who were already in Australia studying at different levels and in different stages, some in the beginning, most on the middle and a few at the end, reflect a sense of proudness that participants were able to proceed with their decisions. Further, there was a sense of satisfaction evidenced in the participants' replies during the interview concerning their decisions to leave Saudi Arabia and become international students in Australia. Saudi women participants were grateful that they were awarded the overseas scholarship. There is no doubt that deciding to study and live abroad promises a unique experience, yet it is expected to result in various situations and challenges from unfamiliar cases and crossing different cultures. Thus, the next chapter will present and discuss the findings on academic and socio-cultural experiences of Saudi women who settled in South Australia as international students.

Chapter 6: Findings and discussion: Academic and Socio-cultural Experiences

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented and discussed the findings on push-pull factors that influenced the choice of 14 participants to leave Saudi Arabia and travel to South Australia as international students. This chapter focuses on the analysis of the data on the academic and socio-cultural experiences and addresses the second research question: How did Saudi women describe the academic and socio-cultural transition during their studying and living experience in South Australia?

The analysis reports two main themes that emerged: the first theme describes the participants' academic experience, and perceived initial challenges due to differences between educational contexts of home and host countries. The second theme reports the socio-cultural experience of participants, starting with their preparation before, upon and after arrival in South Australia. In addition, exploration is carried out showing how Saudi women students interacted and were involved with various aspects in the host country. Figure 9 below demonstrates the structure of main themes and sub-themes as presented through this chapter.

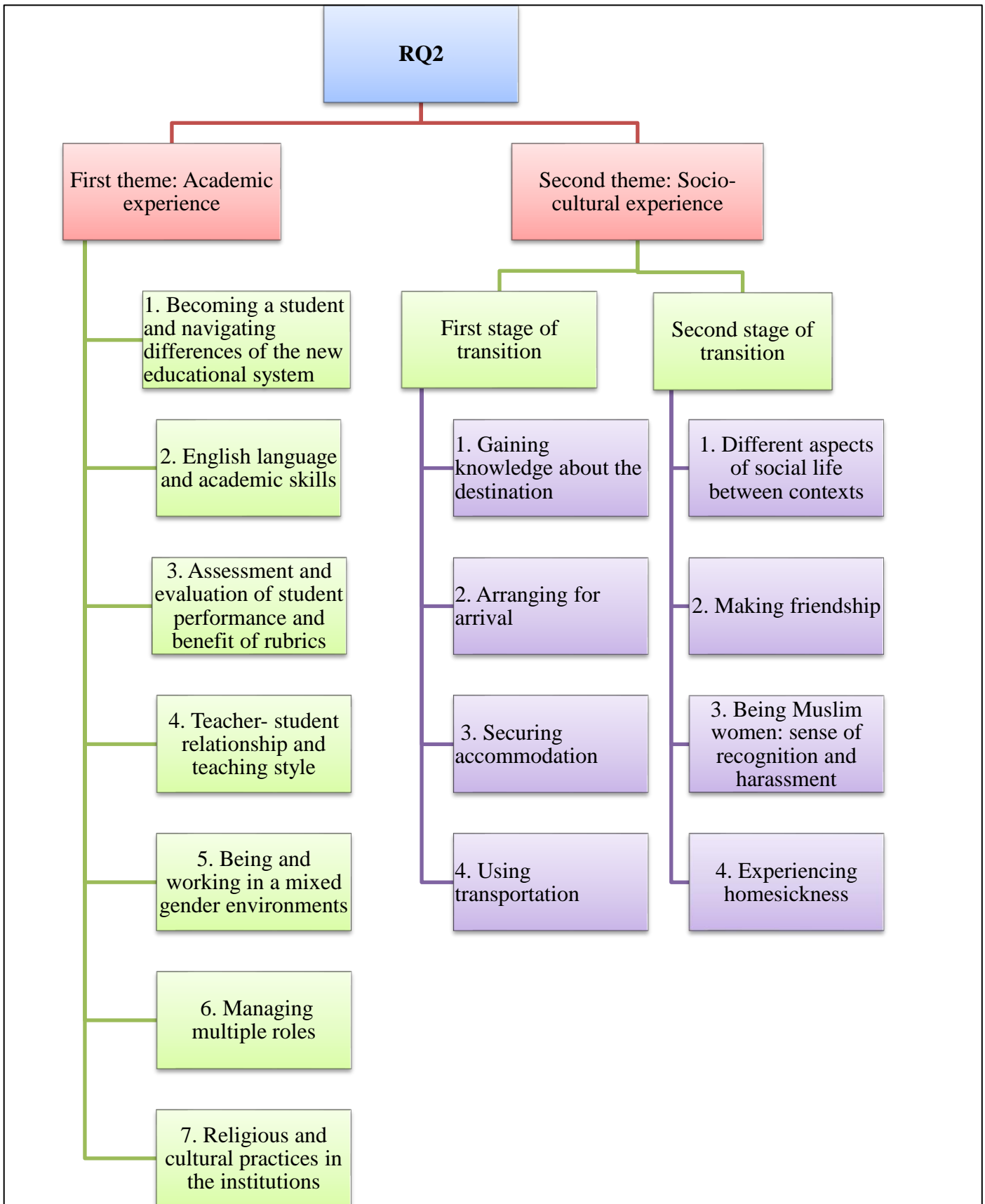


Figure 9. Themes answering RQ2

6.2 First theme: Academic experience

This theme of academic experience refers to the participants' engagement in the educational context in South Australian institutions. The findings identified and reported the following aspects: (1) becoming students and navigating differences of the new educational system, (2) English language and academic skills, (3) assessments and evaluation of student performance and benefits of rubrics, (4) teacher-student relationships and teaching styles, (5) being and working in a mixed gender environment, (6) managing multiple roles, and (7) religious and cultural practices in the institutions.

1. Becoming a student and navigating differences of the new educational system

One of the first matters noted concerning participants academic experience was their contrasted feelings becoming international students. For one participant, being a student again was not a different situation. Zara (P12) stated: "I have been studying continuously since graduation from high school. So, I did not notice a difference studying here as an international student". In contrast, for two other participants, who had graduated several years earlier, becoming a student felt confusing. Farah (P11) clearly indicated: "The experience was new because I graduated in 2013 then joined the scholarship program in 2017". Therefore, becoming an international student after such a hiatus felt difficult to her. Farah's feelings were further understood when Latifah (P5) reported on her first days of joining the university:

The beginning of my university study was a little messed up because the education system here in Australia is very different from the one I was used to in Saudi Arabia. I did not know who to communicate with. I mean, it has been a long time since I graduated in 2012. Surely, the methods of teaching, educational strategies, and many things have been changed. I had a hard time starting this all over again. The experience of studying this way is scary and a bit confusing because I am still not used to it.

Latifah's quote reflected an absence of knowledge and understanding about the expectations or preparation that she needed to do for her classes. It has been argued in the literature that international and local students are assumed to face challenges when starting university degrees (Andrade, 2006; Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Indeed, the quotes above confirmed this position, as participants found studying in the new context made them feel frustrated and challenged.

In addition to the new situation, being a student in a different educational system, three participants discussed aspects with regard to understanding the new structure of their courses and curriculum design. For two participants, who were doing nursing courses, the structure of their degrees and design of curriculum was comparable to what they had studied in Saudi Arabia. Zara (P12) stated "it was the same medical field which I studied in Saudi Arabia. I can say it is very similar in curriculum too". Similarly, Farah (P11) commented:

Well, the academic structure was similar to my previous studies. There was almost no difference in the method of study and the type of curriculum. I have come across them, and I adapted to the situation easily without difficulties.

However, Jamilah (P7) reflected that in her opinion attending non-academic activities in the curriculum part of the academic English course proved difficult:

I was annoyed by some non-academic activities during the term, for example, going out to a public place to visit like a museum or going out for a cup of coffee in a public place. Such activities have no academic benefit, and I feel like I was wasting time.

In addition, different studying hours were a challenge to several participants. The timing of classes in Australian universities was contrasted to the participants' previous study experience and was initially challenging for them. For example, Lulu (P3) said: "Most of my classes were intensive, which is from 9 am to 5 pm, as well as practical work in childcare

centres from 8 am to 6 pm”. Lulu was required to attend the placement in childcare centres while at the same time attending other subjects. She needed to find her way, planning for her placement and preparing for other classes. Similarly, Wardah (P6) commented on the long hours of classes during Ramadan while fasting: “During school, my classes probably finished at 6 pm. For Ramadan, I had to break my fast on my way home and arrive after Maghreb prayer”. Also, Mona (P10) noted that her classes started late in the afternoon which made her change the routine to attend classes with appropriate energy. She said: “The problem I face is that my classes are in the afternoon, so my bedtimes and leisure are mixed up because I sleep in the morning to be ready to go to the university at night”.

Based on the above responses, returning to the academic environment, especially in a new system of education, reflected a complex experience that many participants needed to navigate while developing knowledge about differences between previous and present educational settings. This finding is in line with previous research that highlighted that the first year of an international student’s experience is being critical for them due to opposing rules and expectations held by the hosting university’s and the student’s academic backgrounds (Jepson et al., 2002; Prescott & Hellstén, 2005).

1. English language and academic skills

The second sub-theme that participants mentioned concerned English language and related academic skills. This sub-theme reflected the seven participants’ experience with the English language used as medium of instruction and learning.

On the one hand, two Saudi women studied English and met the required level before coming to South Australia, thus had no language difficulties during their postgraduate studies. For example, Wardah (P6) stated: “I studied English in the language centre for short time because my level is advanced, so I did not have any difficulties with the language”. Likewise, Arwa (P13) who was studying a doctoral program expressed: “Based on my studies in Britain,

I feel good in my academic English language and the methods of research, so I have not encountered difficulties in this regard”.

On the other hand, English language was identified as an academic challenge for other Saudi women especially those who had to learn it from scratch. Two participants who studied English language at the beginners’ level reflected that it was a concerning matter. Nora (P4) describing her feelings stated: “I was very concerned about the beginning of study especially that I did not have the basics in English”. Similarly, Dalia (P14) was not confident about the level of her skills, thus requested to study English from scratch because she aimed to learn the needed academic skills that are important at university level. She stated:

The first days, I went to the language centre to undertake the placement test. I got scared at the beginning although I was at the intermediate level. I preferred to start my English study from the scratch because I lack the necessary academic skills for studying here.

According to her story, Dalia was aware of her English language level and required academic skills to complete a postgraduate degree in Australia. This helped her make better decisions in learning English and relevant academic skills.

Besides learning English, some academic skills, including writing and speaking, were identified by participants as being difficult to master, even for those who had an advanced level of English. Wardah (P6) previously stated that her English language met the required level to enrol in a postgraduate degree, however, she acknowledged that academic writing was an obstacle in her studies.

The writing was the weakest skill compared to the rest of the skills. As the levels progressed, I was finding it difficult, especially the critical writing. The level of articles and lessons also became higher and there were many terms you need a double effort to learn.

Further, academic reading was a challenging skill for Dalia. In her own words, Dalia (P14) described her challenge: “As I am student who learns English and my vocabulary is limited, I was having difficulties in reading a topic other than my speciality and its study in class”. Similarly, one participant noted the difficulty of learning academic terminologies and technical language in her course. Farah (P11) indicated:

When I started studying nursing terminologies, it was a challenging task to learn and memorize. I must be perfect in using the English language because it is an essential skill while communicating with others during my study and while working in hospitals.

Speaking proficiency in English was challenging to another participant. Jamilah (P7) commented on her long journey studying at the English language centre but not achieving the required level.

I have been studying for almost a year and still I have not met the language requirement to start my postgraduate degree. I thought that if I studied English abroad, I would learn quickly especially since I already had an English diploma, but speaking is my lowest skill. Even though my vocabulary is good, it is difficult for me to talk to others.

As can be understood, achieving the required level of English language and related academic skills produced some difficulties to several participants. Though some women were proficient in their English skills and did not encounter many difficulties, the proficiency of others was a challenge. The data indicated that some Saudi women were not very competent in the use of English language and accordingly encountered some difficulty engaging with learning materials. This finding echoes the previous research (e.g., Alsaifi & Shin, 2017; Alsulami, 2018) reporting that the English language barrier was one of challenges that influenced Saudi students’ academic adjustment in Australian universities. In addition, this

finding regarding the writing, reading and listening skills that participants encountered difficulty with expands on Nguyen's (2011) study which examined the challenges of learning English from a Southeast Asian students' perspective. The author argues that Asian students from Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia described their previous courses of English in their home countries to be focused more on grammar and other skills were not adequately taught. Identifying this problem can help language educators in schools or lecturers in universities to develop better strategies to assist English teaching for international students in Australia.

2. Assessments and evaluation of student performance and benefit of rubrics

Participants were asked what experiences they had in relation to assessment and evaluation methods in their different courses. Respondents identified three views: (1) assessments were different, (2) assessments seemed familiar, and (3) assessments were challenging. In addition, a small number of participants discussed the use of rubrics while completing their tasks.

First, four of the participants noted that tasks such as scientific writing, academic speaking, discussions and group work projects were different types of assessments from the Saudi Arabian educational system. For example, Miram (P2) reflected her perception of the differences stating: "I am aware of the university's assessments and evaluation methods such as writing scientific papers. I never studied this assessment or have been able to practice it even at the Bachelor's level". Further, another participant commented on the great benefits of being assessed in Australia differently from the Saudi Arabian system. Wardah (P6) said:

There was a compulsory communication class at all levels to improve different speaking skills such as academic discussions. I have not been assessed in this way during my studies in Saudi Arabia.

In addition, two of the participants indicated that group work assessments were beneficial for them. For example, Hadeel (P9), who is a mother as well, reported that group work tasks were more easily finished during class time as she could then spend more time looking after her children's needs.

The assignments are different from Saudi Arabia, and this is good for me. Many tasks should be done in group work which I prefer more than individual work because working alone needs effort and requires more time at home and it is hard to work at home with children.

Similarly, Zara (P12) who was a nursing student valued the benefits she would gain while working with various people at placements: "Here, I liked the chance to practice and apply knowledge while studying because there is an opportunity to deal with different nationalities and identities; students, teachers, and staff in hospitals".

The second view about assessments seeming familiar was expressed by three interviewees (P2), (P6) and (P10) who attended English language courses before starting their degrees. The English language courses prepared them for various assessment types at university level. To illustrate, Mona (P10) believed that her accomplishment at university resulted from the great experience learning many skills at the language centre. She stated: "I think that the student must study first at the language centre because it eases studying at the university. I believe that my accomplished achievements at the university linked to the learning experience I had in the language centre". More specifically, Wardah (P6) named specific research skills she learnt at a university affiliated language centre.

There are different types of assessment and evaluation I learnt in the language centre, for example, individual work, the report writing, research, group work, which were all assessed at the end of each level. Thankfully, I benefited from the acquired skills when I started studying at university.

Third, three respondents (P3), (P11) and (P14), commented on their challenging experience due to being unfamiliar with the different assessment types. Dalia (P14) commented:

The method of assessment is challenging because in Saudi Arabia we mostly rely on final exams but in Australia assessment tasks are different. While studying English courses and Master's subjects there was a mixture of assessment tasks such as in-class tests, research papers, group or individual work depending on the assessed skill.

Lulu (P3) indicated that difficulty of assessments was linked to the structure of the early childhood course that she was studying at postgraduate level. Lulu (P3) recounted:

I found the method of evaluation and assessment difficult. I spent most of my time working on assignments because my speciality has a lot of research. For example, many assignments had theoretical and practical parts, so I faced difficulties understanding what was required. Also, many of the assignments were ungraded.

Lulu's statement expressed her difficulty at having to complete various assignments some of which required the submission of theoretical parts and practical reports for demonstration purposes.

While talking about the assessment in their studies, four of the participants mentioned the rubric as a tool that helped them better understand how to complete their assignments, though it was not commonly used in the Saudi Arabian education system. To illustrate, the following quotes reflect participants' accounts on the usefulness of rubrics while studying English language courses or Master level subjects. Wardah (P6) shared that using rubrics initially was not easy, however, it helped her be clear about the work she submitted later.

I liked that they use rubrics when marking assignments. For example, during English language courses, the teacher used rubrics to explain the weaknesses and strengths of my homework.... I cannot deny that dealing with rubrics was difficult at the beginning, but it was easy after that.

Three other women (P10), (P11) and (P14) shared the same perspective that the detailed rubrics made them confident while completing homework. To explain, Dalia (P14) reported the following:

When studying the Master's course, we would not find a clear instruction of doing the assignments. It can be done in more than one way because it depends on the student and the way he/she justifies choosing this method, so students have their own way to succeed. I believe it seemed complicated at the beginning, but it become easier with practice and experience. I was able to succeed after learning the technique and followed the steps required in the rubric.

Saudi education and practiced pedagogy relies mostly on a teacher-centred approach, leading students to memorize the content of their subjects and recall the information in class or for assessments and final examinations (Hamdan, 2005). Thus, when Saudi women students arrive in Australia, they were challenged by being assessed in other ways, like group projects and research papers, which they were not used to. This finding is also in line with the conclusion of a prior study on international students' educational difficulties in Australian universities (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). The authors reported that one of the major academic difficulties pertained to the different assignment types, like group work and critical thinking tasks, that were commonly used for assessment in Australia but were unfamiliar to international students. Highlighting this finding might provide information for lecturers in Australian universities to accommodate students who are unfamiliar with assignments other than examinations.

3. Teacher-student relationship and teaching style

In this fourth sub-theme, participants shared stories that related to how they perceived the teacher-student relationship, teaching styles and learning approaches while studying in Australia. In more than one story, comparisons and contrasts were made between the Saudi Arabian and Australian education systems. A number of participants appreciated the teacher-student relationship from various aspects. Nora (P4), for example, expressed her opinion on how teachers place themselves close to their students and stated:

The level of relations between a teacher and a student is great, which you do not feel the stratification or firmness. My rights as a student are apparent and easily accessible, and no one can deprive me of them.

Hasnaa (P1) similarly shared the same opinion with Nora (P4) and commented on the teachers' approachability:

The teachers' morals are beautiful, and their communication with the students is excellent in terms of the personal side.... I liked the teachers' behaviour with students, and they were down to earth. They allowed us to talk to them if we have a studying difficulty. They help us by talking and supporting us positively.

Mona (P10) further commented on the valuable opportunity to engage in the classroom as an active student: "There is a sense of encouragement to learn, and they always encourage us to express opinions even if it is against them so I talk freely with no concern that they would take revenge by my grades". In addition, two PhD candidates gave the same opinion regarding the supervisor-student relationship. Nahla (P8) and Arwa (P13) agreed on the great amount of guidance and support they received from their research supervisors. Nahla (P8) said:

I am studying a PhD and what caught my attention is the cooperation of my supervisor and the way of communicating with her. In comparison to my study in Saudi Arabia, unfortunately, the supervisor did not help me during my Master research degree. He did not read or review any of my work and rather he asked me to send it all when it is all done. In contrast to the situation here that I meet the supervisor every two weeks, the feedback is constructive and in detail.

Arwa (P13) also appreciated the help from her supervisor when seeking advice and indicated the following:

In terms of the relationship with the supervisor, our relationship is fantastic, and he supports me if I need any help. I contact him first if I have an issue, so he guides me to the right person and solution.

However, not all participants had great experience with their educators. Wardah (P6) shared an unpleasant experience attending the laboratory with Saudi and other students where she felt dissatisfied to work with the laboratory supervisor. She mentioned:

There might be some harassment at the university, especially in the labs. One professor expressed underestimating and disrespecting attitudes. He used to say that I am not like him and raised his voice when I ask some help for an experiment. We were a group of four Saudi female students and if any of us asked something he ignored us. But if any of the other students ask, he would help them. After several situations we complained about him at the international students' affairs, but the problem was not solved.

This experience, narrated by Wardah (P6) appeared to be an individual story. Others shared positive experiences illustrating evidence that the Australian academics were very considerate and accommodating to the participant Saudi women students, thus assisting their adaptation to

the Australian academic context. The quotes in general reflected participants' perceptions about the teacher-student level of communication and relationship, which indicated an informal and supporting environment for students to express their individual academic views. In addition, it expands the findings of previous studies on teacher-empowered relation and limited communication with students in Saudi Arabian education. To clarify, scholars reported that many teachers in Saudi Arabia practice authority in the classroom (Alnassar & Dow, 2013; Elyas & Picard, 2012). This is a typical norm in a collectivist society where high power distance is observed (Hofstede, 1986). Thus, most students from such cultures do not feel encouraged to take an active role in the classroom or to communicate with teachers in an informal way. Yet, easily reaching and communicating with individuals who hold higher positions, like lecturers in this situation, reflects the individualistic cultural norm of Australia (Hofstede, 2017), thus the participants in the current study were able to improve their connection styles with their lecturers which led to better involvement with the learning process in some cases. Therefore, the teacher-student relationship in the Australian universities that were less authoritative and more informal than in Saudi Arabia encouraged students to become active learners in the academic environment.

Teaching style

Participants of the current study exposed their unfamiliarity with the practiced teaching approaches within Australian universities from two viewpoints. The first viewpoint valued the use of technology as a tool in the teaching and learning settings. Four women including Hasnaa (P1), Lulu (P3), Nora (P4) and Nahla (P9) commented on the usefulness of technology within the academic environment. For example, Nora (P4) liked the use of technology that kept her connected with academic requirements and progress.

What I liked most about the Australian's education was the reliance on technology and constant communication via online system. There is an email for each student, linked to the institute where they study. Also, there is a student dashboard where I follow all my subjects, assignments, and grades. I hope this way will be in our education system.

Equally, Nahla (P9) noted the convenience of submitting her assignments and academic forms online. Nahla stated: "I noticed here the use of technology and reliance on electronic communication such as assignments, booking appointments, and submitting required forms. The use of technology makes studying easier". These views confirmed the findings of recent studies (Binsahl, 2018; Mayan, 2019) concluding that Saudi students have a positive perception about utilising technology in the learning environment in Australian universities.

The other viewpoint discussed the limited role of educators and the reliance on many sources in the Australian universities which was a challenge during the early stages of their journey. In detail, teachers play a major role in Saudi Arabian education as they are the source of knowledge. Therefore, joining a university in Australia and getting used to studying from various sources was unexpected and difficult for many participants. For example, Dalia (P14) described the two contexts as:

The system of education in Australia depends greatly on the student's self-learning. The role of the teacher is to explain and illustrate during classes. The rest of the information can be accessed from other sources such as the subject dashboard where more scientific articles, or books are offered. In Saudi Arabia, the primary or fundamental source of information is the teacher who determines the information from the available curriculum.

Furthermore, Latifah (P5) described her initial university experience as:

The first two weeks were when I felt most confused, then I started to know the system and developed competency. I noticed that the education here depends on the student, the extensive reading, and searching for information in more than one source for one subject like five or six books. It is very different from the education system in Saudi Arabia, which is similar to spoon-feeding from the teacher to the student. So, I have difficulty learning in this way.

The academic background of both primary and higher education settings in Saudi Arabia remains highly controlled by the teacher (Abouammoh & Smith, 2013; Elyas & Picard, 2012). This means teaching is central and teachers have the authority to make decisions related to educational and classrooms matters pertaining the high-power distance of the Saudi Arabian culture (Hofstede, 1986). In addition, participants of the current study were confused and challenged in becoming independent learners showing their orientation to uncertainty avoidance where they felt confused about unstructured or unpredictable learning situations. Nevertheless, they interestingly showed levels of high determination to engage with the culture of their new academic context and got used to new environment utilising various sources of knowledge tools in their respective universities.

