

Spring 3-27-2018

# INTERNATIONAL MUSLIM STUDENTS WITHIN A GLOBALIZED EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Noha Ghali

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/educ\\_llss\\_etds](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/educ_llss_etds)



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Ghali, Noha. "INTERNATIONAL MUSLIM STUDENTS WITHIN A GLOBALIZED EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT." (2018).  
[https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/educ\\_llss\\_etds/94](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/educ_llss_etds/94)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Education ETDs at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies ETDs by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

Noha Mohamed Ghali  
*Candidate*

Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies  
*Department*

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication

*Approved by the Dissertation Committee:*

Holbrook Mahn, Ph.D. Chairperson

Donald Zancnella, Ph.D.

Jan Armstrong, Ph.D.

Ozlem Sensoy, Ph.D

**International Muslim Students within a Globalized Educational Context**

**By**

**Noha Mohamed Ghali**

MA TEFL, American University in Cairo, 2006

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Degree of

**Doctorate of Philosophy**

**Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies**

The University of New Mexico

Albuquerque, New Mexico

**July, 2018**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I cannot express enough thanks to a person who chose to be anonymous. This work would not have been possible without your guidance and comments throughout the different stages of the dissertation writing process.

I would like to also thank Dr. Holbrook Mahn for his continuous support, feedback, and guidance. I would also like to thank my supporting father for his encouragement over the years.

Finally, special thanks and gratitude to both Dr, Ann Gonzalez and Dr. Anabel Aliaga-Buchenau. I would not have been able to finish my dissertation without your help.

# **INTERNATIONAL MUSLIM STUDENTS WITHIN A GLOBALIZED EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT**

**by**

**Noha Mohamed Ghali**

**MA TEFL, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO, 2006**

**DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY  
LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND SOCIOCULTURAL STUDIES**

## **ABSTRACT**

While previous research has revealed and documented the difficulties that international students and international Muslim students face when studying abroad, it fails to critically study and discuss the students' perception of reasons behind these difficulties. The main aim of this study is to focus on international Muslim students and explore their social and academic experiences and challenges in a globalized educational context. Another aim is to investigate international Muslim students' perceived reasons behind the challenges they meet, and how they negotiate such challenges. The study reviews the literature on international Muslim students in western higher education to highlight the gap in the literature on these groups of students and show the need for further research. Guided by the work of both Bayat (2015), and Altwaiji (2014) on Neo-orientalism, this study focuses on international Muslim students' experiences and challenges with the aim of guiding researchers and policy makers, and administrators on campuses to improve campus learning environments for international Muslim students. Using qualitative case study methodology, seven student participants and two administrators were interviewed regarding students' experiences and challenges in a southwest university of the

United States. The data revealed nine themes of social experiences and five academic themes related to students' experiences. The data of the current study revealed several social and academic themes that were not discussed in previous studies on international Muslim students and their experiences in the United States.

*Keywords:* international students, Muslim students, challenges, experiences, western higher education, Neo-orientalism, international education, cosmopolitanism.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background of the Study .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	6
Theoretical Framework .....	7
Research Questions .....	11
Purpose of the Study .....	11
Significance of the Study .....	12
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Introduction .....	13
A Framework for the Literature Review .....	14
The Purpose of the Literature Review and Selection of Studies .....	14
The Framework of the Studies Reviewed .....	15
The Review .....	16
The Adjustment Process of International Students .....	16
Factors Contributing to Positive Experiences of International Students .....	21
Local and International Students in Western Higher Education .....	24
Eastern International Students in Western Higher Education .....	28
International Muslim Students in Western Higher Education .....	32
Discussion .....	38

<b>CHAPTER 3 METHEDOLOGY .....</b>	<b>40</b>
Research Design .....	40
Participant Selection Method .....	41
Data Collection Methods .....	46
Methods to Analyze Data .....	48
Credibility .....	50
Consistency .....	52
<b>CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>53</b>
Social Experiences of International Muslim Students .....	54
Summary of the Participants' Social Experiences .....	97
Academic Experiences of International Muslim Students .....	102
Summary of the Participants' Academic Experiences .....	141
Document Analysis .....	145
<b>CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>148</b>
Summary .....	148
Overview of the Study .....	148
Research Design .....	149
Findings .....	150
Social Experiences of International Muslim Students .....	150
Academic Experiences of International Muslim Students .....	159