4. Being and working in a mixed-gender environment

This sub-theme reports the participants' reflections on their experience and the challenges faced while working or engaging with male students. There are two aspects discussed below: (1) the perception about attending mixed-gender classes and (2) the experience of working with male classmates.

First, studying in a mixed-gender setting was not challenging to six participants due to their previous experience. Arwa (P13) offered the best description in this regard: "Studying and interacting with males is fine to me and I have no problem. Also, my first job before being

a lecturer was in a mixed-gender field and it was easy”. Likewise, Latifah (P5) and Farah (P11) worked with male colleagues in medical departments before coming to Australia. For instance, Farah (P11) expressed:

I studied nursing in Saudi Arabia, and I had a job there in a mixed environment. It gave me experience and learnt how to work with males in one place. When I started studying in Australia, it was a similar experience to the previous one. I was fine with it.

From another experience, Miram (P2) had studied overseas before and became used to mixed gender classes. She said: “Based on my previous experience of studying in Canada, I had no difficulty and studying or interacting with men students was easy”. All other responses concerned the impact of previous experience on participants’ perspectives and reactions about being and working with males in the South Australian academic context. Five women, Hasnaa (P1), Nora (P4), Wardah (P6), Hadeel (P9) and Dalia (P14), explained that in the beginning they felt embarrassed sitting next to male classmates and then asked to relocate or introduce some communication limits. For instance, Nora (P4) stated: “When I spoke with front desk, not to sit next to men during the class, they were very appreciative of the different cultures and customs and respected my request”. Similarly, Hasnaa (P1), Wardah (P6) and Dalia (P14) highlighted the educators’ understanding of their preferences not to work with male students at the beginning of their studies. Wardah (P6) shared:

As a first experience of interacting with male students, it was embarrassing and awkward for me to study in a mixed place. So, I made it clear to the teachers that I do not prefer sitting next to boys during classes with the exception of group work and the institute was supportive. It was fine after that, and I enjoyed my studies.

Moreover, one participant pointed out that the presence of Saudi students in the universities posed easier and more relaxed settings for her as teachers and staff, as well as students, became aware of the Saudi women students' preferences. Hadeel (P9) indicated:

I have not encountered any difficulties with them. I find that they are respectful and understand the limits of communications. Also, the institute has had many Saudi girls and boys, so they know how to deal with girls, especially as I wear a full hijab and a niqab, which reflects my religion and where I am from.

In contrast, Zara (P12) and Jamilah (P7) commented on the existence of Saudi students in their classes from another angle, Zara (P12) stated:

I still feel shy sometimes because there are Saudi and other Arab students in my classes. Anyway, they know their limits in dealing with girls inside classes. For other nationalities, interacting with them occurs only in group work projects or discussions and they respectfully understand how to deal with girls once they notice the hijab.

Three other participants mentioned the discomfort of studying with male students. Nahla (P8) commented:

Studying with males is an inconvenient experience. It is my first time of attending classes with male students. My conversation or interaction may show that I am comfortable, but it is not internally, this is my feeling. I always make sure to choose a seat that is next to the girls; however, if a boy sits beside me, I try to get up and change my place. It gets on my nerves if they get embarrassed but usually my colleagues are very respectful.

Dalia (P14) explained how studying with male students impacted on her active engagement in the classroom. She said: "Studying abroad was my first experience of direct

interaction with the other gender. So, attending a mixed class for a long time was affecting my behaviours. I was embarrassed to ask questions and usually responded with short answers”.

This sub-theme presented the Saudi women students’ perception and experience attending mixed gender educational settings in Australia. As early noted in section 2.3, the Saudi Arabia educational system is based on gender-segregated principles (Alamri, 2011; Baki, 2004), in contrast to the Australian academic environments. Thus, when moving overseas many Arab and Muslim students are concerned about learning in a mixed class and the importance of participating in group work or interacting with the opposite gender (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). In the current study, while six participants felt no difficulty attending mixed gender academic settings since they have previously studied or worked in similar environments, the remaining eight participants felt discomfort and challenges as they had not been in such settings before. However, such feelings lasted only for a short time and early on when joining classes because participants adapted to the practice of learning and working with the opposite gender as part of the educational experience in Australia. This finding challenges Alhazmi and Nyland’s (2010) argument that the mixed-gender environment was the most challenging experience for Saudi females. Yet, it confirms the finding that the longer Saudi women are exposed to the culture of Western academic environment, the more adaptation they experienced (Alsahafi & Shin, 2017; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Orth, 2015; Sandekian et al., 2015).

5. Managing multiple roles

Managing a number of roles was a new situation to seven of the fourteen participants. Being a sister and student, or a wife, mother and student was a heavy responsibility for many participants. Responsibilities were viewed from two perspectives: how they become responsible for new roles, and how it was challenging to manage such roles.

For the first group, three participants were accompanied by their younger brothers for the entire duration of their journey and had great support from them. In one case, a brother who came with his sister was eligible to benefit from the scholarship and enrolled at university attending his own undergraduate studies. Lulu (P3) said:

At the beginning of the scholarship, my brother was studying at the same university. So, he used to be busy, and he had the same academic commitments that I had. So, we were helping each other toward house chores such as one cooks, and the other person cleans up.

Also, Farah (P11) used to spend a lot of time attending her nursing classes and relied on her brother for cooking or doing house chores. She stated:

I came here with my brother. He does not like to go out a lot and prefers being with his friends or staying at home because he does not study. I even rely on him a lot to do chores and cooking.

In contrast, being a mother and student was challenging for eight participants who were looking after their children and attending to their studies too. The challenge was best described by Nora (P4):

Different class times is something I struggled with sometimes. When I studied in Saudi Arabia, the hours were limited from morning to noon. While I have classes here in the morning, noon or the afternoon, which is very tiring, and I cannot balance my studies with my child's needs and home duties.

Likewise, Nahla (P8) a mother of four children described her situation as having to meet the demands of all roles: “The experience of being here as a mother and a student is the hardest thing I have ever faced. It is one of the difficulties I am facing right now”. Moreover, a student

who was also a mother, Latifah (P5), shared her situation that her husband was not available to look after her young child:

I had two subjects that started at 5 pm, which was very difficult at the beginning. I cried for two weeks once I knew the timing of the classes because my child was only 4 months old, and my husband is a surgeon and on call at any emergency time. I had no one to babysit my child.

In another example, Dalia (P14) also explained her experience caring for her two teenagers who needed to understand the overseas living experience.

Managing different roles is challenging. I am like an iron woman. I needed to balance between children and their needs because I was very keen to take care of them intellectually, religiously, and to clarify the difference in religion and society between Australia and Saudi Arabia.

In line with the previously noted requirement of Saudi scholarships for international female students, all participants had been accompanied by their male relative, brother or husband, and children. In addition, section 2.4.2 depicted societal gendered roles, in the context of Saudi Arabia, that men usually care for financial needs and women look after family members. In the current study, three participants came with their brothers, and nine came with their husbands/children. Findings on the academic experience identified that participants encountered several difficulties in relation to the actual engagement with the new educational environment, as well as the completion of various assignments. Hence, being Saudi international female students in Australian universities had its own burden, given the new academic context as well as being responsible for the accompanying family members' care. Singles who came with brothers managed better than participants who were mothers. Saudi women students who were mothers had the burden of responsibility towards their children and

their studies. This affirms previous findings on international students who are mothers who report difficulty in managing their roles (Alhajj, 2016; Alqahtani & Pfeffer, 2017; Behboodi Moghadam et al., 2017).

6. Religious and cultural practices in the institutions

This sub-theme reported how participants described their own experience wearing their traditional dress and offering Islamic practices at their respective academic institutions in South Australia. Regarding the experience of wearing the traditional dress in any chosen style, a number of participants who wore abaya with niqab reported that their lecturers and classmates, as well as staff, were respectful and did not show any negative responses. To illustrate, Hasnaa (P1) felt confident by the large number of other Saudi women attending the same institution and wearing similar styles. She stated: “I wear abaya and niqab, so it was fine at the institute because the presence of other Saudi women students which was great”. Wardah (P6) had the opposite situation, being the only Saudi woman studying in the institution, yet she continued wearing it. Wardah (P6) stated: “Wearing niqab and abaya was unique and noticeable in the institute, but they accepted it, and no one bothered me about it”.

Commenting from a different perspective, Lulu (P3) stated that neither her local classmates nor educators treated her differently based on her dress style. In fact, she felt as accepted as any other woman student regardless of outer appearance. She stated: “They were keen to let me share with them and made me feel equal intellectually and personally without looking at my abaya with niqab style”. In contrast, Jamilah (P7) was unwelcomed when engaging in some class activities, especially given she looked distinctive from other students in the class. Jamilah (P7) described her feelings in one situation when all classmates gathered to take a picture after class activity: “It was uncomfortable because I wore niqab and some students refused to be in the picture”. As a result, Jamilah (P7) decided to take the niqab off and continued to wear the abaya covering her body and leaving her face exposed. The students

in class did not feel comfortable interacting with her, especially when she was fully covering her face except the eyes. Thus, she decided to take off the niqab and expose her face to allow easier interaction with the students.

Nevertheless, Nahla (P8) had not noted any objection to her wearing abaya and niqab within her university context, yet she did not feel comfortable having to wear them for long hours. She mentioned: “I am not comfortable to wear my abaya all the time, especially that I am wearing a niqab on”. Her response, as well as that of others, indicated a comparison of previous and present academic experience. As stated in section 2.3, the Saudi Arabian system of education is gender segregated whereby public universities and schools are for males or females. Thus, hijab, jilbab or abaya and niqab would usually be worn outside females’ schools and university campuses. In contrast, because participants were attending mixed-gender academic context, they continued to wear their traditional dress with respect to their varying styles. Hence, the impact of previous experience may contribute to the contradictory experience of whether to wear abaya and niqab.

Participants also spoke about the experience of having to pray and break their fasting during Ramadan at certain times that could fall during class hours. In this regard, several women stated that their institutions were equipped with appropriate facilities allowing them to practice their religion completely. To illustrate, Hasnaa (P1) noted: “There were specific places for ablution and praying at the institute as well as a special place for Friday prayer during school hours”. Repeatedly, Miram (P2) from another institution, said: “Thankfully there is a prayer room available with all the facilities and needs for prayer”.

Some educators showed understanding and allowed participants to attend their prayers or break their fast at specific times. For example, Mona (P10) stated:

Normally I go to pray and return to my class but in Ramadan I had a class during Iftar time, so I break my fast and pray, then I return to the class.

Getting out of class is okay, and I do not need permission because teachers know already and were okay for me to go for praying or breaking fast then coming back.

Farah (P11) reflected in more detail how the educators were considerate in allowing students to attend their prayers without interrupting the class times. She said:

When I was studying at the language centre, there were more Muslim and Saudi students. We all used to pray together. Then the teacher became aware and allowed us to pray in groups and warned us not to be late. There was an equipped place for prayer and ablution. On the other hand, there were few Muslim students in the university, yet when I asked for praying, they would allow me to pray.

Noting that above statements by participants who attended different universities, it seems that some universities were receptive toward the needs of Muslim men and women students.

Nora (P4) felt such respect and stated that:

Honestly, they appreciate the time and the significance of prayer for us. All the prayers pass during my class hours, especially in Ramadan, but I go out for praying during break time. There are two separate prayer rooms, one for women, and another for men.

Also, Arwa (P13) affirmed same receptiveness from the universities that have appropriate facilities to accommodate the needs of Muslim students. She indicated: "In general, the university has a mosque dedicated to Muslims and in Ramadan they provide Iftar daily. Honestly, the university and even the students have receptiveness to different religions and cultures". Furthermore, Wardah (P6) commented on how she valued the availability of all needed facilities within the university stating that it felt like she is studying at home: "It was

easier to pray in the university because there is a fully equipped prayer room in each building, which I thank them for as it feels like I am in a Saudi university”.

From another view, two participants stated that there was no praying facility in their universities nor was there an available one close by. For example, Nahla (P8), a PhD participant, complained about the location of the prayer room and said: “For prayer times, I face difficulty always because I spend a long time at the university. I know that there is a prayer room in the university, but it is located far from my office, so I do not go there. When it is the time, I mostly pray next to my desk in my studying space”.

This section reported participants experiences of cultural dressing styles and offering religious practices while being involved in the everyday educational context in South Australia. From a general perception it was expected that participants could be wearing one of the three styles noted in Chapter Two: (1) *abaya* with *niqab* to cover the face and the entire body with a loose dress, (2) *jilbab* to cover the entire body without the face, and (3) *hijab* to cover the head without the face and wearing normal dress such as blouses or jackets and pants or long skirts (DeCoursey, 2017; Slininger, 2014). There were different experiences by participants as some continued to wear the abaya and niqab and one took off the niqab. Most participants reflected great respect within the context of their various academic institutions toward their choice of dressing style and attendance of Islamic practices during class times. Also, participants largely agreed that their institutions were receptive and accommodating to their needs as Muslim students through offering suitable facilities like separate prayer rooms. Furthermore, educators showed positive responses and understanding towards the needs of participants to offer prayers and break fast in specific times during the class. These situations pinpoint some changes in the receptiveness to the various needs of international Muslim students in Australia. To clarify, previous studies on the adjustment experiences of Muslim students in different Australian universities concluded less satisfaction on the provision of appropriate facilities and services

within the university campuses (Asmar et al., 2004; Novera, 2004). While other authors indicated that one of the main difficulties faced by the Muslim men and women students was the lack of specific facilities for them, the participants of current study noted the availability of appropriate facilities as well as better understanding from educators in most South Australian universities and language centres. Additionally, the noted changes observed in offering specific facilities and the educators' awareness of specific cultural dressing or Islamic practices suggest that Australia's higher education would be recognised as a multicultural context that adapts to the various needs of an increasingly diverse student cohort. Though Australian institutions are secular, tolerated faith and supported religious diversity towards international Muslim students' needs within campuses has helped them be connected to their religious faiths (Possamai et al., 2016).

6.2.1 Summary of academic experience

The seven sub-themes reported the academic experience of Saudi women students in South Australia. It described participants' views and responses on studying in a different educational culture. Overall, many participants identified challenges which they encountered early when joining the new academic context. Nevertheless, the responses reflect a positive academic experience after getting used to the differences, and an improvement in learning skills to meet the academic expectations of Australian institutions. In addition, some aspects revealed participants' experience dressing in their cultural styles and practicing their religious tasks. The following section will present the findings with regard to the participants' socio-cultural experiences.

6.3 Second theme: Socio-cultural experience

This second main theme reports and discusses findings of how participants describe their socio-cultural experience while living in the South Australian context. Two sub-themes of the

transition's stages will depict the participants' experiences while living in the society and culture of South Australia. Figure 10 below shows the presentation of aspects per sub-theme.

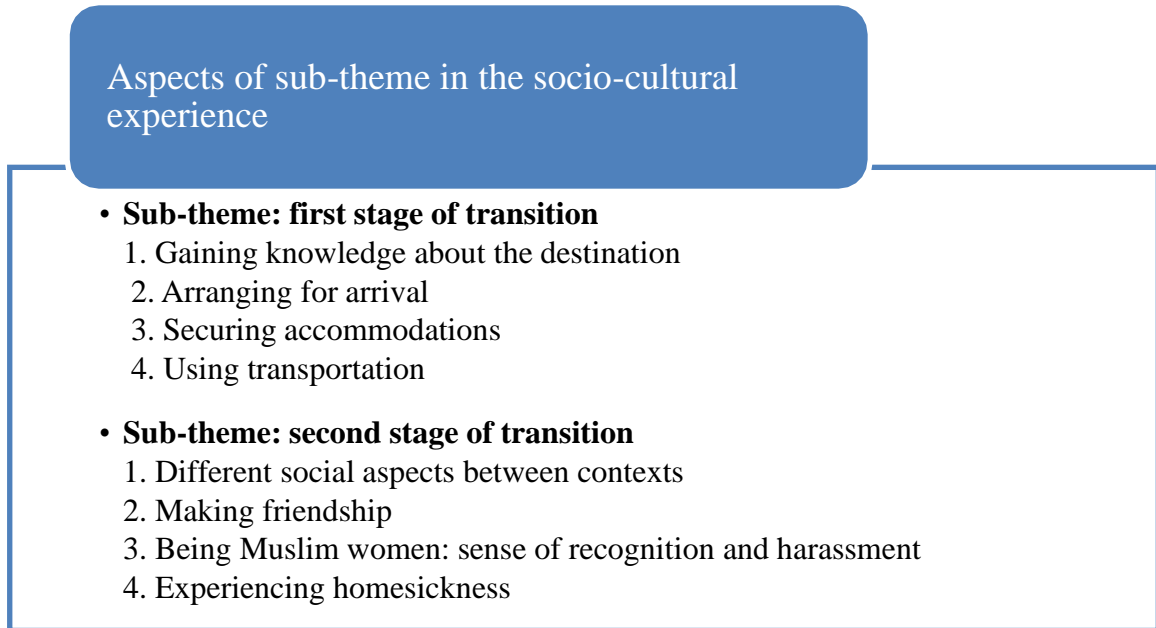


Figure 10. Aspects of socio-cultural experience

6.3.1 Sub-theme: First stage of transition

This sub-theme refers to a number of aspects that participants consider important when preparing for travel. The socio-cultural experience began at the time participants prepared to depart Saudi Arabia and transit temporarily as international students in South Australia. During this stage, the participants indicated their needs were to: (1) gain knowledge about the destination, (2) arrange for arrival pick up, and then after arrival, their experience of (3) securing accommodation and (4) using transportation.

1. Gaining knowledge about the destination

More than half the participants in the current study stated that they used a number of sources to gain knowledge about what they needed to know before travelling, based on their

different essential needs. To explain, four participants, including Miram (P2), Lulu (P3), Latifah (P5) and Jamilah (P7), affirmed that reading about Saudi students' experiences was an informative source to find out about the living basics in South Australia. In detail, the forum they used as a source (name withheld) is organised into sections of countries and members provide information on almost all needs of Saudi students while being overseas. Lulu (P3) explained that this special website was the main source of information:

I used to read in a forum named... for Saudi international students... Students write about their experiences and share tips, problems, or solutions to the difficulties they face... I read about the lifestyle, the people, the ways to use transportation, and how to get accommodation.

While those participants benefited from reading about previous students' experiences, others like Mona (P10), Farah (P11), and Zara (P12) sought information on social media platforms.

To illustrate, Mona (P10) stated:

I read about the place and contacted people here regarding studying... I relied on the library for reading, which provided me with information, and I asked about how difficult it is to study and everything related to it. Then I started watching YouTube, the university's channel and its information, and other social media programs such as Telegram. ... I read before travelling about the best bank, the best mobile's company and electricity. I was reading and setting my needs. Then I chose everything before arrival.

The last statement in her quote reflects that reading about many things of the new destination was beneficial for P10 and that she made a number of choices and learnt about basics before travelling. Similarly, Zara (P12) also stated her source of information was *Twitter's* platform reading about the city she would be travelling to. In addition, Zara made contact with some students who were already in South Australia. She said: "I used to read a lot on social media, especially Twitter. I would write a city's name and lookup using both Arabic and English... I

communicated with some students there”. Likewise, reaching out and connecting with people residing in South Australia was Arwa’s source for information before travelling. Arwa (P13) said:

I asked friends and reached out to some people and families who live in South Australia about the weather, the use of public transportation, and the best accommodation areas because I will be living alone. I almost knew all the information I needed before travelling.

Since participants were coming to South Australia for the first time, it seemed important for them to know about student life through developing knowledge from available information from various sources. In addition, three mother participants who brought their children had to arrange their children’s admission to schools prior to travelling, as this was a pre-condition for receiving an Australian visa. In this matter, Nahla (P8), a mother of three school-aged children, stated that: “The system here issues visas for children only on the condition of providing admissions for schools, so I communicated with their schools while I was still in Saudi Arabia”.

This finding regarding gaining knowledge by the participants in the pre-departure stage is depicted in one view - the uncertainty avoidance - as a cultural feature of Saudi Arabians. The cultural dimensions model reported high scores of uncertainty avoidance, meaning that individuals need clear rules (I. Hofstede, 2017). This is depicted by the participants’ quotes when they unintentionally referred to their reading and learning behaviours to develop some knowledge and be prepared to live in a new and different context. In another view, the practice of gaining knowledge and being prepared before travel was similar to that found in other studies in the literature on international students’ information seeking behaviour. Advancements in communication and technological tools have changed the way international students access knowledge and seek of information (Alzougool et al., 2013; Kim, 2013). Therefore, the need to gain knowledge and learn about the destination became an expected behaviour of

international students in the pre-departure stage. Yet, some factors could influence the type of information that students seek (Kim, 2013). Quite rightly, coming alone or coming with children was found to influence specific information that participants of the current study were concerned about learning before coming to Australia. Furthermore, this finding is in line with previous work noting that international students preferred to access pre-departure information using home country sources, rather than those of their destination country (Alzougool et al., 2013). In this sub-theme many participants noted that they used to read from a data source website. This frequently cited source (name withheld) was developed by Saudi Arabian students who study overseas to help new students learn about destinations, and current or previous students share information regarding the scholarship experience. Reading the experience of individuals from the same cultural background would clarify many aspects for newcomers according to the assumption that they are coming from same cultural norms and possibly would share the same concerns. This is in line with the finding of Binsahl et al. (2020) and Orth (2015) who report that the Saudi students generally benefitted from reports or recommendations made by reliable Saudi individuals who had lived in Australia in gaining knowledge about children's schools and other life needs.

2. Arranging for arrival

Not only was learning about the destination and organising schools for children done prior travel, but arranging for arrival pick up and relevant settlement needs was also done prior to travel. Prior to leaving Saudi Arabia, many participants opted to contact people who already were living in South Australia. One group of five participants communicated with the Saudi students' association to pick them up upon arrival. For this matter, Hasnaa (P1), who was travelling overseas for the first time, stated:

I had prior contact with the Saudi club. They sent me someone who welcomed us at the airport, and they were picking me up and dropping me

off to the language centre for a week... the manager of the club himself and one of the members helped us until we were ultimately settled.

Also, Nora (P4) who was travelling overseas for the second time shared:

The experience of arrival was lovely and beautiful. Before travelling, my husband sent messages to different Saudi students' websites, so everything was organized, and they arranged for us a temporary accommodation. When we landed, there was more than one car one for us and another for our bags. After the arrival, they brought us dinner and covered our basic needs in the first days.

Thus, the Saudi students' association service was available to all students whether they had travelled before or not, providing the offered services for newcomers. Another group of six participants communicated with their Saudi friends who were studying at the time in South Australia. For example, Lulu (P3), Warda (P6), Nahla (P8), Hadeel (P9), Farah (P11) and Zara (P12) were all welcomed by their friends. To illustrate, Hadeel (P9) stated: "When we arrived, our friends were waiting at the airport for us. They drove us home and brought a delicious dinner". Friends' help was also reflected in Farah's story, but in a different way. At the time Farah (P11) reached out to her friend to arrange the arrival pick up, the friend was on holiday but offered to communicate with a hosting family to meet Farah at the airport. Farah (P11) informed:

One of my friends arranged everything for me. She coordinated with a hosting family who welcomed me at the airport, and they drove us to the accommodation... I thank my friend because she helped me even though she was in Saudi Arabia.

Almost all previous stories indicated pleasant arrival experiences, however, unfortunately one participant reported an unpleasant arrival story. Mona came with her husband with no arrangement for pick up, so they hired a taxi to drive them to the hotel. Mona (P10) narrated:

We had a bad situation with the taxi driver who picked us from the airport to the hotel. He was non-Australian nationality and asked me which country I came from, so I said Saudi Arabia then he got upset and started saying bad words and insulting us.

This sub-theme explored how participants started their journey into South Australia, once they had gained adequate knowledge about Australia and began to arrange for their arrival. Two ways that were found to be very helpful in getting eleven of the participants settled with less difficulty upon arrival were: (1) communicating with Saudi students' associations, and (2) communicating with Saudi friends in South Australia. The participants' behaviour of reaching out to people at the destination as well as the willingness of those who were readily offering help and immediate support reflected the collectivist nature of Saudi Arabian culture and norms. Saudi Arabian people value relationships and like to benefit their group members greatly (Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede, 2017). This is evident from the different quotes above, which indicate how Saudis either working in association or alone provided help for those arriving in South Australia for the first time, that members of the same culture are integrated into cohesive groups that care for each other interdependently. Nonetheless, the arrangement for arrival with the Saudi association or friends who already reside in the host destination prior to travelling has not been reported in the literature on Saudi international students' overseas experiences.

3. Securing accommodation

Participants had contrasting experiences whilst looking for accommodation. One group got their accommodation with few challenges compared to the others. More than half of the participants had easily secured their accommodation after arrival based on a number of factors including early communication with Saudi individuals living in South Australia and prior knowledge on the process of searching and finding suitable accommodation. For instance, Hasnaa (P1) contacted a Saudi student who had finished his study: “The process we had to get our accommodation was easy; we got it within two weeks of our arrival because we had the apartment with all the furniture and essential items from a Saudi student who graduated”. Similarly, Dalia (P14) stated: “Before travelling, we communicated with the Saudi club, they helped us to access a full accommodation with furniture”.

Furthermore, Nahla (P8) asked her brother who was in South Australia to help with accommodation arrangements: “He prepared everything before my arrival like finding and renting a house, buying furnishings and providing all the basic needs”. In contrast, Miram (P2) relied on her previous experience living in Canada and was aware of the process of finding accommodation: “As for accommodation, the search was easy and personal without any help. We chose something suitable for us based on our previous experience in Canada”.

In contrast, other participants narrated a challenging experience to secure their accommodation. Jamilah (P7) explained her situation, playing the main role, learning about the rental process and dealing with agencies.

The search for a house was a painful experience because the process here is tiring and their way of showing houses in no more than 15 minutes. This may be at the last hour of the day, so it happened to be at my school time. I had to take permission from the institute. Also, the waiting period to get an offer/rejection of the homeowner was taking a long time too... the hardest thing we faced was learning about the regulations and the way to deal with

others such as the real estate agencies to get accommodation because my brother does not speak English and I had to be with him every time we inspect a property.

Two women also noted the different processes between Saudi Arabia and Australia. Mona (P10) said:

It was challenging to find a residence. I knew that it needed time, but I did not expect that would last long. We found out that the procedures are very different from Saudi Arabia, so we had been living in a hotel for a month until we found a suitable accommodation.

Farah (P11) elaborated:

The journey of looking for accommodation was tiring. It lasted for a month, and I had school every day. The difficulty was the way of searching through offices but offices' working hours were the same as my school. It was stressful every time to get out of class. Even the way of searching and choosing between houses needs an effort starting from pre-reservations. I had to look at the home, fill in the application, and collect supporting documents. Then I waited for a reply from the owners of the house. It really took a long tiring time.

Living in an appropriate place would greatly help international students to feel secure, especially at the early arrival stage. However, according to the quotes presented above, not all participants were lucky in finding accommodation soon after arrival, especially those who had not communicated with people or had previous knowledge about the process. Hence, the need to secure appropriate accommodation was one of the stressful matters they had to solve as for most international students after arrival in an overseas country (Grayson, 2008). Examining the participants' experience in the current study about securing their accommodation in South Australia can be discussed from two perspectives: (1) participants as Saudi women going

through this experience and taking the main role for first time, and (2) participants being international students in a new context. First, all participants, except three, were the main recipients of scholarships meaning that all required documents to rent accommodation giving their names, not their accompanying male family member. Hence, they needed to be present at all times while inspecting a place, to validate the requested papers. Apparently, this process was stressful and new for some participants because while living in Saudi Arabia they were mostly relying on their husbands and fathers with such processes. Yet when moving to South Australia the role changed and they had to go through the process themselves, communicating with landlords or agents when meeting requirements. This was especially true when their accompanying male did not speak English. Those participants implied discomfort at having to deal with males due to the norm of a gender-segregated society, which strongly discourages any interaction with non-relative men. This finding expands on the study of Binsahl (2018) indicating that Saudi women students feel concerned about securing accommodation themselves with less dependence on their male accompanying members after moving to study in Australia.

Second, almost all participants attended their classes in the first weeks of their arrival, therefore those who were still looking for accommodation struggled every time they needed to leave when a lesson clashed with accommodation inspections schedules. Owing to their cultural academic context, educators are placed in high power position (Alnassar & Dow, 2013), and out-of-topic interruptions are not expected. Thus, as Saudi women who had just joined the new system of education and begun attending their class in South Australia, they were not accustomed to asking for permission to leave to inspect a property on a frequent basis. Indeed, this argument was noted by Ryan and Twibell (2000) pointing out that not all international students perform effectively within an environment with different norms and rules. This stressful situation - balancing studies in the new academic context as well as meeting

the urgent need to find accommodation - is consistent with the findings of Sawir et al. (2008) that international students are reluctant to deal with landlords in the host country.

4. Using transportation

There were similar stories of complex experiences shared by all participants describing the use of public or private transportation in South Australia, and these are not unexpected considering the norm of the home context where public transportation is not commonly used by women (Alshabibi, 2019). Thus, the norm for most participants is to be driven; however, as early settlement in the new context, they had to use public transportation at least for some time upon arrival and this was perceived differently. For Lulu (P3) and Nora (P4) the overseas experience developed their own independence and allowed more convenience in commuting alone without relying on a male relative. Lulu (P3) referred to her previous living experience in Canada in terms of ease of use of the buses after settling in South Australia.

We do not have public transportation in Saudi Arabia, but I learned how to use it in Canada, so when arrived here I used it easily. I only had to know the buses' numbers and stops' locations. In our culture, my brother should drive me everywhere, but while we were in Australia, I would not ask him to drive me, I would use the bus.

Nora (P4) also relied on previous experience living in the United Kingdom stating that: "It was easy because Britain had almost the same system". In comparison, several participants including Farah (P11) and Zara (P12) had some difficulty until they become used to it. For instance, Zara (P12) stated: "It happened that I got lost many times, until I learned how to use transportation". Likewise, Farah (P11) informed: "It was tiring because I did not know how to use it".

Others like Hasnaa (P1), Miram (P2), Latifah (P5), Wardah (P6), Jamilah (P7), Nahla (P8), Hadeel (P9) and Dalia (P14) used buses less and were driven by their husbands or brothers

for different reasons. For one reason, two women were not successful in learning how to use buses. As a result, Hasnaa (P1) decided to buy a car: “At the beginning of using transportation, we got on the bus, and we were lost because we did not know how to use it. Then we bought a private car”. Likewise, Jamilah (P7) depended on taxis: “We were more dependent on taxis because my brother and I did not know how to use the bus”. For another reason, Nahla (P8) benefitted from her brother driving them before getting their own car: “After we got here, we did not have a car and my brother was in charge of our transportation until my husband bought a car”. Nevertheless, Arwa (P13) depended on driving herself since she was living alone: “I rely on myself because I live alone. I have my car and I drive myself”.

Few participants relied on public transportation while commuting in South Australia. Of those who did, two benefitted from previous experience having lived in another country and two needed some time until they become familiar. However, the majority instead preferred private transport being driven by their husbands, hiring taxis, or driving themselves most times. The variations across all situations whether using public or private transportations could be linked to the fact that public transportation in Saudi Arabia is not commonly used and women mostly rely on a family member or private driver when commuting (Al-Garawi & Kamargianni, 2022; Alshabibi, 2019). Hence, living in a different context allowed number of participants to learn to use public transportation and become independent when going to their universities or undertaking daily activities. Yet, it should be stated that this change of perception and behaviour was not easy for all, and some of them got lost or felt less privacy and this resulted in the preference of private mobility involving buying their own cars or hiring taxis. This finding, to some extent, aligned with previous research on Arab women students, particularly women from Saudi Arabia, which reported easy movements relied on the availability of different public transportation and greater convenience and freedom in overseas contexts including Australia (Binsahl, 2018; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

Furthermore, the current study confirms the strong impact of cultural norms on the participants' choices. Although accessibility to public transportation in South Australia was available, many Saudi women decided to use it less and preferred to be driven. In one way, this could indicate respect to the gendered role of the Saudi culture that men are responsible for caring for their women (Alhazmi, 2013). In another way, the conservative values and opinions can explain why many participants preferred private transportation. As stated earlier in sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2, the guardianship and gender-segregated practices encourage Saudi women to reduce contact and communication with non-related men. Thus, when being driven by their husbands or brothers they avoid situations that involve speaking or sitting next to non-related men and this protects their privacy.

The section above explained participants' experiences during their first stage transiting to South Australia. Four aspects identified and discussed by the majority of participants were: learning about the new destination, arranging for pick up on arrival, securing accommodation, and using transportation. Within each aspect, some participants reported an easy experience while settling in their host country, but others found they had to face challenges. The next section will delve further into the exploration of participants' living experiences after settlement.

6.3.2 Sub-theme: Second stage of transition

In this second stage, the fourteen Saudi women participants narrated how they have lived in South Australia and how it varied from Saudi Arabia in many aspects. The participants shared stories about (1) different social aspects between contexts, (2) making friendships, (3), being Muslim women: sense of recognition and harassment, and (4) experiencing homesickness.

1. Different social life aspects between contexts

One of the first topics that participants noted about their socio-cultural experience in the host context was the differences regarding several matters. From a general view, two participants reflected awareness on the differences which could justify the modification of some behaviours or perceptions at later stages to live in the new context. For instance, Hasnaa (P1) described her view as international student moving to live away from her home country:

I think that a person who moves to a new place to live, he/she must get used to the new way of life in all its aspects. I consider it mandatory for the student to learn from the beginning. I learnt about the system of living in Australia and stick to it since I study and live in their country.

Additionally, Lulu (P3) showed understanding of the differences across cultures and stated that her previous overseas living experience had greatly helped her in Australia: “It is impossible to have the same customs and culture in two different places. But according to my previous study experience in Canada, I had a perception of various cultures and traditions”. More specifically, almost all participants discussed a number of aspects they had to deal with differently from what they were used to, considering their new situation being international students in a new context. Aspects include finance and living standards, independence from family and freedom from commitments and cultural holidays.

Finance and living standards

Many participants commented on the differences of financial and living standards between their present experience as international students in South Australia and previous experience living in their home country.

From one viewpoint of their financial situation, three participants found a better situation after leaving their own society and becoming international students. To explain, Nora (P4)

noted that customs of traditional society, in both home and host contexts, have the power to affect financial needs. Nora (P4) described the differences:

There is a difference when I compare relations and society between here and Saudi Arabia. The biggest thing I have noticed in Saudi Arabia is social hypocrisy, over-hospitality, and relationships with friends. Here, the friendship and the way of hospitality varied, and the connection is great without cost. We learned from their living standards.

Dalia (P14) also expressed her present experience not needing to spend great amounts of money as she would do to greet family or friends back in Saudi Arabia:

After moving to study in Australia the financial needs varied. I used to spend a lot of money for family obligations and occasionally for friends' celebrations. However, the financial obligations became less because there were no more family or friends' events to celebrate.

Thus, those women felt better living in a different society in which relations with others were restricted to fewer people. Although the context of international students may require a good level of finance, the three participants initially did not report any difficulties. Rather, they reported good control in prioritizing different needs other than spending money on family or friends' relationships as a practiced custom of Saudi Arabian society. From another viewpoint, it was a difficult situation for those who had to take the responsibility of managing financial needs. First, before coming to Australia, three women were not used to being responsible for financial obligations. However, being the recipient of scholarship, they had to take that role and learn new skills. For illustration, Lulu (P3) stated:

Financial matters were not one of my interests because the house belongs to my father, so the bills like electricity and the internet were entirely my

father's job. I had nothing to do with it, but I learned how to deal with financial matters during the scholarship.

Farah (P11) similarly indicated that living overseas made her responsible and aware of the financial tasks that used to be done by her parents.

The responsibility brings a heavy burden that I had to do everything such as managing living expenses. I was not aware of it in Saudi Arabia, but I was shocked when I came here. I should be responsible for water bills, gas, electricity, rental household stuff. My parents were in charge of all these responsibilities, but it is on me now.

Nevertheless, moving across countries as international students entails a number of variations, not only about finance, but also about living standards. Seven participants compared their living standards in the home and host contexts. For one group, four women, Nora (P4), Warda (P6), Zara (P12) and Arwa (P13), indicated that they had similar situations of living in smaller properties and doing household chores by themselves. Thus, settling into a new living context in a different arrangement as international students was not a big difference. To represent this group, Arwa (P13) described: “As for the standard of living, it is almost the same in Saudi Arabia. I did not have a maid or a driver too. Also, for cooking and cleaning, I rely on myself too.”

In contrast, the other group of three participants, Latifah (P5), Mona (P10) and Dalia (P14), had a different living standard and because of that, when they settled in the new context, they reported positive developments. For example, Mona (P10) reported that different living standards made her develop personal skills.

The standard of living here is different since it is a small house and without a maid or driver. The complete responsibility is on me, so it is not as same as in Saudi Arabia. But this is a chance to live at a level other than what I am used to.

Similarly, Dalia (P14) also shared how the different lifestyle impacted her and her children positively “After living here for a while my children became responsible for their needs. I am thrilled that my children have acquired some skills such as self-learning and independence despite their young age”.

This aspect reflected variations of financial needs and living standards showing different views about being international students living in a different context. Most of the participants in the current research shared positive stories on how they benefited from the differences of financial needs and living standards, expressing it was easy and manageable to live in a different context. This finding contrasts with some literature (Gu et al., 2010; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019) which suggested that living in a different context as international students can be challenging, in most cases specifically around financial and living matters. Because all participants and their accompanying family members were fully sponsored by their scholarship, almost no challenge in the financial aspect was noted. In fact, the experience being an international student was valuable to many of them. Nevertheless, some participants of the current study showed a high level of independence and an ability to manage financial needs that were new responsibilities for them. Surprisingly, because these participants were the main students, they were forced to take on financial tasks typically considered a man’s responsibility in the Saudi Arabian culture. This confirms that Saudi women have the capability to adapt to living in new context where social tasks differ from their regular ones in their home country (Alhajjuj, 2015; Bar, 2017; Binsahl, 2018).

Independence from family and commitments

Another matter that five participants talked about was the impact of the strong communication with extended family and related commitments. The structure of society in Saudi Arabia seemed to reflect a strong connection with families and relevant members as one

of their cultural features (Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede, 2017). Nonetheless, such strong connections were reported to be a stress factor for a number of the women, and the living away from the family brought some measure of independence. From one perspective, two participants noted the different social relations within home and host contexts, referring to it being a better situation having less communication with relatives and friends while being in Australia. Miram (P2) stated:

I noticed a wide difference in relations with others. In Saudi Arabia, my accommodation is close to my family, and we have many family events. My mother always asks us to attend all occasions. However, the situation here is different and better.

Another example, given by Hasnaa (P1), noted the benefits of fewer social commitments in the new context.

Social life is better because there is no family relatives whom I should meet regularly. My friendships here are limited but if there is a visit, it could be once a month. While in Saudi Arabia, on the other side, I cannot skip family visits, events and traditions, we must stick to our relatives. This bond is stressful physically, mentally, and socially too, but compared to the situation during my study here, the mental health is better because the stress may only be for study's matters.

From another perspective, two participants commented on better control of the couple's and children's relationship as they were not being counselled directly by extended family members. Nora (P4) shared:

From my experience in studying overseas, I noticed that the relationship between couples improves a lot. There is an opportunity to live alone without interference from the parents or close members who may influence on the couple. I feel that I got to know my husband more.

Hadeel (P9) mentioned greater chance to care for her children:

Being here has given me an excellent opportunity to take care of my children, myself and my studies. I found that the family's bond allowed close members to be involved in raising my children and my role was limited but while being here alone, I had more time with my children.

Also, Zara (P12) expressed that living alone and away from family improved her independence in many personal skills.

I have a strong bond with my family. However, the difference now is that I am free and independent. I get to decide everything on my own which is different from Saudi Arabia because I used to decide things with my family there.

The above quotes show that living in a different context away from family was a valuable experience for several participants. Transitioning from one society to another gave the opportunity to develop new personal skills without pressure or guidance from close family members. This finding aligns with qualitative studies that examined the impact of studying abroad on the development of intercultural competence and personal growth of students who have studied in different countries (Althobaiti & Obeidat, 2020; Maharaja, 2018). Findings indicate that as international students joined overseas universities there is a high possibility of enhancing intercultural competence and personal development. Indeed, the five participants of the current study noted that they gained a better understanding of their home and host cultures, as well as cultural differences, increasing their own level of self-confidence, maturity and adaptability.

Cultural holidays

Regarding their cultural experience, participants were asked how they perceived and responded to the host culture. Their individual responses indicated that participants observed some variations relating to wider cultural beliefs and lifestyles of the host context. One aspect that participants highlighted was about perceiving, attending or ignoring cultural events during their transitional experience. From a general perspective, two participants valued the chance to be living in South Australia, the research context, and learning about Australian and other cultures. Mona (P10) stated:

The state is known as a state of festivals which celebrates the existence of various cultures such as Indian, Chinese and European cultures. When I came here, I met all the people from these cultures though I expected that I would only meet Australians. However, the openness and cultural intermingling that exists here is a pleasant and rich experience of several cultures in one place.

Likewise, another participant supported a previous view and stated that the Australian context and the society encourages the existence of many cultures and beliefs. Warda (P6) shared:

I came to Australia because it is a multicultural country, so I did not feel that I am a stranger. In fact, I find myself a part of their society. They generally support coexistence, acceptance and difference of all cultures believes and religions.

In addition, Wardah (P6) used her university context to provide her opinion on the openness to different cultures and stated: "For example, my university always organizes Eids carnivals for Muslims and other ones for different ethnicities of students, which is nice that all international students and even Australians participate and get to know about the culture of others". Despite the participants appreciating the experience of living in a context where all can celebrate their own beliefs, yet some had opposing opinions about attending or ignoring specific cultural

events which may be against their own beliefs. One group of three women were open and enjoyed engaging in different cultural events. Zara (P12) best reflected this view and shared:

I respect cultural differences. I believe that people cannot always agree on things, we have to disagree and that's what distinguish groups of people and national cultures even the religious practices differ. So, I like to be involved with cultural events and see how they react to their traditions and habits. It is an opportunity for me to know the culture here from different people since I am living and studying in a different country.

Arwa (P13) also enjoyed attending with her friends without thinking of religious values behind specific celebrations.

On cultural celebrations like Christmas which I do not care about it, it is ok for me to meet with classmates and celebrate because they know I live alone, and they care about me. In general, although I do not believe in the religious story behind such an event; I like to attend and enjoy just for curiosity.

In contrast, three participants respected the cultural events linked to religious beliefs, but refused to be part of them. Nahla (P8) best described the perspective and reflected:

I do not like participating in celebrations that are linked to their cultural and religious beliefs like Christmas. I am very conservative towards them. My religion obliges me to celebrate the main Eids only. On the other hand, I like to know different cultures across the world and the customs and traditions by reading about them. Yet, I refuse to participate in any non-Islamic occasion.

Furthermore, Nora (P4) commented:

The people here respect religious interests and traditions, such as their holidays or occasions. I see that they are interested in their culture, and they want others to share with them. However, I do not like to participate because I think it is for them, and we have our religious holidays as Muslims.

This aspect presented how the participants responded to the different cultural holidays occurring in the host context. Some of the Saudi women students had no issue engaging with the local cultural holidays, whereas others had a clear position not to take any part with respect to differing religious values and celebrations. Both positions indicated it presented no challenge while living and engaging with the host's cultural holidays, given their transition will not last forever. This is consistent with two of the four acculturation strategies namely separation, integration, assimilation, and marginalisation (Berry, 1997). Berry theorized two dimensions of acculturation approaches for sojourners, like international students, who come to live in a different cultural context: maintaining their ethnic identity and maintaining connections with host individuals and acting in the "local way" (Berry et al., 1989, p.203). Therefore, the Saudi women students could select to engage or disengage with the host values, following to the degree of maintaining their own value structure in the face of the host countries cultural values. According to the participants' quotes, it appeared that some selected to practice the separation strategy as they strongly intend and act to maintain their original cultural and religious values and avoid other cultural contacts. In contrast, a few participants chose to practice an integration strategy as they accepted the celebration of other cultural holidays and got involved with them freely.

Indeed, according to the participants' responses, the impact of their cultural and religious values can be sensed, to some extent. Participant responses implied an intense perception of the home and host cultural values being referred to as 'ours' and 'theirs'. As a result, although Saudi women students decided to study in South Australia, they selected to only engage with the culture temporarily during their stay to the extent that this allows the achievement of academic goal. Thus, they seemed to adapt their perspectives as "sojourners" (Russell et al., 2010), who temporarily live in another context and want only to adapt needed for essential survival. Saudi women students have grown up in their original context where they respect

religious values and celebrate them along with their other national events, and they do this differently depending on their tribe or regional costumes (Aldossry, 2015). But, since being in Australia, they came to realise the chance to reflect on their own perceptions. Thus, many of the participants' comments were based on the understanding of being a Muslim living in a different cultural context, and revealed different perceptions regarding interacting with, or alienating from, the others' cultural celebrations, especially when they represented a religious value. Further, the cultural differences in values became apparent when participants began comparing their own culture with that of the host country. This comparison emphasised the feeling of openness or prejudice to engage with the host culture.

2. Making friendship

Having to live away from family and known people initiates the need of Saudi international women students to make new friends in Australia. This was perceived from Farah's (P11) statement that could reflect other participants' views: "When I came here, I lost my connection with the family, so I had a motive to form relationships with people to meet and hang out with them in my free time". However, making friends in the Australian context did not work for many participants. The following quotes categorized two perceptions of ten participants. One group of seven women made friends with local Australians and other people in their neighbours. For example, the following quote typically reflected the experience of those women who commented on their situation of being able to make friends with local neighbours. Miram (P2) shared: "Here in Australia I made friends with people in the same neighbourhood, and we regularly meet with other locals near my house". Further, three women commented on their openness to making friends with others, regardless of their culture or religion; however, only one participant succeeded and two failed. Farah (P11) indicated: "I am open-minded, so I do not care if the person is not Muslim or an Arab. I like to get to know others and I made some friends". In contrast, Hasnaa (P1), stated: "I met a few locals. However, I did not have any luck

in making friends”. Nora (P4) also wanted to engage more with locals, but she felt unwelcomed in a friendship: “I like making new friends and I go and meet new people. However, people in here are cautious and they mostly do not like talking to others”.