Limitations of the Study .....	166
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	166
Recommendations for Policy Makers .....	167
Recommendations for Future Research.....	168
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>APPENDIX A LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS.....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>APPENDIX B INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>APPENDIX C INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF</b>	
<b>INTERNATIONAL STUDNETS EMPLOYEES .....</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>APPENDIX D CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARH .....</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>APPENDIX E CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>187</b>

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Background of the Study

The numbers of international students studying outside their home country are increasing. Yet, successful international recruitment does not guarantee positive and rich educational experiences (Lee, 2010). The main aim of this study is to focus on international Muslim<sup>1</sup> students and explore their social and academic experiences and challenges post 9/11 and in a globalized educational context. The study also investigates international Muslim students' perceived reasons behind the challenges they meet, and how they negotiate such challenges.

The chapter below starts with providing a definition of globalization, followed by presenting the relationship between globalization and education and how globalization, through education, benefits the economies of western<sup>2</sup> countries. I then discuss the 9/11 attacks, how these disrupted the globalization process, and affected international Muslim students, in particular. In the Statement of the Problem section that follows I describe the issues that need to be addressed about international Muslim students. Theoretical Framework and Research Questions sections follow. I end the chapter by the Purpose and Significance of the Study sections.

Popkewitz and Rizvi (2010) refer to the ever increasing flow of trade capital, people, images, and ideologies between countries of the world as *globalization*. According to them, social transformations, political and cultural reconfiguration, and complex networks of interaction are all consequences of this process. In other words, interdependence, economic

---

<sup>1</sup> The word Muslim in this study is used to refer to anyone who claims Islam as their religion regardless of their sect, religiosity, and political affiliation.

<sup>2</sup> The word western in this study is used to refer to European countries, United Kingdom, United States, Australia, and Canada.

activities, and the expansion of social, political and cultural relations are all included in and covered by the term *globalization*. According to Popkewitz and Rizvi (2010), globalization is a complex hegemonic western term. They proposed that centralizing the West as the point of reference may be promoting certain hegemonic power relations that serve to organize the world and control it. In other words, the West, which includes Europe, United States, Australia, and Canada may be using globalization as a tool to set standards and measures for other nations and countries.

Globalization has expanded to include higher education. For example, campuses worldwide have an increasing presence of recruiters and marketers who offer attractive and affordable alternatives to studying in one's home country (Lee, 2010). Consequently, international university students (a student who is enrolled in a western higher education institution undertaking an undergraduate or graduate course and is neither a citizen, nor a refugee, nor immigrant of the host western country (Al-Quhen, 2012), constitute around 20% of all international travelers, making student travel a multibillion dollar business (Liewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008). This resulted in a strong indicator of the growing cross-national flow of more than 1.6 million students worldwide to study overseas (Rhee & Sagaria, 2004). Out of these, there are approximately 32% of international students studying in the United States. Also, international students have added variety to university demographics in places like Australia, and the UK (Asmar, 2005). They have also added diverse perspectives and broadened cultural understanding in and out of the classroom (Bevis, 2002; Harrison 2002).

Globalization's expansion to higher education has benefited the economic structures of western countries. For example, in 2003, Australian institutions have witnessed a growth in the enrollment of international students by 15.5%. This growth has contributed over 4 billion

Australian dollars to the Australian economy (Asmar, 2005). In addition, international training and foreign student education was announced by the United States. Department of Commerce (DOC) as the fifth largest export industry in the country. This industry has contributed eleven billion dollars to the U.S. economy (Rhee & Sagaria, 2004). Moreover, the Association of International Educators<sup>3</sup> reported that international students and their dependents contributed to the United States economy by 14.5 billion dollars for the academic year 2006 – 2007.