Opposite to the first group, other participants had specific conditions pertaining to the religion, background or gender of potential friends. To illustrate, Lulu (P3) made friends only with the Muslim women:

I spent four years in Australia, but I did not make friends or get to know the local neighbours around or me... I just had a few relations with Muslim women who I meet in the mosque during Friday, Ramadan or Eid prayers.

Similarly, Nahla (P8) explained that she spent her time socializing only with the Saudi families “As for friends, I met Saudi families and we have constant visits from time to time, but no locals”. Similarly, Dalia (P14) commented on her friendships at the university context and stated her intention of making friends only with females. She stated: “I got to know other students at the university who come from different nationalities, but I choose to be friends only with girls regardless of religion”.

The section above described the experience of Saudi women students making friends and having social interactions while living in South Australia. The different responses presented reflect two perceptions: being open to all people or having specific preferences when forming relationships with others. Only a few initiatives resulted in good friendships with locals from the closer community; the others failed. Some participants tried to approach other people to establish informal friendships, however, the expectation of easily forming friendships with locals did not match the reality. This finding of the difficulty making friends with locals resonates with previous studies reporting international students’ disappointment in this matter (Cathcart et al., 2006; Williams & Johnson, 2011).

Nevertheless, the findings reported in this section further justify the perception of some participants who had clear conditions of selecting and making friends with ‘women only’ of similar backgrounds and faith. By identifying these three conditions, the present study adds new knowledge to the published research examining the influence of gender-segregation on Saudi women’s transition experience in overseas contexts (e.g., Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013; Sandekian et al., 2015). The identified conditions inherited in the Saudi Arabian culture result in participants being raised to stick to religious teachings, cultural norms and always behave in ways that represent Islam.

3. Being Muslim women: sense of recognition and harassment

A number of participants acknowledged that they felt recognition and great understanding that they are unique being Muslim women in South Australia. An example of the recognition was seen in public prints using a picture of a Muslim woman wearing hijab. This was enormously appreciated by Miram (P2):

I have noticed that they put a picture of a woman who wears hijab in social publications, which means that there is an understanding of the hijab. It also represents appreciation and respect for the Muslim woman who chooses to wear it even in a country or in a place that does not recognize Islam as a religious identity for all.

Another example shared by Lulu (P3) and Dalia (P14) stated a similar story when approached by some children who questioned the abaya and niqab. Dalia (P14) informed:

Once I felt embarrassed when children were afraid of my dress in a playground. They were saying this is a ninja and ran away. But soon after that, I was happy seeing some parents explaining to their children that this dress is a religious symbol and worn by Muslim women.

From a different perspective, Lulu (P3) was welcomed along with other Saudi women who wanted to practice swimming in a private and women-only space.

I learned swimming when I found an opportunity at the local gym. They accepted to arrange with a coach at a specific time without males, and all the employees were women. I thank their cooperation and understanding of my request and the group of other Saudi girls.

Perceiving respect and recognition encouraged the fourteen participants to choose their preferred style of dress whether wearing, changing, or taking off the hijab or abaya and niqab, believing that it would not change their identity as Muslim women. That being noted, eight participants continued to wear hijab or abaya and niqab as they used to in Saudi Arabia. The following quotes best reflected this view. Hadeel (P9) stated:

I treat it as a foundation and order from Allah that I must wear it religiously. But the way of dressing and wearing it is personal and based on individual opinions and experiences. Each one decides based on what she goes through.

Similarly, Hasnaa (P1) added:

I choose to wear the abaya and niqab whether in my country or any other country; I cannot do something in my country and disagree with it somewhere else. Frankly, I feel confident and comfortable because as a Muslim, I love to practice religious rituals and adherence to them anywhere.

In contrast, four participants made some changes to the way they dressed after arriving in Australia for various reasons. Two participants chose to put the hijab on after living for a while in Australia and feeling accepted by society. They felt wearing the hijab would represent their religious identity. For illustration, Mona (P10) noted:

Honestly when I came to study, I was not wearing the hijab for about six months. After that, I felt that I should wear it... I found that the hijab is a

religious and cultural identity such as Chinese or Hindi woman when she wears her country's dress. All of them feel proud that they are committed to wearing their traditional clothes, so I also love wearing the hijab and representing my country, which is the country of Islam and reflects my religion while I am studying abroad.

Wardah (P6) had a sequence of changes to her dressing style responding to the different academic environments.

When I arrived, I used to wear the abaya and a headscarf to cover my hair but without niqab, however, I was not comfortable, especially in public places and on the bus, it was eye-catching. Later, I found no difference whether I wear the abaya or not, so I decided to change the way of my hijab based on the place and my understanding of its principles. My classes are at laboratories and the movement is supposed to be faster and easier. I decided to wear hijab that covers my hair and loose clothes and I left abaya... It remains a religious practice that I will not give up even if I wear it differently.

Arwa (P13), in contrast, took off the hijab to avoid any negative situations: “My previous experience in Britain played a significant role in my decision regarding not wearing hijab... when I decided to study in Australia, I chose to be more comfortable in another community without wearing the hijab”. However, although the statements above reported how society and people in South Australia respectfully perceived Muslim women, based on participants’ responses, there were several stories of participants reporting indirect or direct harassment while being in public places. In detail, three participants who used to put on hijab and wear loose clothes noted uncomfortable stares in public places. For instance, Miram (P2) stated: “Although I have not encountered any attitude that is racist or discriminatory against me, there is often a look of astonishment and wonder or a look of dissatisfaction, and this is hard for me”.

Unfortunately, the other four participants who used to wear abaya and niqab advised they were harassed directly in public places because of their niqab. For example, Lulu (P3) stated:

I experienced three situations where I was discriminated because of my niqab. The worst case happened to me while I was shopping in a big mall and an old woman came to me taking my niqab off my face and said: you should not be in our country if you want to wear this thing on your face, go back to your country.

Jamilah (P7) also shared similar situations after which she decided to take the niqab off:

When I was wearing the niqab, once a woman in the market told me to go out and leave the country. And another situation that an old man in the street raised the stick on me saying: you are a terrorist! Stay away from me! I got very upset about these two situations, and it was the reason that I took the niqab off.

Although most participants were raised to cover themselves as a practice of their religion and representation of their authentic culture, one consideration should be noted. That is, Saudi women do not form a single homogeneous group, and their public, as well as private, practices are shaped by their individual variations in terms of the locations from which they originate and the world views to which they subscribe (Quamar, 2016). Therefore, coming from an Islamic home context may explain the participants' diversity in either keeping up, changing or discarding their cultural dress style, even if experiencing indirect or direct harassment while living in a different environment.

The reported stories indicated two contrasting experiences narrated by participants while wearing various dress styles in South Australian public places. On the one hand, several Saudi women felt a great sense of respect to their faith and practice when wearing hijab or abaya and niqab, and this reflected the multicultural government initiatives and values welcoming minor

cultures to peacefully live on Australian lands (Markus, 2018). Indeed, this expectation of Australia's welcoming and support for different cultures was one of the pull factors that encouraged many international students, as the current study participants identified, to select it from other nations (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). However, on the other hand, encounters of individual harassment were identified by a small number of participants in the current study which could indicate little acceptance or refusal by people in Australian society toward the dressing choices of Muslim women. This sentiment was expressed frequently by those affected participants, throughout the interviews, linking it to the notion of security in terms of religious and cultural differences and how moving to an unfamiliar context is likely to have impacted their sense and level of security as international students (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008). This finding around the contradictory feelings of Saudi Muslim women students in South Australia resonates with their unique cultural and religious background. Participants of the present study, being Saudi and Muslim women, are embedded within, and affected by, a global system of religious, racial, cultural relations and current events, particularly with respect to the rise of 'Islamophobia' (Binsahl, 2018). Therefore, such concern was found to affect their choice of Australia as the destination over other countries, since it suggested far fewer Islamophobic incidents and provided them with a sense of security and safety, as Shepherd and Rane (2012) have reported.

4. Experiencing homesickness

All fourteen participants shared different the emotional experiences they felt through specific times living abroad and being away from their families. Ramadan time and Eid celebration were frequently mentioned occasions when all participants missed their families' and home's spiritual practices and atmospheres. To illustrate such an experience, Latifah's (P5) statement reflected her own and other participants' feelings during specific and recurring events.

The time of Eid and family events during the overseas journey become depressing. I think that these are the hardest times for me and other students. I wish to be with my family regardless of the presence of many people here.

Hadeel (P9) similarly added:

When it is the time to celebrate my own religious or cultural occasion, I celebrate Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha but in a small and simple way because it cannot be made as in Saudi Arabia with family members and friends. The spirit is different.

Furthermore, Nahla (P8) expressed her emotional difficulty celebrating without joining the family: "I have to say, it does not replace celebrating and meeting parents and family members. On such occasions I feel sad, homesick and miss the family bond".

However, participants interestingly reported how they did not engage with such emotional sadness during these religious and cultural events. They identified different ways to overcome the homesickness encounters. First, five participants reported that they usually attended the mosque to feel the Islamic unity with other Muslims. For example, Hasnaa (P1) said: "Every time a religious event passes, I feel sad to be alone and I went to the mosque in Ramadan to pray with others". Also, Dalia (P14) validated the same view and practice: "On Eids, I like to create vibes of celebrations and show joy because it is a symbol of religion. I make sure to attend the mosque with other Muslims and bring my children along".

Additionally, three other participants noted they liked to be in regular contact with their own families on such specific occasions. For instance, Miram (P2) described: "In Eid, I cheer up my children and myself, we keep in touch with the parents and share the joy via social media at the same time". Four other participants stated that they joined the Saudi club gatherings to celebrate and feel they were with same cultural group. The Saudi association in South Australia

usually hosts special events for Saudi members. This was stated by Arwa (P13) describing her Eid celebrations before and after joining the Saudi association's gatherings.

I still remember my first time of Eid Aladha; I was alone, and I did not know friends at the time, so I stayed at university as if it was a typical day. Then, I met friends from Saudi Arabia and became a member of the association and we used to organize and celebrate Eids or other cultural events together.

Likewise, Zara (P12) stated: "On Islamic events like Ramadan and Eids I always enjoy it here with friends at Saudi club where we meet all together and celebrate in a private party even with friends from other Gulf States".

While examining the experience of homesickness as reported by the participants in the current study, one can note that no matter how they made efforts to enjoy the time with members of same religion or culture, being away from family and celebrating important religious or cultural events felt difficult for many Saudi women students in South Australia. This finding is supported by the argument that continuity of cultural and religious practices is very important for Muslims living in the diaspora (Zine, 2001). In effect, while participants were living in the host context, they missed their own religious celebrations, familial and cultural practices which inspired their multiple identities as Muslim and Saudi women. As a result, they experienced homesickness when missing out on times of social and spiritual meetings, and tried different ways to control these feelings. Moreover, participants commented on the advantage of developing good links with other members who supported their Islamic and cultural identities. Saudi women overcame sadness and homesickness due to feeling alone during Eids and Ramadan by gathering with Muslims of other cultures, communicating with their own families and fellow students from the same country. This may reflect the strong impact of collectivism as a cultural feature of the Saudi culture. The collectivist dimension argues that people like families and close communities in Saudi Arabia are considered as

important life-long members (I. Hofstede, 2017). This explains the participants' homesickness while living overseas and being away from their family and known community. Thus, they tried to form new connections with people of the same culture or religion to celebrate their religious and cultural events. This echoes the literature on international students' preference of inclusion with their cultural community rather than the host's ones (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Sherry et al., 2010; Zhou & Zhang, 2014), and the literature on Saudi women's overseas limited social interactions (e.g., Altamimi, 2014; Bar, 2017; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Yaghi, 2019).

6.3.3 Summary of socio-cultural experience

The two main sub-themes reported socio-cultural experiences of Saudi women students in South Australia in two stages. The first stage described the participants' preparation for the travel before and after arrival. The second stage reported the participants' views on aspects they found different to their original context and interaction with locals and others to form connections and friendships. In addition, it described participants' encountered experiences of recognition and harassment as Muslim women, as well as feeling homesickness due to being away from their families. Overall, participants reflected on the difficulty of broader sociocultural adjustment in the Australian context. Strong impacts of cultural and religious values, and the lack of sociocultural competence could be argued to hinder the involvement of Saudi women with the Australian socio-cultural context.

6.4 Conclusion of chapter

This chapter reports the findings on the second research question exploring the transitional experience of Saudi women as international students in South Australia. The transition has been identified as the experience of attending university in an academic context and involving society and culture. Transitioning to the Australian academic and socio-cultural contexts was expected to be challenging due to the enormous variations between home and

host countries. However, participants revealed positive perceptions, to some extent, about their own experience. Regarding the academic experience, Saudi women reported difficulties around being students in a different context, engaging with mixed-gender academic structures, meeting the required English level and getting used to different assessments, only at the early stage of their studies. In addition, they reported a substantial understanding of their cultural and religious practices was perceived by many educators and universities, respecting their preference to work in groups with male or female classmates, different styles of dressing and offering appropriate facilities for prayers.

Nevertheless, managing multiple roles was the only difficulty that lasted for the whole duration of study given the fact that more than half of participants came with their children. Behaving as a wife, mother and student without compromising the roles or expectations of either one is a great dilemma for student mothers. Hence, being in multiple roles had its own burden for many Saudi women participated in this study as they had to increase their control over situations in order to fulfill their multiple tasks as mother, student, housewife all at the same time attending the new academic context in Australian universities.

Similarly, within the socio-cultural experience, participants identified a number of variations around the practices and norms of the Australian context and compared it to the Saudi Arabian settings when describing their thoughts. In their overall engagement with Australian society and culture, Saudi women noted positive and negative perceptions in most situations. Although they enjoyed the new settings of feeling independence from cultural practices, like regular communications with extended families and being respected as Muslim women, they in contrast had encountered challenges in other matters. Participants reported discrimination stories in public places which happened to those who wore abaya and niqab, a lack of friendship out of their cultural circle, and lastly homesickness - missing their families in specific events. The next chapter will report the findings of factors and strategies

participants used to adjust and acculturate with academic and socio-cultural contexts in South Australia.

Chapter 7: Findings and discussion: Supporting Factors and Acculturation Strategies

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the supporting factors and acculturation strategies used by participants to overcome challenges encountered in the host academic and socio-cultural contexts as identified in previous chapter. The chapter responds to the third research question: What supporting factors in the academic and socio-cultural contexts helped Saudi women in their transition experience?

There are three main themes in this chapter: the first theme presents supporting factors that helped participants to overcome difficulties and engage with the educational settings, the second theme reports supporting factors which assist participants to better settle and live in the societal context, the third theme identifies evaluative opinions about the transition experience of Saudi women students after having studied and lived in South Australia for some time. Figure 11 below shows the organization of the main themes and sub-themes as presented through this chapter.

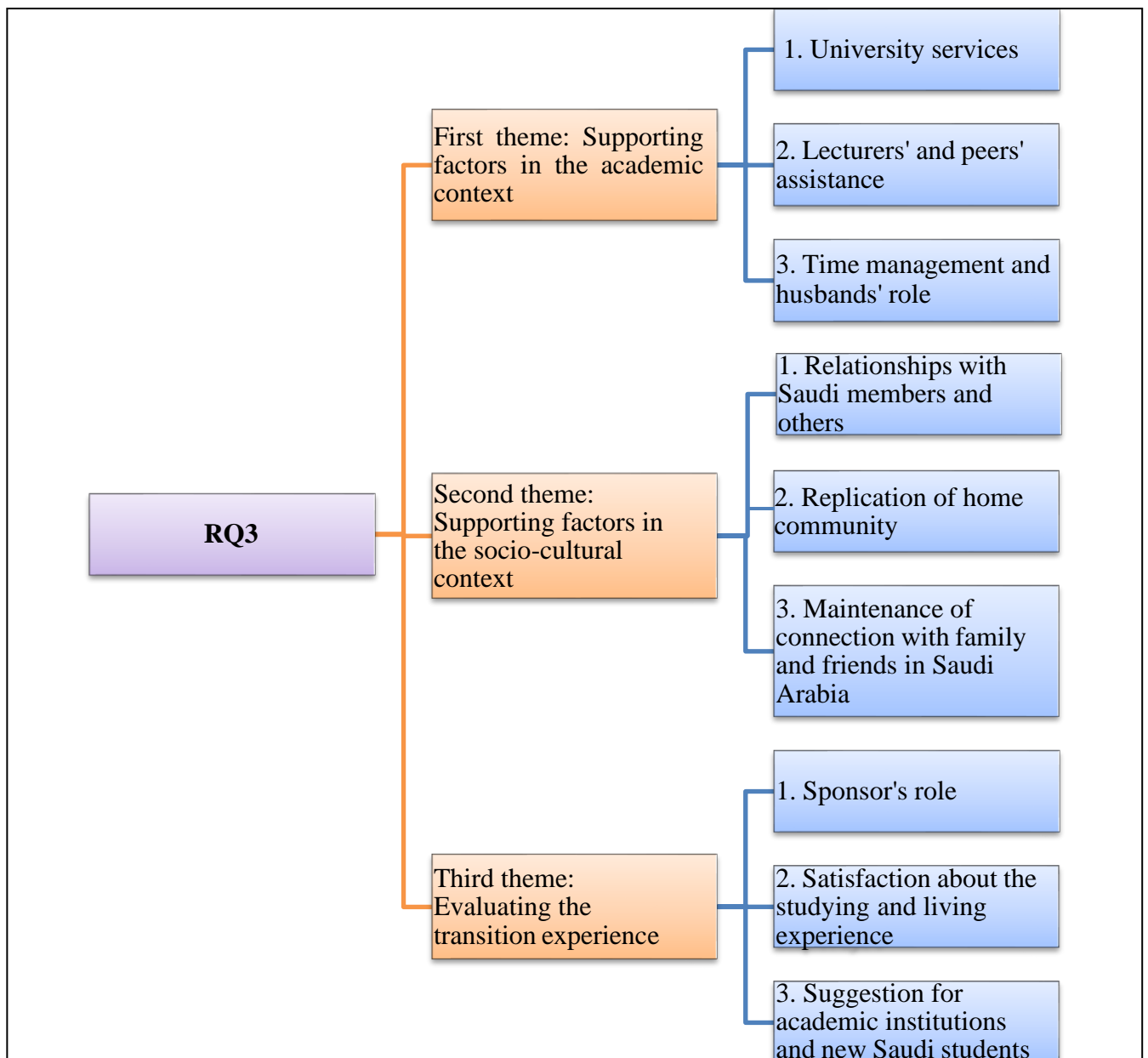


Figure 11. Themes answering RQ3

7.2 First theme: Supporting factors in the academic context

Theme one in the previous chapter reported participants' experiences of difficulties relating to unfamiliar educational settings and learning practices within the Australian higher education context. Here we look at Saudi women students' responses to seeking various supporting means to help them overcome such difficulties and adjust to the

Australian university environment. This theme comprises three supporting factors that participants cited including: (1) university services, (2) lecturers' and peers' assistance, and (3) time management and husbands' support.

1. University services

Seven of the fourteen participants reported the benefits they gained and support they received from one or more of their various university services. The participants became aware of their university services through attending orientation at the beginning of their programs in addition to reading the designated pages for international students on the university websites. To illustrate, Wardah (P6) who was doing a Master's course noted: "I attended the orientation. It was useful and I learnt about international students' services". Likewise, Hasnaa (P1) affirmed: "There are official services offered by the university to help new students settle at the beginning of arrival. Also, lots of information about all the needs of international students are available on websites". Moreover, Nahla (P8), a PhD student, elaborated:

One of the advantages of the university is that all information is explained and provided on the university's website. After arriving here, I attended orientation, everything was clarified. I become aware of facilities for international students like library services, writing, IT, and math centres.

One important fact to note here is that the participants who benefitted from university services had started their degree programs after they met the required English level. Therefore, they were able to understand and learn the most from the orientation sessions. However, one participant had the opposite, negative experience in orientation as her poorer English language proficiency was a barrier to fully utilizing the services. Jamilah (P7) explained: "When I attended orientation at the beginning of my study many services were

explained but the language was difficult for me to understand. So, I have not benefited anything from the orientation”.

Nevertheless, the department of international students offered a range of academic and other services and was frequently mentioned by participants. Specifically, the academic centre was mostly visited by three participants to help them check their assignments. Mona (P10) explained: “I benefitted from the international students’ services and the academic advisor used to check my written assignments, identify mistakes, and suggest improvements”. Another participant, Lulu (P3) said: “I used to meet with a tutor from the department of international students to clarify some requirements while working on major assignments”. In addition, Latifah (P5), valued the availability of various members within the international department helping her in a number of issues beside the academic ones. She indicated:

The department of international students at the university was very helpful. I used to communicate with them, and they responded to every question, even issues other than studying, such as finding a kindergarten and reserving a place for my child.

Several studies on international students’ experiences highlighted that transitioning to the university settings can be a crucial stage (Sherry et al., 2010; Sümer et al., 2008). To make this transitional stage easier for international students, many universities offer a variety of services like counselling, career and employment information, social activities and supporting academic centres to help their students (Sidoryn & Slade, 2008). In the current study, the quotes above revealed two views from the participants concerning their university’s services and how they used them for support. While seven of the participants identified their benefits came from either attending the orientation or availing themselves of academic services from the international student support, one participant did not. The level

of English language proficiency was found to influence the comprehension of advertised services, a finding confirmed in previous studies in which scholars argued that the level of English comprehension may restrict effective communication between students and the university services (Owens & Loomes, 2010; Sawir, 2005). Therefore, Australian universities and English language centres should consider offering simplified or translated presentations in more than one language targeting the new international students whose English language is basic, to ensure they are better informed about the university and able to access its services.

Furthermore, Andrade (2006) argued that the adjustment in the academic settings is referred to as the involving of the international students themselves in their academic environment. In effect, the participants in the present study wanted to access the academic support services provided by the department of international students to make themselves more engaged with the educational experience. To explain, in the previous chapter the participants identified their specific difficulties resulting from English academic skills and assessment tasks in their courses. Saudi women being students in a new educational context were particularly concerned with those academic challenges in comparison to local students who could be familiar with the English language skills and assignments. Therefore, the participants of this study needed to master their English language skills and meet the requirements of their assessments by attending the academic centre within their universities. This finding was similarly reported by Roberts et al. (2015) who examined international students' views of university support services in Australia. International students in Robert et al.'s study, as well as those of the current study, reported challenges mostly with their academic skills including writing and greater engagement with the academic tertiary context. Thus, they had a significant need for university academic support services over other support services (Roberts et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, accessing the academic centre of the university services was one of the factors that led to the adjustment of Saudi women in the academic context. Seeking help from university academic services showed that over time, participants engaged to a greater extent with their Australian classroom context. With experience, participants became less hesitant to voice their academic challenges and ask for guidance. Their engagement exhibited clear evidence of the assimilation strategy leading to acculturation into the Australian academic culture. Justifying the implication, this strategy is explained based on the acculturation strategies model by Berry (1997).

Assimilation as one of the four acculturation strategies being defined as the individual choosing to forego maintaining their home culture's values and instead seeking daily interaction with the new and dominant community. At the beginning of their university study, the participants' behaviours, such as seeking advice and support from the academic centre, indicated the participants' active engagement and inner desire to become a member of their university context. The Saudi women students abandoned their original culture which encourages attending only gender-segregated places, and in contrast they sought help from the university services through attendance of orientation sessions and frequent visits to the academic service centre which were mixed gender locations. The Saudi women students in this case viewed themselves as the local or other international students, without paying attention to their original culture. Thereafter, the participants who proved to benefit from the university services and international students' services were found to adopt values of their host academic culture and relaxed their upholding of values of their home educational culture by selecting to engage with members of the host university. This finding confirmed the conclusion of Alsahafi and Shin (2017), that use of available sources and asking for help were two sources that helped Saudi students in Australia to overcome educational difficulties.

2. Lecturers' and peers' assistance

In academic and general matters other than needing to use a specific service from the academic support centre, participants sought informal help within the classroom level. Nine participants noted the valuable and immediate help of their lecturers, as well as their peers, as a factor that aided them in their courses. To explain, Wardah (P6) described: "Lecturers were first people who I used to ask for help. There was a specific time for this at the end of the class". Mona (P10) added that besides asking her lecturers she used to communicate through available online tools. She stated: "If I have a question, I ask about it at the same time by using online discussion forums or asking the lecturer". Similarly, Lulu (P3) commented on the cooperation of her classmates when working on shared projects: "I also asked for my classmates' help. We often had discussion meetings during the time we worked on group projects".

From another view, five participants noted the support of Saudi women peers who attended the same university or had done similar subjects previously. Two Master's students referred to the help of their Saudi women peers who attended the same course or the same university when learning about enrolments and submissions. To clarify, Hasnaa (P1) said: "I always asked friends who had previously studied at the same university, and they helped me to select courses, lectures, and overcome the difficulties of study". Equally, Wardah (P6) stated: "When I started studying at the university, I needed to get to know Saudi friends at the same university, so they could explain to me how to enrol in courses, how to submit assignments and other academic procedures". Moreover, Dalia (P14) extended the same support from Saudi women students:

The communication was continuous with my Saudi friends because we study at the same university and some friends were studying at the same course, so

we had a connection in the class. Sometimes after class, we studied together before exam sessions.

Therefore, the presence of cultural peers in the cohort was found to support better academic adjustment. As Hadeel (P9) described: “Having Saudi women students is a motive for me. It motivates me to complete my studies. We understand each other, and our relationship is strong because we share the same experience”.

Examining the role of lecturers and peers assisting Saudi women in their classrooms suggested an interesting cultural fact. Only two participants indicated their communication with lecturers to seek help might have reflected the cultural orientation of Saudi Arabians tending to place teachers in higher power distance (G. Hofstede, 1983; I. Hofstede, 2017). Thereafter, because participants perceived their lecturers in a higher position, some of them did not ask for help and preferred to seek assistance from their classmates. However, while it was important for the participants to fit into their classroom and clarify some academic tasks or processes, they felt less comfortable in fully interacting with other students. Therefore, they were in a constant communication with Saudi women students who knew about the university and shared the same experience.

From one viewpoint, this highlighted the impact of gender-segregated education in Saudi Arabia leading participants to feel comfortable seeking the help of their peers from the same gender and culture. Having completed their primary and higher education in such a segregated academic culture, it is likely it will influence participants to practice their original culture showing more open engagement with females. From a contrasting viewpoint, this preference to seek help from Saudi women peers may be interpreted as a resistance to an acculturation strategy. Separation is practiced when individuals place value on the home culture only, and avoid the new and dominant culture (Berry, 1997). With this strategy, individuals tend to reflect high level connection with the home culture and a low

level connecting with the host culture (Berry, 1997). In this study, the finding replicated this strategy because participants insisted on continuing to practice their home cultural values and communicated freely with other Saudi women students who studied in the same university. Chapter 2 explained that the traditional culture of Saudi Arabia encourages limited communication with foreign males thus, those participants were observing their cultural values when being away from their university and classrooms environment. Thereafter, when they needed help in tasks like course enrolments, assignment submission processes or studying for exams, the preference was to communicate with Saudi women.

3. Time management and husbands' support

In the previous chapter, one aspect identified the challenging situation that Saudi women encountered being wives, mothers, and students in South Australia. Thus, time management and personal strategies were two implemented skills that helped ten participants to navigate their multiple roles. For three participants, identifying tasks and setting dates seemed an efficient method to perform well. Mona (P10), a Master's student married with no children, stated:

To overcome difficulties while studying, I relied on making a schedule, including all the due dates for exams and assignments. Hard work is the key to success, so I paid attention to my study in accordance with my other duties.

Similarly, Arwa (P13), a PhD student married with no children, described her strategy:

I use the university's academic calendar to determine the required milestones for my PhD degree. Also, I benefited from time management and task listing to organize study time and other personal matters. I usually study from 9 am to 5 pm and try to accomplish what is required according to the plan of the day.

These participants reflected a level of an intrinsic motivation using time management to meet their academic and personal demands and not be hindered by the associated needs of their multiple roles. In addition, as noted in the previous chapter, several participant mothers had greater difficulty in balancing their multiple roles. Eight out of ten participants who were accompanied by their husbands and children identified and appreciated the boundless support their husbands offered. Without their husbands' support, especially in caring for children and house chores, the participants indicated their studies would be very challenging. To describe the help they received, a couple of women relied on their husbands to look after children while they attended their classes. Nora (P4), a mother of one child, commented: "My husband helps me with my child and takes care of him when I am at university". Likewise, Hadeel (P9), a mother of four children, noted: "My husband helps me to take care of the kids when I study". Not only caring for children, but also teaching them. This response was shared by Nahla (P8) as: "he helps me with teaching children". In addition, Mona (P10) stated: "My husband here helped me in many things. He is supportive at all levels".

This aspect presented the participants' means of support in their academic experience managing their own time to balance all duties and their husbands' supporting role. The Saudi women students' comments expressed that they had a strong willingness to overcome difficulties resulting from being students and wives or mothers. Being in multiple roles (mother, spouse, and student) in the absence of typical supporting means, such as the extended families, could place great time demands that would threaten the participants' academic results. However, the participants of this study showed the determination to achieve their goals and earn their degrees by utilizing practices for managing their time and setting tasks. The Saudi women students' recognition of their difficult experience contributed positively to development of the regulation of studying strategies and balancing duties. As a result of committing to time management strategies, students increased their positive views of their

greater ability to influence academic results through greater effort (Pintrich, 2003). Indeed, the Saudi women were able to achieve their desired academic goals as will be discussed next in the third theme.

In addition to practical time management, the husbands' role cannot be ignored. It was apparent from the participants' quotes that they received emotional and physical support from their husbands for looking after the children, which allowed more time for them to attend their classes or complete their assignments. It was assumed that Saudi men might not change their gendered role and stay home with the children while their wives studied long hours. However, the husbands proved they were very supportive, accepting a change to their gendered role in the Saudi Arabian context. In their home cultural context, they cared about covering the financial needs, but after accompanying their wives to Australia, they offered to help by looking after the children or doing household chores while their wives studied. This finding is in line with several studies on the experience of Saudi women students overseas (Al-Qahtani, 2021; Alhajjuj, 2016; Alqahtani & Pfeffer, 2017) describing how Saudi husbands changed their roles by taking on some responsibilities that traditionally were tied to women and offering their wives more time for their academic tasks and parenting duties.

7.2.1 Summary of supporting factors in the academic context

In summary, three supporting factors have been identified that assist Saudi women students in the academic context. The supporting factors are: (1) university services, (2) lecturers' and peers' assistance, and (3) time management and husbands' support. In these factors, acculturation strategies including assimilation and separation were evident. Assimilation was noted in the first stage when participants needed to become members of their university settings by proving that they meet the standards of assessments. Separation was practiced in the following stage when participants sought assistance from their Saudi student

cohort for advice on general academic processes. The following theme will present the supporting factors used by participants in their socio-cultural experience.

7.3 Second theme: Supporting factors in the socio-cultural context

Theme two in the previous chapter referred to the key socio-cultural differences and challenges faced by Saudi women students. Their social relationships seemed to be somehow limited, as was their adjustment to several cultural values of the host context. In more than one aspect, participants showed an understanding and awareness of the existence of social and cultural differences. Therefore, they responded to the differences by identifying suitable supporting factors for meeting their social or cultural needs as Saudi women students living away from their home country. Three aspects were identified: (1) relationships with Saudi members and others, (2) replication of home community, and (3) maintenance of connection with family and friends in Saudi Arabia.

1. Relationships with Saudi members and others

The second theme in the previous chapter concerned the participants' failure to integrate socially in the local context, which resulted in feelings of social isolation. It was explained that societal practices in both Saudi Arabian and Australian contexts differ greatly. Thereafter, coming from a strongly connected community in Saudi Arabia to live separately as an international student in Australia, this may have impacted the participants' initiatives to form new relations. To clarify the situation, two women described themselves as being socially active with their close community back in Saudi Arabia and that they felt alone living in the new context. Accordingly, they needed to formulate new friendships with co-nationals to help overcome loneliness. Dalia (P14) explained her social life in both countries to identify the differences between home and host countries.

In Saudi Arabia, my social life is different because I am social. So, when I came here, I faced the problem of loneliness and was depressed for some time because I moved away from my family and friends. After a while, I made a new relationship with a friend from my country. She lives in the same neighbourhood close to me, so we started communicating with each other in the new community in South Australia.

Likewise, Wardah (P6) explained how meeting with other Saudi women replicated the feelings of being at home country. She stated:

When I arrived here, I thought that my goal was only to study and no need to get to know friends, but I started to feel lonely after a while. So, I started to make friends with Saudi girls. It feels similar to our life in Saudi Arabia. Now, I feel much better because of my friends. My friends here are studying in different disciplines, and are from different cities in Saudi Arabia, but studying overseas has brought us together.

Therefore, developing social relationships and socialising with other Saudi women in South Australia offered participants the opportunity to live in a comfortable socio-cultural environment, yet it does not solve the local friendship problem. The established friendships seemed to help participants develop new social routines when they agreed to meet regularly, for example, as experienced by Nora (P4) and Nahla (P8). Nora (P4) stated: "I spend my time here with Saudi friends and we meet continuously during the week. We have a strong relationship".

It is noticeable that those participants preferred to interact with Saudi women friends. The preference could be justified based on the expectation that new friends share the same social values, as expressed by Arwa (P13). She stated: "My relationships with others are either classmates in the university or students' clubs. But, because social relations here are different from Saudi ties, it is better to be with Saudi girls than other nationalities". Nevertheless, the expectation was that sharing the same background and values did not necessarily lead to strong

friendships. Three women explained that their relationships with some Saudi women was limited. For instance, Hadeel (P9) said: “My friends are mostly Saudis and we all study here. So, our relations are in terms of class only”. Choosing to limit the friendship was explained from the perspective that such relations might affect the main goal of study. In this regard Mona (P10) identified: “My relationships are limited. The reason is that my studies take most of my time and I do not like to interact and get to know people. Even I have not participated in their gatherings”.

While the above responses informed individual opinions regarding the willingness to establish new relationships with other people, including those of the same cohort, two participants reflected great examples of engagement with people in their local society. They expressed their gratitude to the South Australian context hosting them as international students and wanted to give back to the society by offering volunteer services. First, Lulu (P3) used to visit the local medical centre and donate blood on a regular basis. She mentioned: “I used to donate blood every three months; it was a humanitarian service to the society I live in”. Also, Zara (P12) joined the social club in her university and, after their approval, she was able to establish an accredited volunteering group (name withheld) to help refugees who moved to South Australia. Zara commented:

I established a group and sought the supervision and approval from my university. The university’s approval for my group made things easier in terms of issuing a formal clearance to organize events and when dealing with organizations... This group serves immigrants and refugees and is not involved in any religious or intellectual thoughts. On the contrary, we ensure the right to liberty and accept different views... Most of the volunteers are from Gulf States such as Oman, UAE, and Saudi Arabia and we welcome volunteers from any country. Our main goal is to leave a mark in South Australia, especially by Gulf States’ students as well as to represent and

reflect a great image of our nationalities. So, we have a role in helping the community we live in during studying.

When the home and host culture are different, social stress becomes a big challenge (Berry, 1997; Thomson et al., 2006). Loneliness is one of the frequently reported social challenges encountered by international students and often results from being away from the known environment and living in an unfamiliar one (Sawir et al., 2008). In this present study, the participants moved from Saudi Arabia as international students and were temporarily living in South Australia, thus they felt socially and culturally alone. Such stresses were confirmed by participants' responses that it was harder at the beginning after their arrival, but over time they began to identify appropriate support within the new culture. Establishing relationships with Saudi members in the new Australian context was noted as a supporting factor evidenced among many participants. This finding confirmed previous studies with similar cohorts of participants studying overseas (Alsaifi & Shin, 2017; Bar, 2017; Yaghi, 2019).

This finding also highlighted the impact of the cultural orientation derived from a shared nationality subgroup, which buffers the challenges faced from the new, unfamiliar cultural context. Choosing to interact mostly with co-nationality members suggests that maintaining some cultural traditions and social practices can lead to a sense of belonging and validation in the foreign country. The social interaction with members of the same background was found to help Saudi women overcome loneliness and increase their well-being, which has been similarly discussed in the literature (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Rienties & Nolan, 2014).

In addition, cultural practices, including gender segregation in the Saudi Arabian context, may act to limit the extent to which participants would involve themselves with others outside of their own cultural group. Many of the responses referred to their friendships with women, implying limited interaction outside co-national individuals, as a means to maintain contact

with the original culture and its practices. Most comments from participants suggest such separation as an acculturation strategy in which individuals placed value on the home culture only and avoided contact with the new and dominant culture (Berry, 1997). The fact that all of the participants planned to return to Saudi Arabia once they finished their study may explain the preference noted by participants for maintaining a separation between themselves and the Australian society, rather than fully embracing acculturation strategies. Saudi women students did not consider behaving or thinking in the same way as the host society as being essential for their future. Understanding the host society and limiting interaction to a certain extent was deemed appropriate and satisfactory for their goals while they were temporarily studying and living in South Australia.

In contrast, social interaction outside of group members was shown via volunteering in society aside from forming relationships with the same cohort. Two participants engaged voluntarily to help people in the society by offering medical and social services for locals. Regular visits and contacts with local people increased their opportunities for social interactions, as well as extending professional knowledge. The fact that many of the women came with their children might explain the reason for their choice to limit interaction with others. Being busy studying and caring for children made communication with same cohort easier than getting involved in a new experience of knowing locals or working with people of different backgrounds. This was not the case of the two women (P3 and P12) who were determined to engage with the society.

2. Replication of home community

Most participants noted the role of the Saudi student club in supporting their cultural adjustment while living in South Australia. Due to existing cultural celebration differences between the home and host countries, as reported in previous chapter, Saudi student clubs in host countries are established to provide a supporting environment for new arrivals and current

students (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Australia, 2022b; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in the US, 2015). These clubs aim to reflect Saudi Arabian cultural aspects and offer social support. Achieving these objectives is observed based on the experience of participants in the current study who indicate the positive impacts of becoming members in Saudi student club. Nahla (P8) described the Saudi club role as a substitute to family vibes: “I like to attend Saudi club meetings and it is very important to me because it reminds me of family gatherings and the relationships’ bonding that we are used to in our society”. Additionally, Latifah (P5) reflected that attending an Eid event eased her connection with other Saudi women.

When I came to Australia, I did not know anyone but after I attended the Saudi club event, I made relationships with other girls. I attended an Eid meeting with the Saudi club, and it was my first experience of going out and meeting with other students. I was drained because I do not like to be alone and needed to get to know people.

Also, Jamilah (P7) similarly commented on the value connecting with Saudi women after being alone following the first months of her arrival. She stated:

I loved to attend all the activities in the Saudi club especially after I spent the first three months alone. I like to join any event offered via the Saudi club, I was happy to meet people, and these celebrations feel like I am at home, and we talk the same language and share the same habits.

Miram (P2) expanded on the valuable benefit for herself and her child in attending the club frequently. She noted:

I certainly love to attend the celebrations and events presented through the Saudi club, and my eldest son loves to come too. I like to take him to meet other Saudi kids and personally I love participating to maintain the feeling

of identity and national belonging outside the borders of our country because life here and our situation as students gives a sense of isolation.

The findings of different cultural holidays in the host context presented in the previous chapter identified that some participants were challenged to integrate into the host cultural environment due to a resistance with any cultural interaction which would go against their cultural and religious beliefs. Accordingly, the Saudi student club was often identified as a supporting factor for the cultural adjustment whereby participants could gather to celebrate their own religious and cultural events. Furthermore, these gatherings and events gave the same cohort a replication of their original culture while living in the South Australian context. These aspects confirmed Sawir et al.'s (2008) argument that the social loneliness experienced by international students was due to the absence of the preferred cultural and linguistic environment. Being a member of a minority group indicates a limited sense of belonging in the new society. However, by attending regular gatherings, speaking one language, and sharing similar values, the participants enhanced their belonging through interaction with their own community.

Participants in the present study indicated that they felt encouraged to attend gatherings and events at the Saudi club because it substituted for their family and friends' community back in Saudi Arabia. A study in the US reported the same finding, that Saudi women students benefited greatly from attending events in the Saudi club. The operation of the student clubs overseas, promoting Saudi Arabian's cultural aspects, was considered valuable to Saudi international students because it represented their cultural and religious values and practices (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

Also, with the intention to return to the original home culture and lifestyle, the Saudi women needed to enhance their comfort, security and belongingness to their ethnicity. Quotes indicate that the club gatherings mimicked a lived sense of Saudi Arabian culture, through the

separate gatherings for women and men, celebrations of familiar cultural events and the opportunity to speak in their native Arabic language. The participants' happiness when discussing these occasions was palpable. This finding expands the quantitative study conducted by Yu and Wang (2011) and reports the preference towards a separation strategy of Chinese students in Germany. The authors argued that the students' preferences to separate rather than assimilate, as an acculturation strategy in foreign countries, reflects the impact of an existing gap between the ethnic group and the host group. Indeed, the participants of Yu and Wang's (2011) study, as well as the participants in the current study, both came from similar societies. The Chinese and Saudi Arabian's cultures are impacted greatly by collectivistic values which emphasize the goal of strong communication and harmony between members of the group, contrary to Western culture where one is highly impacted by individualistic values (Samovar et al., 2004).

However, the replication of home community and cultural celebration in the South Australian context seemed like a separation acculturation strategy (Berry, 1997). The Saudi women students were involved more with their original community and rarely with the host Australian one. This showed they had great interest in joining the original cultural events and interacted with their own nationality in preference to interactions with local people.

3. Maintenance of connection with family and friends in Saudi Arabia

The last aspect of the socio-cultural experience described in the previous chapter represented the homesickness difficulty that participants encountered whilst being away from their families. This difficulty was partly handled when participants had regular communication with close family members and friends. Maintaining regular communication with family and friends in Saudi Arabia was perceived positively as a supporting factor towards their emotional needs. Nine participants noted that they received support from extended family and friends in Saudi Arabia. Lulu (P3) stated: "I talk to my family in Saudi Arabia regularly via social media

applications, for example, WhatsApp and Snapchat. They care about me and always pray for my success”. Likewise, Hasnaa (P1) stated: “I consider my family a valuable source of moral support”. In addition, Wardah (P6) noted: “I communicate most of the time with my parents, we have a strong connection with each other”. Moreover, one participant who was alone in South Australia, said that she used to seek guidance from her family and her husband when encountering difficulties. Arwa (P13) mentioned: “I usually consult my family and my husband”.

These comments reinforced the family as a supporting role in the Saudi Arabian’s culture, noting that participants distance from their families has not decreased the level of communication. Nevertheless, two participants cited the support from their friends, in addition to their families, especially when being in tough situations. Latifah (P5) stated: “The family represents the most important thing for me. We have a strong bond and I like to communicate with them daily. But if I have a problem, I would like to talk more with my friends”. Also, Farah (P11) said: “I am still in touch with my friends. They support and they wish me luck during exams. I feel this is the best thing they have ever given me”. Two other participants mentioned the limited communication with their friends in Saudi Arabia was due to the different time zones between Saudi Arabia and Australia. Arwa (P13) noted: “The communication with friends is still happening on an ongoing basis, but the only obstacle is the different timing”. Also, Dalia (P14) affirmed: “Communication with my friends became less because of the different timing”.

In this aspect, family support refers to the degree of intimacy family members feel towards one another which described the relationship of Saudi women students with their families back in Saudi Arabia. Participants in the present study indicated the strong connection they had with their extended families while being overseas. In addition, communication with friends was mentioned by some participants as another supporting factor. This finding agreed

with some studies which highlighted family and friends' support as an important factor influencing the adjustment of international students in the host country (Aldawsari et al., 2018; Desa et al., 2012). Scholars have identified that the family and friends' roles would positively support the adjustments of international students. The use of social media tools eased the participants' connection with family and friends in home country, allowing them to spend some time talking and sharing thoughts, which was argued by Bacigalupe and Bräuninger (2017) to strengthen the international students' physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. Maintenance of the connection with family and friends in Saudi Arabia seemed helpful in managing the homesickness experienced by Saudi women while being in South Australia as international students.

7.3.1 Summary of supporting factors in the socio-cultural context

Findings of the socio-cultural experience in the previous chapter presented some difficulties that participants had encountered in establishing a relationship with Australians, and its society or culture, which led to some feelings of alienation. While this revealed some degree of detachment from the host culture, the participants relied on three supporting factors to improve their acculturation in the new context. Reported factors included (1) relationships with Saudi members and others, (2) replication of home community, and (3) maintenance of connection with family and friends in Saudi Arabia.

Participant choices in forming relationships with Saudi members, joining the Saudi club and maintaining a connection with family and friends in Saudi Arabia each added to the satisfaction felt in support networks. Nevertheless, these choices suggest an avoidance of forming friendships with locals or other international students. Therefore, it should be noted that the participants emphasised their choice to mostly contact similar cultural members leaves little time for interacting with locals who could educate the Saudi women about the different cultural norms and social aspects of Australian context. Such unintentional behaviours may

justify the loneliness that Saudi women felt in their social experience when they were not involved with the Australian local community. Additionally, in Chapter Five it was seen that many participants stated the goal was to improve their cultural knowledge by choosing to study in Australia, yet the presented supporting factors showed their actions did not support this. Very limited initiatives were made in gaining knowledge about the hosting Australian culture, and more involvement was reported seeking out interactions with a similar cultural background to the cohort. The following theme reports the participants' evaluations and perceptions about their own transition experiences having studied and lived in South Australia for a while.

7.4 Third theme: Evaluating the transition experience

Over time Saudi women students had experiencing study and living in South Australia, came to a period of appraisal and evaluation of their overall transition journey. This transition journey was found to be short for a few but long for most participants, yet they all commented on the following three aspects: (1) sponsor's role, (2) satisfaction about the studying and living experience, and (3) suggestions for academic institutions and new Saudi students.

1. Role of scholarship support

As the current study was carried out to explore the case of Saudi women students who were holders of scholarships, it is not surprising that all participants cited the generous support of many educational, financial and other aspects received from their sponsor, represented by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Australia (SACM). Without the SACM's support, participants would not be able to fund themselves and study in Australia. This was best described by Wardah (P6). She stated:

Thanks to God, I would never get the opportunity to study overseas if it was not by them, the SACM. The most significant support is the financial

coverage of school costs, living costs including medical costs, and their quick response to inquiries.

Similarly, Nahla (P8) affirmed the SACM's ongoing support: "The most helpful thing is the financial coverage of studying and living costs as well as the health insurance...They took full responsibility and their quick response and cooperation towards all cases is appreciated". From another aspect, Dalia (P14) identified the SACM's liaising role: "The SACM offered academic supervision, financial support, and cooperation in matters between my employer in Saudi Arabia and me here".