Western universities and institutions promote the western way of thinking as the producer of unbiased, achievable, and universal knowledge, while other indigenous knowledge is described as inferior, backward, and one dimensional. This resulted in the migration of international students and their flow has been mostly to the West (Stonebanks, 2008). In support of Stonebanks (2008) views about western universities, a report of the Institute of International Educators<sup>4</sup> (2014) listed five top hosting western countries to international students: United States (19%), United Kingdom (12%), France (7%), Germany and Australia (6 %) respectively.

Accordingly, globalization, via higher education among other tools, has established a new world order that has its own power relations and transnational institutions. Consequently, scholars and experts continue to analyze educational settings and the impact resulting from the migration of students to the West. Such analysis should point out the advantages and disadvantages of globalization (Rhee & Sagaria, 2004).

One major disruption of the globalization process by the West was 9/11. The attacks of September 11, 2001 against the United States had a huge negative impact on many people. There was loss of human life, and billions of dollars were spent on the recovery from the disaster (Peek, 2003). The negative impact of the attacks has extended to include thousands of Arabs,

---

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from [https://www.nafsa.org/\\_/File/\\_/nafsapresskit\\_ie\\_facts.pdf](https://www.nafsa.org/_/File/_/nafsapresskit_ie_facts.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from [https://www.nafsa.org/\\_/File/\\_/global\\_market\\_pie\\_chart.pdf](https://www.nafsa.org/_/File/_/global_market_pie_chart.pdf)

Muslims, and any other individuals who appear to be Middle Easterners, and made them targets for blame, anger, discrimination, and racial and religious assault (Peek, 2003).

There were several other consequences of the 9/11 attacks on the United States. According to Lee and Rice (2007), one of these was a decline in the enrollment of international graduate students in general, and Muslim Arab students, in particular, in the United State. The results of a 2004 survey carried out by the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA) which included 530 institutions reported that nearly half of these institutions showed a decline in international graduate students' applications and sixty percent of 130 doctoral and research institutions reported declines in the number of enrolled international graduate students (Lee & Rice, 2007). Also, Muslim Arab students, in particular, showed a significant decline in numbers. A report from the Institute of International Education (2004) showed that enrollment dropped significantly by 9% and 16% from the Middle East and Saudi Arabia respectively.

Moreover, the Council of Graduate Schools in 2004 revealed that hundreds of Middle Eastern students returned home from United States institutions preferring not to live in fear of discrimination and hostility after September 11, 2001 (Lee & Rice, 2007).

According to a report in 2014 from the Association of International Educators (2013), there was a rise in the flow of international students from 2.1 million to 4.1 million in the years between 2001 and 2011. However, the United States lost 10% of international students over that decade. Later, in 2013, the enrollment of international students in the United States started to rise again. As stated previously, such a rise in enrollment contributed to the growth in the United States economy. According to NAFSA (2013), the total growth of international students' enrollment contributed 24 billion dollars in the academic year 2012-2013.

The United States continues to attract international graduate students from different countries. According to Lee and Rice (2007), the United States provides international graduate students with attractive benefits such as facilities, equipment, opportunities to work in the United States, and to earn degrees from well-known educational institutions. However, Lee and Rice (2007) reported that there are many negative experiences of international graduate students. These experiences have the potential to produce resentment and anger towards United States that might override the benefits of studying in the United States.

The enrollment and graduation percentages fail to capture the difficult experiences of international students who persist in their studies (Lee, 2010; Sanner, Wilson, & Samson, 2002). Many of these students persist in their studies because of their fears of repression or to save face regardless of the social isolation and language barriers they suffer from during the years of their study. International students in such situation rely on each other to compensate the lack of the support from their institution (Sanner et al., 2002).

Research has shown that international students, in trying to adapt to their institutions, face many challenges in trying to adapt to their institutions including lack of assimilation, transition, in ability to interact with the host culture, and coping (Bevis, 2002; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Horn, 2002; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). This body of research views host campuses as playing no role in the challenges international students face (Lee, 2010).

Other studies on international students focused on a number of factors that play a role in the experiences of international students. For example, several scholars (Erichsen & Billiger, 2011; Glass, 2012; Lee & Rice, 2007) found that discrimination towards international, gender, family presence, degrees studied, taking courses such as race, ethnicity, growing sense of

national security, developing competition from different countries, and difficulties with obtaining visas are all factors that play a role in the experiences of international students in western higher education.