Literature around the international students' experiences indicated a high correlation between stable financial needs and outcomes of academic performance (Britt et al., 2017; Joo et al., 2008; Sherry et al., 2010). These studies suggest that students who have secured their financial needs are more likely to continue their schooling than peers who experience financial stresses. Participants in the current study highlighted the same issue, that the financial support from the scholarship, covering many aspects such as academic expenses, a monthly stipend, and health coverage, gave the greatest assistance to participants and their families. Having fewer financial concerns allowed participants to focus more on their studies and less on their financial needs that may otherwise require them to undertake part-time jobs, as is the case for many international students in Australia (Baglow & Gair, 2019; Nyland et al., 2009). The benefit of this financial support was not only acknowledged for the participants, but also for their families. It was perceived as a pull factor in Chapter 5, influencing the participants' decisions to study abroad.

Some scholars found that that American female students face many challenges in managing their personal and professional responsibilities due to stresses emerging from sources like time pressure or financial worries (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006). Yet, the Saudi women in this study, as in previous studies (e.g., Al-Qahtani, 2021; Arafeh, 2017), did not have job responsibilities and could concentrate on completing their degrees as full-time students. This

will further be expressed in the next sub-theme showing the greater benefit for Saudi women international students who are financially covered by their sponsor.

2. Satisfaction about the studying and living experience

International students have personal goals they want to achieve and expectations they want to meet that are relevant to studying and living in their selected destination. In the present study, all fourteen participants reported a high level of satisfaction in regard to their transition experience in South Australia in terms of accomplished academic goals and the development of other personal skills. To demonstrate, Hasnaa (P1), Lulu (P3), Nora (P4) and Dalia (P14) earned their Master's degrees and generally reflected on their experience and how it inspired their future plans. This is best noted by Hasnaa (P1):

This experience was beautiful with its bitter-sweet and easy and difficult situations. I feel that I have lived a completely different life. Despite the difficulties and challenges, I am delighted with the experience, and I aspire to continue... and if I get a chance to complete a PhD abroad, I would like to go through that again.

In contrast, Miram (P2) and Latifah (P5), who moved from Canada, commented on the specific choice of destination. For example, Miram (P2) stated: "This state has exceeded my expectations. I love the quiet places where all religious, cultural and social differences are accepted, and I honestly found this visible in South Australia". Similar comments were also shared by Wardah (P6), Nahla (P8) and Hadeel (P9). To illustrate, Wardah (P6), stated: "Moving to Australia was a beautiful experience. I believe that choosing this country and city was suitable for my needs". Likewise, Hadeel (P9) said: "I have enjoyed the experience of living in another country. I think it is an excellent experience in many aspects, especially studying in a different system".

In addition to the general satisfaction concerning the experience of moving to study and live in South Australia, four participants were able to share particular aspects. For instance, Mona (P10) and Arwa (P13) noted two elements, including the atmosphere in their university and the environment of the state, in pointing out their satisfaction regarding their studying and living experiences. Mona (P10) commented: “I am satisfied with my choice of this university and this state because it is small, and the entertainment places are limited which makes for a very great study environment”. Furthermore, Arwa (P13) added a comment about the supportive elements she received: “I am relieved that I chose Australia. I receive moral support from my family, financial support from the SACM, and academic support from the university. I am satisfied with my experience”. Nevertheless, Farah (P11) and Zara (P12) explained how they explored and enjoyed their lives in a different society which widened their knowledge of a different culture. Zara (P12) said: “This experience helped me explore others’ cultures and Western lifestyle, so I developed an idea about this community and new ways of living”.

Moreover, eleven participants referred to specific examples of their personal, academic and non-academic achievements, denoting their satisfaction with their individual journeys. Three participants who were going back to work as lecturers at the university level noted the professional knowledge they had gained from their lecturers in Australian universities. For example, Hasnaa (P1), who earned a Master’s degree in education, stated: “I want to transfer this knowledge to my country and to the students I will teach. I will deal with them in a different and more sophisticated way”. Likewise, Lulu (P3) commented on the same benefit and stated, “As a faculty member at the university, I learned how to deal with students, simplify the required tasks and give them opportunities for discussion”. Apparently, both participants enjoyed the low power distance with their university lecturers, as well as benefitting from being able to express their opinions through discussions in class. Thus, they decided to employ similar class arrangements with their students once going back to their jobs. Nevertheless,

Miram (P2) shared a similar advantage of having studied in a different structure of her specialized field: “The scholarship program is a great opportunity in my life... My specialization is psychology and I surely have known things I would never have known if I studied only in Saudi Arabia”.

Seven participants, including Lulu (P3), Nora (P4), Wardah (P6), Nahla (P8), Hadeel (P9), Farah (P11) and Dalia (P14) also identified personal development including personal skills as benefits resulting from living in the different context. In general, Lulu (P3), Farah (P11) and Dalia (P14) mentioned that in Saudi Arabia they were heavily reliant on their families to solve difficulties and make decisions and had to develop independence after being alone. Describing this development was done best by Farah (P11) who recognised that:

The overseas journey helped me become independent, especially in solving problems. I used to give up because I knew that my family would help me out, but here there is no one who cares about me so I should help myself. I have to endure difficulties and face them positively.

More specifically, Nora (P4) differentiated her life and improvements of skills before and after moving to South Australia. She noted:

Being away from friends and family illuminated to me and offered a chance to develop and change personally. My life abroad has changed significantly compared to the previous situation. Also, my character changed because before I was anxious about making decisions and reactions but living abroad gave me a chance to develop skills, and learn to rely on myself more than when I was in Saudi Arabia.

From another aspect, two participants who were mothers, agreed that living in the new context offered a greater opportunity to strengthen the relationships with their children. Both women noted they were busy engaging in family occasions or meeting job demands, which left

fewer chances to closely monitor their children. However, once they had settled in South Australia, they had a better connection with them. In this regard, Hadeel (P9) started: “I became closer to my small family and took care of them without relying on my family”. Similarly, Nahla (P8) further elaborated:

I am happy about the experience of moving to study and live overseas because it helped me to strengthen the internal family relations, unlike in Saudi Arabia. I was connected to the job, family meetings, friends, and neighbours so there is no chance to sit with my children or deal their needs for a long time. While my relationship with others here is limited, I have been more related to my children.

Satisfaction in this aspect is defined as “an emotional state of mind after an immediate connection” (Moslehpour et al., 2020). Additionally, Kéri and Hetesi (2022) proposed that international students’ satisfaction could be investigated through examining the whole study-abroad process, including both university and non-university factors relating to the entire length of the study abroad experience. Both definitions were referred to by almost all participants in the current study. The participants reported their satisfactory opinions regarding studying and living experiences in South Australia according to their achieved academic goals and other personal improvements. They recognised the quality of their Australian academic experience impacting not only their progress, but also their professional knowledge, as had been shown in previous studies (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Gacel-Ávila, 2005). It can be concluded then that citizens who engage richly in study abroad often bring back substantial new knowledge and skills to their home countries.

Furthermore, a number of recent studies uncovered that international students’ satisfaction, receiving an overseas education, could be linked to the quality of their overall experience (El Alfy & Abukari, 2020; Moslehpour et al., 2020). Indeed, the reported quotes

highlighted the participants' identified factors like lecturers' competency to deal with them and the content of courses, the university's atmosphere and the city's environment as all influencing their level of satisfaction. This aligns with the findings of previous research (Kéri & Hetesi, 2022; Lenton, 2015; Schertzer & Schertzer, 2004).

So besides overall academic satisfaction, participants also found satisfaction in unexpected benefits to their personal development, mostly through the situational consequence of their increased independence from the family. The collectivist cultural features of Saudi life seemed to restrict the participants' capacity to develop independence in making personal decisions. As a result, when they moved to study in South Australia and lived separately from their own families, they become aware of the need to become independent. Improving personal skills was noted in the literature as one of the non-academic advantages that Saudi women students gained from studying abroad (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

3. Suggestions for academic institutions and new Saudi students

Participants in the above section indicated a high level of satisfaction towards their experience of studying and living in South Australia. However, in this section they identified a number of suggestions for the academic institutions in Australia and for Saudi students who plan to study in Australia.

First, two participants commented on the lack of academic skills and the difficulty of different program structures they encountered early on when starting their university degrees. The difficulty noted by the participants was caused by differences between language centres and the university assessments, program structures and a lack of familiarity with the ways of dealing with materials or devices. Therefore, one suggested that English language centres develop a special course to help international students be prepared for a similar university environment. Hasnaa (P1) recounted her experience:

When I studied at the university, I had difficulties in the assignments such as writing research papers. I wished that the language centre had provided us with a similar academic environment, to understand the method and meet the required level. I wish there was such a preparing/initial course for students who start university at postgraduate level.

Wardah (P6) also advised it would be helpful if a similar course was developed by the science departments. She stated:

I found that the program and the materials were mostly designed to suit the local students, and not us international students. Even the devices in the labs, the Australian students were used to them more than us because they have already used them in their previous classes. For us, it took a long time to learn how to use. I wished that the university and specifically my department had training sessions for international students or a short orientation course at the beginning of our study.

Second, several participants discussed academic preparation and knowledge gained regarding the new destination for new Saudi students who plan to study in Australia. For academic preparation, Hasnaa (P1) and Hadeel (P9) noted the importance of acquiring an appropriate level of English language to be able to overcome language difficulties in shorter timeframes. Hasnaa (P1) recommended achieving a good level of English language to help master other academic skills. She highlighted: “I advise them to study the language at a high level before going overseas to study so that time is not wasted in balancing study and learning other academic skills at the beginning of the program”. Also, recommendations were made by other participants to attain more knowledge about Australia, and the university or program prior to arrival. For example, Lulu (P3) stated: “My advice for the students who are coming to study here, is to read about the country, and its culture”. Similarly, Hadeel (P9) stated: “I would recommend that they get to know the city, the university, and identify basic needs long before

travelling. Doing so will minimize the difficulties they might face if they arrive without having knowledge and being prepared”. It seemed that participants mostly agreed with the view that they should have been better prepared prior to travelling. Therefore, they pointed out such advice for new students.

This aspect indicates that in hindsight, there was a felt measure of deficiency in the participants academic preparation prior to starting university and consequently their suggestions to do further research personally and for the university to develop special courses for international students. The identified difficulties faced upon starting the university program confirmed this notion that international students may encounter difficulties resulting from different academic practices and expectations (Ryan, 2005). Indeed, this sub-theme and the academic experience theme presented in the previous chapter both reflect some participants’ difficulties in English language skills and assessment methods. Therefore, educational institutions including language centres and universities in Australia are advised to design courses or orientation sessions to assist international students to achieve better levels of educational acculturating and understanding. This intended achievement is supported by the findings of a previous study which revealed that students who completed a preparatory course felt that they were given guidance in adjusting to the new academic environment (Dooey, 2010). Thereafter, a preparatory course would help international students to optimize their academic readiness to start university degrees and get the greatest benefit from the academic experience.

7.4.1 Summary of evaluating the transition experience

Three aspects were presented under this theme describing the evaluative opinions made by participants regarding their transition experience studying and living in South Australia. The first aspect reported was the participants’ appreciation and acknowledgment of receiving a governmental scholarship. The second aspect outlined participants’ recognition of their

individual achievements. Finally, the third aspect identified suggestions for academic institutions in Australia and advice for new Saudi students to better prepare for study in Australia.

7.5 Conclusion of chapter

This chapter responded to the third research question by identifying supporting factors and acculturation strategies in the academic context and in the socio-cultural context of Saudi women students in South Australia. In the academic context, the main source of support was utilized through the university services and the department of international students. In addition, seeking help from lecturers and peers revealed that participants were actively finding strategies to overcome academic difficulties, and responding to the demands of the Australian academic context. Also, Saudi women reported that organizing their time and finding support in their homes from their husbands was helpful in managing their multiple roles as spouses, mothers and students. In the socio-cultural context, establishing friendships with Saudi members, replicating home communities and maintaining connections with family and friends in Saudi Arabia were the three highlighted supporting factors.

The findings from this chapter of supporting factors within both the study and lived experiences reinforced the impact of cultural values and social practices in the Saudi Arabian context which influenced the choices of participants in overcoming their challenges. Being Saudi women in a different context was found to influence their acculturation strategies because they had to continuously negotiate their values and behaviors so that they could perform well in the Australian academic and socio-cultural environments.

In the academic context, the motivational goals to acquire English language and to obtain a degree led the participants to better adjust themselves in the new academic context. Yet to some extent, the existence of peers from the same culture restricted their full assimilation, and hindered engagement with local or other international students in the classes. In the socio-

cultural context, the participants' regular gatherings with Saudi members, replication of cultural events and the lack of local friendships caused a separation from the Australian social environment.

After presenting the supporting factors in both academic and socio-cultural experiences, the third theme explained how participants evaluated their studying and living experience in South Australia. Most participants acknowledged receiving full financial support for themselves and their accompanying families and reported a high level of satisfaction in terms of achieved academic and other individual expectations. Additionally, participants raised two points: (1) suggestions for academic institutions to develop a specific course for international students introducing them to the standards and expectations of academic requirements in the Australian academic culture and (2) suggestions for new Saudi students planning to study in Australia to read and learn about the country, the university and program details prior to arrival. The following final chapter, Chapter Eight, will summarize the study, present an overview of the findings, and identify some limitations of the study while proposing recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 8: Summary and conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This final chapter concludes the study by summarizing the previous chapters, highlighting the findings of the research questions, presenting the implications, identifying the limitations and giving suggestions for future research. As stated in the first chapter, this study aimed to examine the transition of Saudi women students in South Australia. The transition was examined to identify push-pull factors informing the decision to leave their home country and study in Australia; it described the academic and socio-cultural experiences and identified the supporting factors in the academic and socio-cultural contexts and the acculturation strategies.

As the study focused on a particular cohort from Saudi Arabia, those who decided to study and live in Australia, the second chapter presented the backgrounds of both the home and host contexts. The Saudi Arabian context, the participants' home country, was noted to reflect a remarkable history which was deeply entrenched with religion-based values informing both cultural and social practices. The Islamic teachings not only informed these held values, but also determined codes of practices that shaped educational and socio-cultural practices for women and men of the nation. The Australian context was also depicted for this study being the participants' host context of interest, a place where they temporarily studied and lived as international students.

Chapter Three commenced with a review of the internationalisation of education forming the base of the current study and arguing for the need to examine the international students' different experiences, whilst taking into consideration that many of them relocate to a context that is different from their original backgrounds. The chapter then presented a scoping review

of the literature in terms of push-pull factors influencing the choices of international students to leave their home country and to select study abroad, including the challenges resulting from cross-cultural contact and the supporting factors and acculturation strategies employed while being in the host destination. Each of these three sections started with an appropriate theoretical framework providing a clear lens to examine the international students' experiences.

The push-pull factors model by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) offered a general understanding of the factors influencing the choices of international students to study abroad. Further, while available studies highlighted a variety of push-pull factors influencing international students' choices, only two of the focused cohort studies considered the case of Saudi students in Australia. Therefore, this study aimed to fill the gap in the body of knowledge, by examining the factors that informed the decision of Saudi women students to leave their home country and choose Australia as the host country.

The cross-cultural contact experienced by intentional students was discussed according to the proposed cultural dimensions theory (G. Hofstede, 1983). This theory argued for six dimensions in which cultures can be similar or different. Pertaining to the contexts of the current study, the review showed how Saudi Arabia and Australia received different scores in the model, suggesting these differences may cause some degree of difficulty in adaptation to the academic and socio-cultural contexts for Saudi women student in Australia. The review then examined a number of empirical studies that reported cross-cultural challenges to the educational and social experiences of Saudi students in different countries. The examination of these empirical studies indicated the lack of studies on the experience of Saudi women students, especially in the Australian context. Hence, the current study is intended to respond to this gap and produce knowledge on the cross-cultural contact experience of Saudi women students in Australia.

The last section of the literature review was concerned with the supporting factors and acculturation strategies of international students. In the acculturation model pioneered by Berry (1997), an understanding of the acculturation of international students was defined based on the individual's aim to either maintain their original cultural values or adapt to the host's. After defining acculturation, the review was expanded to discuss a number of factors of the educational and social aspects and their impact in enhancing the experience of international students.

Following the literature review, Chapter Four described the methodology of the current study employing qualitative research methods. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with fourteen Saudi women students who had enrolled in different degree courses and programs in South Australian tertiary institutions. Combining the thematic analysis approach with the three theoretical models enabled the organisation of interview data to examine the transition of Saudi women students. The interviews were analysed, reported, discussed and presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven to explain the participants' transition experience in three phases: (1) push-pull factors informing the decision to study abroad and selection of Australia, (2) academic and socio-cultural experiences, and (3) supporting factors and acculturation strategies. Thus, the study offered rigorous and organised understandings on the transition of Saudi women tertiary students in South Australia.

8.2 Answering the research questions

The study was guided by three research questions whose findings will now be summarised.

RQ1: Push-Pull factors

Chapter Five responded to the first research question: What push-pull factors informed the decision of Saudi women students to leave their country and select to study in Australia?

The findings reported nine push-pull factors that were relevant to the decision of Saudi women students. Push factors referred to various external or internal influences in the home country, Saudi Arabia, that led Saudi women students to leave their country in the pursuit of studies overseas, whereas pull factors identified attractive considerations for selecting Australia as a host destination.

- This study found that Saudi women's push factors for leaving their country to become international students were: (1) job requirement, (2) benefitting husband and children, (3) acquiring the English language and obtaining an international degree, and (4) improving cultural awareness.
- In terms of identified pull factors, the study revealed that Australia was the primary choice for the participants. The Saudi women students selected Australia based on: (1) knowledge about the country as a safe and multicultural environment demonstrated by the presence of Arab and Muslim groups, (2) the image of tertiary education based on language of instruction, quality of education, availability of subjects and university admission, (3) available scholarship, (4), recommendation from others, and (5) lifestyle and climate.

RQ2: Academic and Socio-cultural experiences

Chapter Six corresponded to the second research question: How did Saudi women describe the academic and socio-cultural experiences in Australia? The findings reported and discussed two themes concerning the academic and socio-cultural experiences. Taking into account the huge cultural distance of the Saudi Arabian context to the Australian context as noted in the literature review (Section 3.3), Saudi women students had been challenged in some aspects of their academic and socio-cultural contexts due to the differences from their home context, especially upon joining the universities and settling into the new social settings.

- The following aspects were reported by the participants describing their academic experience: (1) becoming students and navigating differences of the new educational system, (2) English language and academic skills, (3) assessments and evaluation of student performance and benefits of rubric, (4) teacher-student relationships and teaching style, (5) being and working in mixed-gender environments, (6) managing multiple roles, and (7) religious and cultural practices in the institutions.
- Concerning the socio-cultural experience which began at the time participants were preparing themselves to leave Saudi Arabia, the participants reported their situation to (1) gain knowledge about the destination and (2) arrange for arrival pick up, then after arrival they shared the experience while (3) securing accommodation, and (4) using transportation.
- Following settlement, the second stage of the Saudi women students' socio-cultural experience was reported in terms of: (1) different social aspects between contexts, (2) making friendships, (3) being Muslim women: sense of recognition and harassment, and (4) experiencing homesickness.

RQ3: Supporting factors in the academic and socio-cultural contexts

Chapter Seven was the final chapter presenting the findings and answering the third research question: What supporting factors in the academic and socio-cultural contexts helped Saudi women in their transition experience? The examination of Saudi women's academic and socio-cultural experiences in Chapter Six confirmed that their contact with the Australian culture resulted in some challenges as they came to realise the different approaches when compared to their original culture. Eventually Saudi women students found and employed a

number of ways to adapt to the Australian academic and socio-cultural settings by making compromises or practical adjustments.

- The identified supporting factors in the academic context included: (1) university services, (2) lecturers' and peers' assistance, and (3) time management and husbands' support.
- In the socio-cultural context, the study found the following supporting factors: (1) relationships with Saudi members and others, (2) replication of home community, and (3) maintenance of connection with family and friends in Saudi Arabia. An interesting finding to be noted in this thesis is that the collectivistic values have helped Saudi women to rely on their friendships in relation to women from the same culture as an acculturation and supportive means to feel safe and be connected with their original culture while sharing the same experience of living and studying in a different country.
- Regarding the acculturation strategies, the study found that within the academic context, the participants tended to assimilate in the beginning of their educational journeys to ensure they understood and met the requirements of Australian universities. The study also noted that some of the participants intentionally separated themselves from interacting and collaborating with local or other international students and preferably sought the help from their peers of the same culture. Likewise, a separation strategy was clearly noticed when examining the supporting factors in the socio-cultural context. Most participants had limited socio-cultural adaptation as they intensively surrounded themselves with members of their culture in Australia and in Saudi Arabia.

- The last emerging theme in this seventh chapter reported the Saudi women students' evaluation of their transition. The following aspects were noted: (1) sponsor's role, (2) satisfaction about the study and lived experience, and (3) suggestions for academic institutions and new Saudi students.
- The participants have greatly appreciated the chance to be sponsored by their employers or the KASP to study overseas. Also, Saudi women students overall appeared to be satisfied with their studying and living experiences in Australia. This is not to deny the encountered difficulties, but rather clear satisfaction was found in being able to accomplish their academic goals and overcome their challenges. They appreciated their choice of Australia as a host study destination in general, and were satisfied with the university education experience in which they perceived Australian qualifications as being of high quality.

8.3 Model of the transition of Saudi women students in South Australia

According to the findings reported in the Chapters Five, Six and Seven, and with reference to the employed three frameworks in this study, a model of Saudi women's students transition at the three phases has been developed and shown below in Figure 12.

Transition of Saudi women students in South Australia

Phase 1: Push-Pull factors

Push factors to leave Saudi Arabia

- * Job requirement
- * Benefiting husband and children
- * Acquiring English language and obtaining an international degree
- * Improving cultural awareness

Pull factors to choose Australia

- * Knowledge about the country
- * Image of tertiary education
- * Availability of subject and university admission,
- * Available scholarship
- * Recommendation from others
- * Lifestyle and climate

Phase 2: Academic and socio-cultural experiences

Academic experience

- * Becoming students and navigating differences of the new educational system
- * English language and academic skill
- * Assessments and evaluation of student performance and benefit of rubric
- * Teacher- student relationship and teaching style
- * Being and working in mixed gender environment
- * Managing multiple roles
- * Religious and cultural practices in the institutions

Socio-cultural experience

- * Gain knowledge about the destination
- * Arrange for arrival pick up
- * Securing accommodation
- * Using transportation
- * Different social aspects between contexts
- * Making friendships
- * Being Muslim women: sense of recognition and harassment
- * Experiencing homesickness

Phase 3: Supporting factors and acculturation strategies

Supporting factors in the academic context

- * University services
- Lecturers' and peers' assistance
- * Time management and husbands' support

Supporting factors in the socio-cultural context

- * Relationships with Saudi members and others
- * Replication of home community
- * Maintenance of connection with family and friends in Saudi Arabia

Figure 12. Model of the transition of Saudi women students in South Australia

Apparently, the push pull factors theoretical model offered an overview of the Saudi women students' transitional experience right from its initial stage, yet it did not allow for a deeper understanding of the actual studying and living experiences as they have gone through. Therefore, by working all three theoretical models together, the investigation had a much more comprehensive examination of the participants transitional journey as international students.

The fundamental theories, which inform the structure of the model, were perceived to examine the transition of Saudi women students in three phases. In the first phase, the push-pull factors model provided insights into the factors informing the decision of Saudi women students to leave their home country and select to study in Australia. Once the decision had been made and the participants arrived in Australia, the second stage of transition started. Based on the distinctive cultural dimensions between the home country Saudi Arabia and the host country Australia, this stage described several aspects pertaining to academic and socio-cultural experiences of Saudi women students in South Australia. As some of these aspects in both the academic and socio-cultural contexts were perceived by participants as difficulties, the third stage identified the use of several supporting factors to fit into their new Australian contexts. Employing the acculturation strategies theory helped in understanding the underlying cultural goals, whether participants aimed to engage fully or partially with the cultural features of their host country.

8.4 Implications of the study

This study focused on the experience of Saudi women and is useful in understanding and highlighting their transition as international students in a different country, additionally to the following specific implications.

- First, the current study presents a contextual implication concerning Saudi women's transitions as they settle temporarily to study and live in Australia. Previous Australian-based studies that specifically explored the experiences of Saudi students were limited. These limited studies examined the factors influencing Saudi men and women students who choose Australia as their destination (Binsahl, 2018; Alsulami, 2016) and the experience of studying in Australia (Alhazmi, 2013; Alsaifi & Shin, 2017; Orth, 2015). Therefore, the current study intended to produce additional and more specific knowledge on the experience of Saudi women students about their transition at three phases.
- Second, this study provides a theoretical understanding through the employment of the three models: (1) push-pull factors, (2) cultural dimensions theory and (3) acculturation strategies theory, forming the basis to explore the transition of Saudi women students in Australia. By employing three different theoretical frameworks, the transition of Saudi women students was examined at three phases: (1) the decision to study abroad and the selection of Australia as the host destination, (2) the cross-cultural experiences regarding attendance at Australian academic institutions and living in the different socio-cultural environments and (3) the use of various supporting sources to acculturate in the new educational and socio-cultural contexts. No

studies have been found that explored Saudi women students' experiences concerning the push-pull factors, academic and socio-cultural experiences and supporting factors and acculturation strategies in the Australian context. Hence the current study provides an understanding of how Saudi women students report their transition as international students in Australia.

- Also, this study offers some practical implications for the scholarship's authorities in Saudi Arabia, as well as the Australian academic institutions and their members, future Saudi women students, and the host Australian community as follows. The current study may help to inform the scholarship authorities within the Saudi Arabian context about the importance of supporting their sponsored students to be more academically skilled and culturally knowledgeable about their selected country when making their decision to study abroad. This could be done by introducing provisional students to the systems of education in other contexts, their cultural values and social practices. It would be useful to invite the Saudi students who have finished their studies in Australia to share their experiences. This developed awareness could contribute to easier management when having to deal with unfamiliar situations resulting from crossing cultures.

- The academic institutions in Australia could enhance their services to help reduce the inconvenience associated with the transition of Saudi women students and ensure they gain a better academic experience. The roles of Australian academic institutions, lecturers and staff have been acknowledged in the findings, yet they are encouraged to take further responsibility towards providing culturally appropriate support to Saudi women students, at all phases. Newly arrived Saudi women students could be better equipped to join the university programs through more specific sessions offered over multiple times of the semester, for example, in the beginning to introduce them to the university and its policies, through mid-terms and toward the end during final examinations and assessments periods to help solve any difficulties.
- The broader community in Australia also needs to improve its level of acceptance and tolerance towards Saudi women students. The participants shared several unpleasant and single acts of harassment in public places in response to dressing in abaya and niqab. Specifically, structured initiatives such as connecting Saudi students with local people in the community could promote better intercultural understanding and greater awareness of cultural differences. This would help locals to dispel stereotypes around Saudi students and their cultural practices, accelerate the acculturation of the students themselves and lead to a more multicultural Australian context.

8.5 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

The present study contributed to the growing body of literature on international students' push-pull factors to study abroad, academic and socio-cultural experiences, supporting factors and acculturation strategies. Specifically, it contributes to the literature on Saudi women students studying in Australia. However, there were several limitations to this study that may restrict the generalization of its findings and suggest new directions for future research.

- First, this research focused on exploring the push-pull factors, academic and socio-cultural experiences and supporting factors and acculturation strategies during the transition. However, the study did not examine the returning home experience after graduation due to the limited timeframe. A longitudinal study in the future could be considered to examine one group of participants' experiences before, during and after returning to home country, to offer better understandings of their transition at different phases.
- The second limitation concerns the qualitative approach and the use of semi-structured interviews for data collection. Although scholars argue the suitability of qualitative research as an excellent methodology when exploring and understanding are the main objectives of a study, future studies may employ the mixed methods design to offer more comprehensive findings. Moreover, field observations, focus groups or questionnaire tools could be designed based on the findings of this study and administered to a new group of participants to enable the generalization of understanding of Saudi women students' experiences.
- The current thesis aimed to contribute to literature regarding the transition experience of Saudi women international students in South Australian context. However, some methodological limitations especially regarding the participants number may prevent the generalization of its findings. Only 14 women students

from Saudi Arabia were recruited for taking part in the study. In addition, the qualitative interview approach was used to collect the data, which has the potential to compromise the objectivity of the findings since such an approach is inherently subjective. Future research could consider methodological adjustments to enable the recruitment of a larger number of participants of different genders, and then use empirical methodologies to further investigate and expand the research problem.

- Also, this study was conducted in response to research questions from the perspective of the Saudi women students only. For future research, the perspectives of other international women students could be considered. It would be interesting to explore whether women students from different cultural backgrounds report similar push-pull factors, academic and socio-cultural challenges and the use of supporting factors and acculturation strategies when moving to study in Australia.
- A fifth limitation pertains to the study being conducted in only one state of Australia. However, due to the cultural and academic consistency across the Australian context, it is very possible the findings of this research examining the transition of Saudi women students might be generalized to other Saudi women studying in other states of Australia.
- Lastly, a frequent concern for the researcher was keeping personal biases in check during the stages of collecting, analysing and interpreting the data. Careful attempts were made to treat all data objectively. Every possible effort was made by the researcher to report analysed data objectively and accurately, to the best levels, using the theoretical frameworks for the study. And, all aspects of the ethics approval were complied with throughout the study.

8.6 Concluding remark

This qualitative study was designed and conducted to explore the transition of Saudi women students in Australia pertaining to their push-pull factors, academic and socio-cultural experiences and supporting factors and acculturation strategies. Fourteen Saudi women students took part in the semi-structured interviews to share their own stories of becoming international students in another cultural context. Saudi Arabian cultural values and social practices were found to impact on the participants' experiences. Moving to study and live in a new context that holds contradictory practices and values was found to cause some difficulties especially at the beginning of the settlement experience in Australia. However, the participants demonstrated positive initiatives to overcome these challenges and to achieve the intended goals derived from their choice to study in Australia. The overall view indicated that the Saudi women students were satisfied and found success regarding their transition in Australia.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approved from the Human Research Ethics Committee

Note: Title of thesis (Saudi International Female Students: Challenges and Cultural Experiences in Australian Universities: the transition experiences and adjustment strategies in South Australia) served as the original starting-point in these documents.



RESEARCH SERVICES
OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS, COMPLIANCE
AND INTEGRITY
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CRICOS Provider Number 00123M

Our reference 33525

09 February 2022

Dr Robert Matthews
School of Education

Dear Dr Matthews

ETHICS APPROVAL No: H-2019-030
PROJECT TITLE: Saudi International Female Students: Challenges and Cultural Experiences in Australian Universities: the transition experiences and adjustment strategies in South Australia

Thank you for the Annual Report on Project Status provided by Safiah Hakami on 8 February 2022. It is noted data collection is complete and the writing up stage is continuing. The extension request to cover the writing up stage has been approved.

The ethics amendment for the above project has been reviewed by the Secretariat, Human Research Ethics Committee and is deemed to meet the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018)* involving no more than low risk for research participants.

You are authorised to commence your research on: 28/02/2019
The ethics expiry date for this project is: 28/02/2025

NAMED INVESTIGATORS:

Associate Investigator: Associate Professor Julie Matthews
Student - Postgraduate Mrs Safiah Nasser M Hakami
Doctorate by Research (PhD):
Chief Investigator: Dr Robert Matthews

Ethics approval is granted for three years and is subject to satisfactory annual reporting. The form titled Annual Report on Project Status is to be used when reporting annual progress and project completion and can be downloaded at <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/research-services/hreci/human/reporting/>. Prior to expiry, ethics approval may be extended for a further period.

Participants in the study are to be given a copy of the information sheet and the signed consent form to retain. It is also a condition of approval that you immediately report anything which might warrant review of ethical approval including:

- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants,
- previously unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project,
- proposed changes to the protocol or project investigators; and
- the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Amy Lehmann
Secretary

The University of Adelaide

Appendix B: English and Arabic Versions of Invitation Email



This invitation is being sent out on behalf of the researcher and your personal details have not been provided to the researcher.

Attachment 1 – Invitation email for recruitment
(approval number xxx-xxx)

RECRUITMENT OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Saudi International Female Students: Challenges and Cultural Experiences in Australian Universities: the transition experiences and adjustment strategies in South Australia

My name is Safiah Nasser Hakami. I am conducting this research as a part of the Doctor of Philosophy program under the supervision of Associate Professor Julie Matthews and Dr Fizza Sabir at the School of Education, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

The research aims to examine the experiences of moving from Saudi Arabia and being a student in South Australia and what challenges you face as well as what strategies you apply to achieve the academic success and social-cultural adjustments.

I am seeking Saudi females as participants for my research with the following characteristics:

- 1- Aged between 18 - 40.
- 2- Enrolled in a South Australian university or an English language centre .
- 3- Sponsored by the Saudi scholarship program or sponsored by an employer.

There will be a short demographic questionnaire to fill in 3-5 minutes, followed by an interview conducted in the participant's preferred language Arabic or English for one time. Each interview should last no more than one hour. The interview will be conducted in the participants' most convenient time and location and will be audio recorded in order to be transcribed later.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any stage or choose not to answer any questions. No negative consequence will follow from such withdrawal. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a consent form before the interview.

If you agree to participate in the study, the researcher will make all efforts to remove any personal information which might identify an individual participant and no findings which could identify you will be published. Privacy will be protected at all stages of the research.

Complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, the utmost care will be taken to ensure that no personally identifying details are revealed.

The topic of the research might be sensitive for you as it includes questions about your experience of studying and living abroad. You are able to stop the interview at any time, take a break from the interview or withdraw from the study if you want to.

If you are interested in knowing more about the research or in participating, please check the attached documents including participant information sheet and the consent form.

If you need further information or decided to participate, please contact me by sending an email to safiahnasser.hakami@adelaide.edu.au I will be very happy to provide you with further information of my research.

Kind regards,
Safiah Nasser HAKAMI

تم إرسال هذه الدعوة نيابة عن الباحث ولم يتم تقديم بياناتك الشخصية للباحث

رقم الموافقة على أخلاقيات البحث: (H-2019-030)

توضيح للمشاركين في البحث

عنوان البحث: الطالبات السعوديات النوليات: التحديات والعبرات الثقافية في الجامعات الأسترالية: العبرات الانتقالية واستراتيجيات التكيف في جنوب أستراليا

اسمي صفية ناصر حكمي. أقوم بإجراء هذا البحث كجزء من برنامج الدكتوراة في الفلسفة تحت إشراف الأستاذة المشاركة: جولي ماثيوز والدكتوراة فضة صابر في كلية التربية بجامعة أديلايد بجنوب أستراليا.

يهدف البحث إلى التحقق من تجارب الانتقال من المملكة العربية السعودية والاتحاق بالدراسة في جنوب أستراليا والتحديات التي تواجهها وكذلك الاستراتيجيات التي تم تطبيقها لتحقيق النجاح الأكاديمي والتكيف الاجتماعي والثقافي.

أبحث عن طالبات سعوديات كمشاركات في بحثي بالخصائص التالية:

* تتراوح أعمارهم بين 18 و 40 سنة.

* التحق بأي جامعة في جنوب أستراليا أو في معهد للدراسة اللغة الإنجليزية.

* متبعين عن طريق برنامج الملك للتبعات أو عن طريق إبتعث جهات العمل.

إجراءات البحث: سيكون هناك استبيان قصير يستغرق 3-5 دقائق ، تليها مقابلة يكمن اجراءها باللغة المفضلة للمشاركين العربية أو الإنجليزية لمررة واحدة وقد تستغرق 40 دقيقة أو ساعة واحدة. سيتم إجراء المقابلة في الوقت والمكان الأكثر ملاءمة للمشاركين وسيتم تسجيل اللقاء صوتياً من أجل تحليل البيانات لاحقاً.

المشاركة في هذه الدراسة تطوعية تماماً ، ويمكن للمشاركين الانسحاب في أي مرحلة أو اختيار عدم الإجابة عن أي سؤال أثناء اللقاء ولن يترتب على هذا الانسحاب أية عواقب سلبية. إذا وافقت على المشاركة ، فسيتطلب منك إكمال نموذج الموافقة قبل المقابلة.

إذا وافقت على المشاركة في الدراسة ، ستبدل الباحثة قصارى جهدها لإزالة أي معلومات شخصية قد تحدد مشاركتك فردياً ولن يتم نشر أي نتائج يمكن أن تحدد هويتك. سيتم حماية الخصوصية في جميع مراحل البحث. لا يمكن ضمان إخفاء الهوية الكاملة ومع ذلك ، سيتم إتخاذ أقصى درجات الحذر لضمان عدم الكشف عن أي تفاصيل شخصية.

قد يكون موضوع البحث حساساً بالمسبة لك لأنه يتضمن أسئلة حول تجربتك في الدراسة والعيش في الخارج. يمكنك إيقاف المقابلة في أي وقت أو أخذ استراحة من المقابلة أو الانسحاب من الدراسة إذا كنت ترغب في ذلك.

إذا كنت مهتمة بمعرفة المزيد حول البحث أو المشاركة ، فيرجى قراءة المستندات المرفقة بما في ذلك ورقة معلومات المشاركين ونموذج الموافقة.

إذا كنت بحاجة إلى مزيد من المعلومات أو قررت المشاركة ، يرجى الاتصال بي عن طريق إرسال بريد إلكتروني إلى safiahnasser.hakami@adelaide.edu.au و ستكون سعيدة جداً بتزويدك بالمعلومات حول بحثي.

أطيب التحيات
الباحثة/ صفية ناصر حكمي

Appendix C: English and Arabic Versions of Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: Saudi International Female Students: Challenges and Cultural Experiences in Australian Universities: the transition experiences and adjustment strategies in South Australia

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Julie Matthews and Dr Fizza Sabir
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Mrs. Safiah Nasser HAKAMI
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Philosophy
Ethics approval number: (H-2019-030)

Dear Participant,
You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

The research aims to investigate the transition experiences and challenges as well as the adjustment strategies that lead to academic success and socio-cultural adjustments of Saudi international female students in South Australia.

In order to conduct this study, you as a Saudi female are invited to fill out a short demographic questionnaire and then be interviewed to share the experiences, challenges and strategies that are relevant to your time while studying and living here in South Australia.

Who is undertaking the project?

I, Mrs Safiah Nasser HAKAMI, am conducting this project. I am a student on a scholarship from the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. This research will form the basis for my degree of a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of Associate Professor Dr Julie Matthews and Dr Fizza Sabir.

Why am I being invited to participate?

You are being invited to take part as a Saudi female who is: (1) aged between 18 – 40 (2) enrolled in a South Australian university or an English language centre and (3) sponsored by the Saudi scholarship program or sponsored by an employer.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be involved in the following activities:

- One short demographic questionnaire about your personal details such as: degree type, marital status and length of being in South Australia. The questionnaire will take about 3-5 minutes to answer.
- Single audio-recorded interview asking questions about your studying experience in South Australia and what difficulties or differences you found and what things helped you to be succeed in your studies so far. The interview should take a maximum of one hour.
- Opportunity to provide, or discuss or share experiences, challenges and strategies that are relevant to your time of studying and living here in South Australia.

How much time will the project take?

The demographic questionnaire will take about 3-5 minutes followed by one interview session lasting for the maximum of one hour. Time for the meeting to do both activities questionnaire and interview will depend upon agreement of both the participant and the researcher in a public, quiet and safe location.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks in this research other than those associated with regular interview process. However, the topic of the research might be sensitive for you as it includes questions about

your experience of studying and living abroad. You are able to stop the interview at any time, take a break from the interview or withdraw from the study if you want to. If you require support and you are still at a university, there are usually student support or counselling services at your university and you are advised to contact them. Alternatively, you could talk to your GP or call a support phone line such as Beyond Blue Support Service, Phone: 1300 22 4636.

An expected risk is that complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed as the sample size is small. However, the utmost care will be taken to ensure that no personally identifying details are revealed and the risk of identification can be kept to its lowest.

What are the benefits of the research project?

The benefits from the study will reach the researcher directly. However, there are no direct benefits to you except feeling a significant part of the study.

Can I withdraw from the project?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time during the research and up to the time of submission of the dissertation. In this case your information will not be included in research. Also, if you require support and you are still at a university, there are usually student support or counselling services at your university and you are advised to contact them. Alternatively, you could talk to your GP or call a support phone line such as Beyond Blue Support Service, Phone: 1300 22 4636.

What will happen to my information?

All the information provided will be treated in the strictest confidentiality during the research process (i.e., recruitment, data collection, data analysis) and during the reporting of research results and publications. Because the sample size is small, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, the researcher will make all efforts to remove any personal information which might de-identify you and the utmost care will be taken to ensure that no personally identifying details are revealed.

The interview data will be transcribed, and you will have access if you request to read the transcripts in order to give additional comments or feedbacks. Access to the interview data will be restricted only for the researcher, the supervisors and the participant. The interview transcript will be stored in secure places, including in the researcher's password-protected hard drive and will be kept in a locked cupboard in a secure locker of the researcher's office. The interview data will be retained by the University of Adelaide, South Australia for 5 years from the date of dissertation submission.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

If you have questions or inquiries regarding the project, you should contact the researcher or supervisor:

Name, Title	Telephone Number	Email
Mrs. Safiah Nasser HAKAMI, Researcher	08 83137571	safiahnasser.hakami@adelaide.edu.au
Associate professor. Julie Matthews, Principal supervisor	08 83131561	julie.matthews@adelaide.edu.au
Dr. Fizza Sabir, Co- supervisor	-	fizzasabir@hotmail.com

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (H-2019-030). The research project will be conducted according to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator. Contact

the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat on phone +61 8 8313 6028 or by email to hrec@adelaide.edu.au. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If I want to participate, what do I do?

If you would like to participate in this research project, please contact Mrs. Safiah Nasser HAKAMI on the aforementioned details. The researcher will provide you with a consent form to be signed and returned to her. You will be given a copy of the consent form and this information sheet for your personal documentation.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. Safiah Nasser HAKAMI

Associate professor. Julie Matthews

Dr. Fizza Sabir

ورقة المعلومات للمشاركين

عنوان البحث: الطالبات السعوديات النوليات: التحديات والخبرات الثقافية في الجامعات الأسترالية: الخبرات الانتقالية واستراتيجيات التكيف في جنوب أستراليا

المشرف الرئيسي: أستلا مشارك جولي ماثوز والدكتورة فضة صابر
الطالب الباحث: صفية ناصر حكيم
درجة الطالب: دكتورة في الفلسفة
رقم الموافقة على أخلاقيات البحث: (H-2019-030)

عزيزتي المشاركة ،

أنت مدعوة للمشاركة في المشروع البحثي الموضح أدناه.

ما هو المشروع ؟

يهدف البحث إلى استكشاف التجارب والتحديات الانتقالية وكذلك استراتيجيات التكيف التي تؤدي إلى النجاح الأكاديمي والتكيف الاجتماعي والثقافي للطالبات السعوديات النوليات في جنوب أستراليا.

من أجل إجراء هذه الدراسة ، تمت دعوتك كطالبة سعودية لملء استبيان قصير ، ثم تتم مقابلتك للحديث حول الخبرات والتحديات والاستراتيجيات ذات الصلة بوقت أثناء الدراسة والعيون هذا في جنوب أستراليا.

من يقوم بالمشروع؟

أنا ، صفية ناصر حكيم ، أقوم بالبحث في هذا الموضوع. أنا طالب بمنحة دراسية من الملحقية الثقافية السعودية -جامعة حفر الباطن -. سيشكل هذا البحث الأساس لشهادة الدكتوراه في الفلسفة في جامعة أدلبيد وهو تحت إشراف الأستاذة الدكتورة جولي ماثوز والدكتورة فضة صابر.

لماذا دعيت للمشاركة؟

أنت مدعوة للمشاركة كطالبة سعودية: (1) براوح عمرك بين 18 و 40 (2) ملتحقة في أي جامعة في جنوب أستراليا أو في معهد لدراسة اللغة الإنجليزية و (3) مبتعدة برعاية برنامج الابتعاث أو برعاية جهات العمل .

ماذا يطلب مني القيام به؟

سوف تشارك في الأنشطة التالية:

- استبيان قصير حول تفاصيلك الشخصية مثل: نوع الشهادة والحالة الاجتماعية وطول مدة وجودك في جنوب أستراليا. سيستغرق الاستبيان حوالي 3-5 دقائق للإجابة.
- مقابلة فردية مسجلة صوتياً تطرح أسئلة حول تجربتك في الدراسة في جنوب أستراليا وما الصعوبات أو الاختلافات التي وجدها وما الأشياء التي ساعدتك على النجاح في دراستك حتى الآن. يجب أن تستغرق المقابلة ساعة واحدة كحد أقصى.
- فرصة لتقديم أو مناقشة أو تبادل الخبرات والتحديات والاستراتيجيات ذات الصلة بوقتك للدراسة والمعيشة هنا في جنوب أستراليا.

كم من الوقت سيستغرق المشروع؟

سيستغرق الاستبيان حوالي 3-5 دقائق تليها جلسة مقابلة واحدة لمدة إحصاها ساعة واحدة. يعتمد وقت الاجتماع للقيام بكل من الاستبيان والمقابلة الخاصة بالأنشطة على موافقة كل من المشارك والباحث لقاء في مكان عام وهادئ وأمن.

هل هناك أي مخاطر مرتبطة بالمشاركة في هذا المشروع؟

لا توجد مخاطر متوقعة في هذا البحث غير تلك المرتبطة بعملية المقابلة. ومع ذلك ، قد يكون موضوع البحث حساساً بالنسبة لك لأنه يتضمن أسئلة حول تجربتك في الدراسة والعيون في الخارج. يمكنك إيقاف المقابلة في أي وقت أو أخذ استراحة من المقابلة أو الانسحاب من الدراسة إذا كنت ترغب في ذلك. إذا كنت بحاجة إلى دعم وكنت لا تزال في إحدى الجامعات ، فعلا ما توجد خدمات دعم أو إرشاد للطالب في جامعتك ويصح بالاتصال بهم بدلاً من ذلك ، يمكنك التحدث إلى طبيبك أو الاتصال بحط هاتف الدعم مثل Phone: 1300 22 4636 -Beyond Blue Support Service

المحاطرة المتوقعة هي أنه لا يمكن ضمان عدم الكشف عن هويتك لأن حجم المشاركين قليل. ومع ذلك ، سيتم تحلأ أقصى درجات الحذر لضمان عدم الكشف عن تفاصيل التعريف الشخصية وإمكانية الحد من خطر التعرف على الهوية (إلى أدنى مستواه).