Of great importance, Lee (2010) reported that international students who have been marked differently (the study did not define the word *different*) from natives of host countries have been victims of hostility and discrimination. In particular, several studies (Erichsen & Billiger, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Morita, 2004; Rhee & Sagaria, 2004) revealed that students, particularly coming from non-western, non-English speaking countries, are being labeled as the “others.” According to these scholars, these students face hardships in higher education more than international students coming from western English-speaking countries. Because of the global tensions and intergroup relations nowadays, international Muslim students, from non-western and non-English speaking countries, face challenges that are different from other groups of students (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2009). Muslim international students also reported racist discourse from professors and racial negative experiences during their university years (Ahmad, 2007; Sheridan, 2006).

### **Statement of the Problem**

While previous research has revealed and documented the difficulties that international students and international Muslim students face when studying abroad, Lee and Rice (2007) assert that it fails to critically study and discuss the students’ perception of reasons behind these difficulties. What institutions of higher education mainly know about international students in the United States is through enrollment figures and trends (Lee, 2010; Sanner et al, 2002). However, Lee and Rice (2007) acknowledged that more attention is needed to study the

experiences of the international students rather than focusing just on numbers of enrollment of international students at campuses as a marker of internationalization.

Prior to 9/11 several problems were identified in the literature on international students. Cole and Ahmadi (2003) asserted that the literature lacked the depth needed to uncover and understand the problems and obstacles that face Muslims while studying in the U.S. Issues such as Muslims' perception of their courses, and how Muslim students perceive the interactions between non-Muslim teachers and non-Muslim students with Muslim students should be focused on in future research (Asmar, 2005). Also, religious discrimination requires researchers' immediate attention (Sheridan, 2006). Moreover, Lee (2010) suggested that further research is needed to examine the role of race and socioeconomic status on international students' experiences. I demonstrate in the following literature review that these problems continue to be unaddressed in post 9/11 research which will warrant the need for my study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework I use in this study is Neo-orientalism, which refers to the reshaping and reorganizing West-and-Islam polarity in a post 9/11 world (more detailed information about the reshaping of the relationship between the West and Islam is provided below in the context of defining Neo-orientalism). However, before explaining the paradigm of Neo-orientalism (Kerboua, 2016; Samiei, 2010), I give below a review of Edward Said's concept of Orientalism.

In his book *Orientalism*, Said (1979) focuses on how western social scientists create an image of eastern cultures, such as North Africa, Arab World, Middle East, South Asia, and South East Asia, as the "Other" belonging to a backward, different, and inferior culture and therefore in need of rescue and western intervention. Moreover, missionaries and orientalist who were



brought by European colonial powers to Orient's cultures spread lies and distortions about Islam to support colonial power's campaign to conquer and colonize the rest of the world. These distortions and lies were not limited to orientalist and missionaries, but were also part of an European popular culture. According to Bayat (2015), Islam was portrayed as a fixed, unchanging, and a key determinant of Orient's culture and society. Such Islam dictates and shapes Muslim values of everyday conducts and ensures fundamental culture uniformity throughout the whole Islamic world. Western social scientists also ignore the views of Orient and turn them into silent shadows brought to life only through the arrogant intellectual views of western social scholars. These Orientalists lack the experience of on-the-spot- observation, while they extrapolated Muslim life from religious texts such as the Quran. In addition, Said (1979) argues that European scholars defined themselves by defining Orient. They described them as uncivilized, subordinate, irrational, lazy, and subjects that cannot decide their own fate. This description made Europeans automatically assume that they are civilized, rational, and active. Generalizing the culture of the Orient was necessary for the Orientalists (Said, 1979). They constructed the West as the center or norm while pushing everything else i.e. the Other to the margins. The views of western scholars toward Orient justified how colonization has the right to civilize and rule them (Said, 1979).