ما هي فوائد المشروع البحثي؟

سوف تكون فوائد الدراسة إلى الباحث مباشرة. ومع ذلك ، لا توجد فوائد مباشرة لك سوى الشعور بالمساهمة بجزء كبير في الدراسة.

هل يمكنني الانسحاب من المشروع؟

المشاركة في هذا المشروع تطوعية تمامًا. إذا وافقت على المشاركة ، فيمكنك الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت أثناء البحث وحتى وقت تقديم الرسالة. في هذه الحالة ، لن يتم تضمين معلوماتك في البحث. أيضًا ، إذا كنت بحاجة إلى دعم وكنت لا تزال في إحدى الجامعات ، فعلاً ما يكون هناك دعم أو خدمات استشارية للطلاب في جامعتك ويصبح بالاتصال بهم. بدلاً من ذلك ، يمكنك التحدث إلى طبيبك أو الاتصال بحط هاتف الدعم مثل **Beyond Blue Support Service** ، Phone: 1300 22 4636.

ماذا سيحدث لمعلوماتي؟

سيتم التعامل مع جميع المعلومات المقدمة بسرية تامة أثناء عملية البحث (أي المشاركة وجمع البيانات وتحليل البيانات) وأثناء الإبلاغ عن نتائج البحوث والمنشورات. لأن حجم المشاركين قليل ، لا يمكن ضمان عدم الكشف عن هويتك. ومع ذلك ، سيبدأ الباحث قصارى جهدها لإزالة أي معلومات شخصية قد تؤدي إلى إلقاء تحديد هويتك وسيتم اتخاذ أقصى درجات الحذر لضمان عدم الكشف عن تفاصيل التعريف الشخصية.

سيتم منح بيانات المقابلة وسيكون بإمكانك الوصول إليها إذا طلبت قراءة النصوص من أجل تقديم تعديلات أو تطبيقات إضافية. سيتم تقييد الوصول إلى بيانات المقابلة فقط للباحثة والمدرسين والمشاركين. سيتم تخزين نسخة المقابلة في أماكن آمنة ، بما في ذلك القرص الصلب المعصم بكلمة مرور الباحثة وسيتم حفظها في خزائن معلقة في خزائن آمنة بمكتب الباحثة. ستحتفظ جامعة أديلايد بجنوب أستراليا ببيانات المقابلة لمدة 5 سنوات من تاريخ تقديم الرسالة.

يتم أتصل إذا كانت لدي أسئلة حول المشروع؟

إذا كانت لديك أسئلة أو استفسارات بخصوص المشروع ، فيجب عليك الاتصال بالباحث أو المشرف:

Name, Title	Telephone Number	Email
Mrs. Safiah Nasser HAKAMI, Researcher	08 83137571	safiahnasser.hakami@adelaide.edu.au
Associate professor. Julie Matthews, Principal supervisor	08 83131561	julie.matthews@adelaide.edu.au
Dr. Fizza Sabir, Co- supervisor	-	fizzasabir@hotmail.com

ماذا لو كان لدي شكوى أو أي مخاوف؟

تمت الموافقة على الدراسة من قبل لجنة أخلاقيات البحوث الإنسانية بجامعة أديلايد برقم (H-2019-030). سيتم إجراء المشروع البحثي وفقاً للبيان الوطني لـ NHMRC بشأن السلوك الأخلاقي في البحوث الإنسانية 2007 (محدث في 2018). إذا كانت لديك أسئلة أو مشاكل مرتبطة بالجواب العملية لمشاركتك في المشروع ، أو ترغب في إثارة مخاوف أو شكوى بشأن المشروع ، فعليك استشارة المشرف الرئيسي. اتصل بأمانة لجنة أخلاقيات البحوث الإنسانية على الهاتف +61 8 313 8313 6028 أو عبر البريد الإلكتروني على hrec@adelaide.edu.au. إذا كنت ترغب في التحدث مع شخص مستقل بشأن المخاوف أو الشكوى ، فإن سياسة الجامعة بشأن الأبحاث التي تشمل المشاركين من البشر ، أو حقوقك كمشارك. سيتم التعامل مع أي شكوى أو قلق بسرية والتحقيق الكامل. سوف تكون على علم بالنتيجة.

إذا أردت المشاركة ، ماذا أفعل؟

إذا كنت ترغب في المشاركة في هذا المشروع البحثي ، فيرجى الاتصال بالباحثة صفية ناصر حكيم على التفاصيل المذكورة أعلاه. توفر لك الباحثة استمارة موافقة توقيعها وإعالتها إليها. ستحصل على نسخة من نموذج الموافقة وورقة المعلومات الخاصة بوثائق الشخصية.

تفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام،

الباحثة صفية ناصر حكيم
أستلا مشارك. جول، ماثيوز
د. فizza صابر

Appendix D: English and Arabic Versions of Consent Form

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)



CONSENT FORM

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	Saudi International Female Students: Challenges and Cultural Experiences in Australian Universities: the transition experiences and adjustment strategies in South Australia
Ethics Approval Number:	(H-2019-030)

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, and the potential risks and burdens fully explained to my satisfaction by the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the project and my participation. My consent is given freely.
3. Although I understand the purpose of the research project, it has also been explained that my involvement may not be of any benefit to me.
4. I agree to participate in the activities outlined in the participant information sheet.
- Short demographic questionnaire
- One interview
5. I agree to be:
- Audio recorded Yes No
6. I understand that as my participation is **de-identified** and that I can withdraw from the study at any time during the research and up to the time of submission of the dissertation. In this case my information will not be included in research.
7. I have been informed that the information gained in the project may be published in a thesis/conference presentations.
8. I have been informed that while I will not be named in the published materials, it may not be possible to guarantee my anonymity given the nature of the study and/or small number of participants involved.



9. I understand my information will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except where disclosure is required by law.

10. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Participant to complete:

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher/Witness to complete:

I have described the nature of the research to _____

(print name of participant)

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: _____ Position: _____ Date: _____

نموذج الموافقة

1. لقد قرأت ورقة المعلومات المعرفة وأوافق على المشاركة في مشروع البحث التالي

الطلبات السعودية التويات: التحديات والخبرات الثقافية في الجامعات الأسترالية: الخبرات الانتقالية واستراتيجيات التكيف في جنوب أستراليا	عنوان البحث:
(H-2019-030)	رقم الموافقة على أخلاقيات البحث:

2. لقد تم شرح المشروع ، و ما يؤثر على ، والمخاطر المحتملة والأعباء من قبل الباحث. لقد أتيت لي الفرصة لطرح أي أسئلة قد تكون لدى حول المشروع ومشاركتي. اقدم موافقتي كاملة.
3. على الرغم من أنني سوف اشترك في المشروع البحثي ، فقد أوضح الباحث أيضاً أن مشاركتي قد لا تفيدي.
4. أوافق على المشاركة في الأنشطة الموضحة في ورقة معلومات المشاركة.

استبيان قصير

مقابلة واحدة

5. أوافق على أن تكون المقابلة مسجلة صوتياً نعم لا

6. أدرك أنه يمكن تحديد مشاركتي، وأنه يمكن الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت أثناء البحث وحتى وقت تقديم الرسالة. في هذه الحالة ، لن يتم تضمين معلوماتي في البحث.

7. لقد تم إخباري أن المعلومات التي تم الحصول عليها في المشروع قد يتم نشرها في أطروحة / عروض تقديمية.

8. لقد تم إخباري بأنه بينما لن يتم ذكر اسمي في المواد المنشورة ، فقد لا يكون من الممكن ضمان عدم الكشف عن هويتي نظراً لطبيعة الدراسة و لعدد المشاركين القليل.

9. أفهم أن معلوماتي سيتم الكشف عنها فقط وفقاً للموافقة المقدمة ، باستثناء الحالات التي يكون فيها الكشف مطلوباً بموجب القانون.

10. أدرك أنه ينبغي على الاحتفاظ بنسخة من نموذج الموافقة هذا ، عند الانتهاء ، وورقة المعلومات المعرفة.

بيانات المشاركة

الاسم: _____ التوقيع: _____ التاريخ: _____

الباحثة: لقد وصفت طبيعة البحث للمشاركة

الاسم: _____ التوقيع: _____ التاريخ: _____

Appendix E: Profiles of Individual Participants

Hasnaa (P1)

Hasnaa was aged between 35- 40 years and had one child. She came to Australia with her husband to study English academic courses then attended a Master's level course. She was the main recipient of a scholarship from her employer where she works as a teaching assistant in Saudi Arabia. At the interview time, she graduated with a Master's degree from the School of Education and was preparing to go back to Saudi Arabia.

Miram (P2)

Miram was married, aged between 25-34 years and had two children. She received the governmental scholarship (KASP) and was in Canada before moving to South Australia with her husband and children. She was studying Psychology at Master's level and at the interview time was in her first semester.

Lulu (P3)

Lulu was aged between 25-34 years and was single. She came with her brother before getting married, then her husband came after. Being a teaching assistant, she was eligible to apply for an employer scholarship to study a Master's degree in Australia. At interview time, she was a graduate of a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education.

Nora (P4)

Nora was aged between 25-34 years and had one child. Initially, she came with her husband to support him, then was eligible to receive the same scholarship from her husband's employer. At the interview time, Nora was attending an English pathway program to advance her English skills prior studying a Master's degree in Business Management. Before coming to Australia, Nora and her husband studied for short time in the United Kingdom.

Latifah (P5)

Latifah was aged between 25-34 years and had one child. At the interview time, Latifah was in her first semester studying a Diploma in Marketing. She came with her husband who was the recipient of a scholarship from his work to continue Postdoctoral studies. Before coming to Australia, they were in Canada.

Wardah (P6)

Wardah was aged between 25- 34 years and had two children. At the interview time, Wardah was in her second semester studying Chemistry at Master's level. She received an employer scholarship to study abroad being a teaching assistant in a Saudi Arabian university.

Jamilah (P7)

Jamilah was aged between 35-40 year and was single. She was a lecturer in a Saudi Arabian university. At the interview time, she was attending an English academic course before starting her Doctorate degree in Chemistry. She came to Australia with her younger brother after being offered the chance to study abroad on a scholarship from her employer.

Nahla (P8)

Nahla was aged between 25-34 years and had four children. Nahla worked as a lecturer in a Saudi Arabian university and was studying at Doctorate level in English Literature. At the interview time, she was in her first year of PhD candidature.

Hadeel (P9)

Hadeel was aged between 25-34 years and had four children. She came to Australia to support her husband while he attended his study. At the interview, she was attending an English academic course with no intention of enrolling in other degree courses.

Mona (P10)

Mona was aged between 25-34 years, married with no children and came to Australia with her husband. She received the governmental scholarship (KASP) to study a Master's degree. At the interview time, she was in her second semester studying Project Management.

Farah (P11)

Farah was aged between 18-24 years and came to Australia with her brother. Farah worked in a medical institution who offered her the employer scholarship to study overseas. At the interview time, she was in her second semester studying Diploma in Nursing.

Zara (P12)

Zara was aged between 18-24 years. She was the main recipient of the scholarship from her employer in a Saudi Arabian medical institution. She was in the second year doing her Bachelor's degree in Nursing at the interview time. At the beginning, her father came to support her, then she lived alone.

Arwa (P13)

Arwa was aged between 25-34 years, married with no children. She was a lecturer in a Saudi Arabian university and has pursued her Master's degree in the United Kingdom. At the interview time, Arwa was in her second year of PhD candidature and living alone.

Dalia (P14)

Dalia was aged between 24-35 years and had two children. She was a teaching assistant in a Saudi Arabian university. At the interview time, she graduated with a Master's degree in Education.

Appendix F: English and Arabic Versions of Interview Protocol



Attachment 4 – Questionnaire and interview protocol

The first part of this interview will set up personal information about your case in South Australia. Then, the second part of the interview will address your experiences before and after arriving, your challenges from academic, social, and cultural aspects and the adjustment strategies that applied to deal with the different challenges. It is anticipated that both activities will take between 40- 60 minutes.

First part: demographic questionnaire

- 1- What is your name?
- 2- What is your group of age? 18-24 25-34 35-40
- 3- What is your degree course? Undergraduate Master PhD
 Other:
- 4- What is your university?
- 5- What is your subject area?
- 6- What is your level at your course?
- 7- How long have you been in South Australia?
 Less than 1 year 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years or more
- 8- What is your marital status? Single Married Divorced
- 9- Do you have children? Yes No

Second part: interview questions

The transition experiences- before coming to South Australia

- 1- What made you decide to study abroad?
 - 1a- How did you feel about going in Australia before you came here?
 - 1b- what did you do to prepare yourself for coming to Australia? (read, ask friends..)

The transition experiences- after coming to South Australia

2- How would you describe what happened when you arrived here? (Accommodation, transportation, food, weather, children schools, finance..)

2a- Were you welcomed by anyone? (Friend, relative, university services, Saudi club or any other..)

Academic experience and challenges

3- What is your experience of studying here in South Australia?

3a- What do you like about it?

3b- How would describe your previous experience of studying in Saudi Arabia?

3c- What are the differences between experiences? (mixed gender classes, male teachers, instruction of teaching)

3d- Did you have any difficulty of studying here in South Australia? If yes, what kind of difficulties you have? (language of communication, system of teaching, assessments and grading, class times..)

3e- How do you organise classes or working projects with prayer times?

Social experience and challenges

4- What is your social life in South Australia like? How do you spend your time here? (engage in Saudi club activities, engage with Saudis, engage with non-Saudis, engage with community social activities..)

4a- Is your social life in South Australia different from Saudi Arabia? If yes, how is it different from your social life in Saudi Arabia? (may be you had a nanny, maid, driver; lived in a villa, large house..)

4b- How is your relationship with friends back in Saudi? Do you keep in touch with them while being here in South Australia?

What about your friends in here? Where are they from? Do you support each other? If yes, in what way is that?

4c- Did you face any social challenges during your time here in South Australia? (may be you experienced discrimination or racism..)? If yes, please tell me about it and what did you do?

Cultural experience and challenges

5- What is your cultural life in South Australia like?

5a- How it is different from your cultural life in Saudi Arabia?

5b- Why do you still wear hijab or niqab in this culture where it's perfectly fine not to wear it? And how do you feel about your dressing style: hijab or niqab (do you feel awkward, comfortable, confident..)

5c- How would you describe your feelings during cultural or Islamic events? (Eids, Ramadan, national day and family occasions..)

Adjustment and coping Strategies

6- What is your personal way to deal with difficulties?

6a- How do you manage your multiple roles as a student, mother, wife or sister?

6b- How would you describe the help from your: husband or brother in accompany, friends in Saudi or here, family, university, Saudi club, SACM?

6c- What strategies have you applied that helped your academic achievement in South Australia so far?

6d- What strategies or things helped to adapt the life in South Australia?

Evaluation

7- Now that you have been in South Australia for some time, what do you like about this transition experience?

7a- Are you overall satisfied with your decision to come to South Australia? If no, what would help to improve your experience?

7b- What would you advise other Saudi female students to succeed in studies and adjust to life in South Australia?

7c- Would you like to add or speak about other things we might have missed?

استبيان واسئلة المقابلة

سيكون الجزء الأول من هذه المقابلة لتحديد معلومات شخصية عن خبرتك في جنوب أستراليا. بعد ذلك ، سيتناول الجزء الثاني من المقابلة تجاربك قبل الوصول وبعده ، والتحديات التي تواجهها في الجوانب الأكاديمية والاجتماعية والثقافية واستراتيجيات التكيف المطبقة للتعامل مع التحديات المختلفة. من المتوقع أن يستغرق كلا النشاطين ما بين 40 إلى 60 دقيقة.

الجزء الأول: الاستبيان

- 1- ما اسمك
- 2- ما هي مجموعتك العمرية؟ 24-18 34-25 40-35
- 3- ما هو مستوى شهادتك؟ بكالوريوس ماجستير دراسات عليا أخرى:
- 4- ما هي جامعتك؟
- 5- ما هو تخصص الدراسة؟
- 6- في أي سنة دراسية؟
- 7- منذ متى وانت في جنوب أستراليا؟
أقل من 1 سنة 1 سنة 2 سنوات 3 سنوات 4 سنوات أو أكثر
- 8- ما هي حالتك الاجتماعية؟ عزباء متزوجة مطلقة
- 9- هل لديك أطفال؟ نعم لا

الجزء الثاني: أسئلة المقابلة

- تجربة الانتقال - قبل المجيء إلى جنوب أستراليا**
- 1- ما الذي جعلك تقرر الدراسة في الخارج؟
 - 1- كيف كان شعورك تجاه الذهاب إلى أستراليا قبل مجيئك إلى هنا؟
 - 1 ب - ماذا فعلت لتجهيز نفسك للمجيء إلى أستراليا؟ (قرأت ، سألت الأصدقاء ..)
 - 2- **تجربة الانتقال - بعد الفهم إلى جنوب أستراليا**
كيف تصف ما حدث عندما وصلت إلى هنا؟ (السكن ، النقل ، الغذاء ، الطقس ، مدارس الأطفال ، التمويل ..)
 - 2 أ- هل رحب بكم أي شخص؟ (صديق ، قريب ، خدامات جامعية ، نادي سعودي أو أي شيء آخر ..)
 - الخبرة الأكاديمية والتحديات
 - 3- ما هي خبرتك في الدراسة هنا في جنوب أستراليا؟
3 أ - ما الذي يعجبك في ذلك؟
3 ب - كيف تصف تجربتك السابقة في الدراسة في المملكة العربية السعودية؟
3 ج- ما هي الاختلافات بين التجارب السابقة والحالية؟ (فصول مختلطة بين الجنسين ، المعلمون الذكور ، طريقة التدريس)
 - 3 د - هل واجهت أي صعوبة في الدراسة هنا في جنوب أستراليا؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، فما نوع الصعوبات التي تواجهك؟ (لغة إنجليزية ، نظام التدريس ، التقييمات والتقييم ، أوقات الدراسة ..)
 - 3 ع- كيف تنظم الدراسة أو مشاريع العمل مع أوقات الصلاة؟
التجربة الاجتماعية والتحديات
 - 4- ما هي حياتك الاجتماعية في جنوب أستراليا؟ كيف تقضي وقتك هنا؟ (المشاركة في أنشطة النادي السعودي ، والتواصل مع السعوديين ، والاحتفاء مع غير السعوديين ، والمشاركة في الأنشطة الاجتماعية للمجتمع ..)
 - 4 أ- هل حياتك الاجتماعية في جنوب أستراليا مختلفة عن المملكة العربية السعودية؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، كيف تختلف عن حياتك الاجتماعية في المملكة العربية السعودية؟ (لا يكون لديك مربية ، خادمة ، سائق ، تعيش في فيلا ، منزل كبير ..)
 - 4 ب - كيف هي علاقتك مع الأصدقاء في السعودية؟ هل تبقى على اتصال معهم أثناء وجودك هنا في جنوب أستراليا؟
ملا عن أصدقائك هنا؟ من أين هم؟ هل تساعدون البعض؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، ما هو نوع المساعدة؟
 - 4 ج- هل واجهت أي تحديات اجتماعية خلال وقتك هنا في جنوب أستراليا؟ (لا تكون تعرضت للتمييز أو العنصرية ..)؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، فملا أخبرني بذلك وملا فلت؟

التجربة الثقافية والتحديات

- 5 - ما هي حياتك الثقافية في جنوب أستراليا؟
5 أ - كيف تختلف عن حياتك الثقافية في المملكة العربية السعودية؟
5 ب - هل تسمحى لي بسؤالك لماذا ترتدى الحجاب أو النقاب هنا حيث من الحرية عدم ارتداء الحجاب؟ وكيف تشعرين بارتداء الحجاب أو النقاب (هل تشعرين بالحرج أو الراحة أو الثقة ..)
5 ج- كيف تصفين مشاعرك خلال المناسبات الثقافية الوطنية أو الإسلامية؟ (العيد ، رمضان ، اليوم الوطني، والمناسبات العائلية ..)
استراتيجيات التكيف
6- ما هي طريقك الشخصية للتعامل مع الصعوبات؟
6 أ- كيف تديرين أدوارك المتعددة كطالبة أو أم أو زوجة أو أخت؟
6 ب - كيف تصفين المساعدة من: مرافقك هنا زوجك أو أخيك، الأصدقاء في السعودية أو هنا ، الأسرة ، الجامعة ، النادي السعودي ، العلقية الثقافية السعودية؟
6 ج - ما هي الاستراتيجيات التي طبقتها والتي ساعدت على دمجك الأكاديمي في جنوب أستراليا حتى الآن؟
6 د- ما هي الاستراتيجيات أو الأشياء التي ساعدت على التكيف على الحياة في جنوب أستراليا؟
تقييم
7- الآن بعد أن عشت في جنوب أستراليا لبعض الوقت ، ما الذي يعجبك في تجربة الانتقال هذه؟
7 أ- هل أنت راضية بشكل عام عن قرارك بالاقدم إلى جنوب أستراليا؟ إذا كانت الإجابة لا ، فما الذي قد يساعدك على تحسين تجربتك؟
7 ب - ماذا تصفين الطالبات السعوديات الأخريات للنجاح في الدراسة والتكيف مع الحياة في جنوب أستراليا؟
7 ج- هل ترعين في إضافة أي شيء أو التحدث عن أشياء أخرى ربما لم نتطرق لها؟

شكرا لك.. أطيب التحيات
صفية ناصر حكيم

Appendix G: Example of Arabic Interview Transcript

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Appendix H: Example of Translated Interview Transcript

Interview transcript

In the beginning, please tell me what made you decide to study abroad?

Postgrad degree
Employer will award with degree
quality education
Cultural social knowledge

I am an employee at the university, so perusing postgraduate overseas is a requirement. It is not necessary to be abroad, but I felt if I studied abroad, the quality of the study would be better, and the output is higher. It is also more multidisciplinary abroad compared to studying in Saudi Arabia. I also like to learn about different cultures and how the way of life and people in other societies.

Why did you choose Australia or South Australia especially?

Quality education
Honor and prestige
USA/UK etc

Politically good relations
good school admission

Unique & unique culture in many college in AUS

Not racism for muslim women

Welcoming all people
Quality life in a small

I previously studied in Britain during my master's degree, however, the style of study was a bit difficult. So I chose Australia for change because most of my college at the department where I work went to America, Britain and Canada. Still, I don't like America and Canada have some political problems, therefore Australia was my choice and I wanted to explore it and get to know it. It was an opportunity for me when I got school admissions in it. Also, many of my colleagues are studying in America, which is possible that the outputs are similar, but my studies in Australia give me a field that makes stand out from the rest. Moreover, I have been suffered from racism a lot while I was in Britain because of my hijab, so I made my decision that if I get a scholarship, I will not go to Britain and not wear hijab. Maybe my choice is not right to some extent, but, when I arrived in Australia without wearing any hijab, I noticed the difference in the treatment because I look like others and I've never had a bad situation. Besides, friends always say that the people in Australia accept difference and are friendly. Living in Australia is also better as South Australia is one of the top cities to live in. Also, the finical matter is entirely different between Britain and Australia. Everything is better, so all these reasons encouraged me to choose Australia.

How did you feel about going in Australia before you came here?

I got excited, and my husband was with me. I was relieved because I knew that he would help me, especially at first. Compared to my Britain's experience, I had friends and relatives in the same city where I was studying, I did not feel a thing. But I don't know anyone in Australia, and my husband went after a while. So, I became alone and started to feel strange, but I tried to ignore it by spending most of my time in

Engagement with non-Saudi students