The orientalist's protagonists were thinkers, philosophers, novelists, travelers, and colonial administrators who operated at the time when the West and East were still distant in terms of time and space (Bayat, 2015). Nowadays, current globalization, the subsequent terrorist acts in the West, and how the West responded have added new dimensions to the work of Said (1979) and produced a multi-faceted Neo-orientalism that constitutes a new perspective of the relationship between the West and Islam (Samiei, 2010). Below, I give a review about the factors

that led to the rise of Neo-orientalism. Neo-orientalism is a modern-day western view representing Islam and the Muslim world as a social and ideological threat to western civilization i.e. Orientalism on steroids (Kerboua, 2016).

According to Samiei (2010), three key elements paved the way to Neo-orientalism: globalization, escalating global political changes, and interconnectedness. First, unlike the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the West established a presence in the East through trade, travel, and colonial activities, globalization and the free movement of people across borders have allowed a considerable shift where the contemporary Muslims have established a presence in the West (Bayat, 2015). For example, the growing presence of Muslim scholars in western universities has enabled them to challenge the stereotypes that the Orientalists developed of Muslims previously exposed by the work of Said (Samiei, 2010). Muslims are also present in the West as refugees, students, immigrants, wealthy tourists, and investors in corporations. They have become as part of the social and culture fabric of the western nations (Bayat, 2015).

Furthermore, financing sympathetic approaches to Islam helped the presence of Muslims in the West to be influential (Samiei, 2010). Some Islamic states have made an impact on western academic institutions through their financial support. This financial support has been a result of successful businesses and the increasing income from oil (Samiei, 2010). Also, there is an escalating diversity of western Islamic studies. These studies reveal a wide spectrum of attitudes towards Islam (Samiei, 2010). This diversity can reduce the traditional approach of Orientalism.

Yet, the presence of Muslims in the western societies has been viewed as a threat to western cultural values and the physical well-being of the West (Altwaiji, 2014; Bayat, 2015). According to Bayat (2015), these views are supported by the protagonists such as politicians,

think-tank people, journalists, and Hollywood. These protagonists produce narratives about contemporary Muslims through powerful institutions, mass media, and experts. Extensive venues of dissemination are used to produce images of the Muslim east that reach beyond the public opinion and inform foreign policies and international relations (Bayat, 2015).

The second factor that paved the way to Neo-orientalism was the escalating global political changes. One of the most important consequences of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the retaliation that took place after the attacks was the re-evaluation and reshaping of the term Orient. This led to the emergence of American Neo-orientalists academia that made the Arab world, the Middle East, and predominantly Islamic countries the center of attention (India, Turkey, and Iran were excluded) (Altwaiji, 2014). The War on Terror was another consequence of the attacks on 9/11 and brought back the dividing discourse of “us” and “them” and labeling every Arab Muslim including Christian Arabs as a terrorist (Altwaiji, 2014). This is a case of practicing symbolic power in which distorted images of Muslims are created to produce a hegemonic version of reality by those who are in power.

Third, interconnectedness was another factor that paved the way for Neo-orientalism. Interconnectedness refers to how events happening anywhere in the world have an effect on other parts of the world. Hence, what happens to one group of people affects other groups. Modern technologies changed the concept of space and turned the world into a small village. For example, global mass media and the internet play a major role in accessing information and connecting different parts of the world (Samiei, 2010).

The three factors mentioned above led to the rise of Neo-orientalism where intellectuals and opinion makers produced knowledge, news, analyses, and current affairs negatively commenting about Arabs and Muslims. The result was the emergence of a more hostile form of

Neo-orientalism called Islamophobia (Kerboua, 2016). Islamophobia is a feeling of hatred, fear, discomfort, and apprehension toward all that is concerned with Islam and Muslims (Kerboua, 2016).

### **Research Questions**

This study investigates the experiences and challenges that international Muslim students face on the main campus of a large university in the southwest United States through the following research questions:

1. *What are the social and academic experiences that international Muslim students face in United States higher education post 9/11?*
2. *What are the reasons, perceived by international Muslim students and staff, behind these challenges?*
3. *How do international Muslim students and staff negotiate the challenges that international Muslim students face in United States. higher education institutions?*

### **Purpose of the Study**

There are several purposes of this study. The first purpose is to explore the experiences and challenges of international Muslim students in United States higher education. The second purpose of the study is to critically study how these students perceive reasons behind the challenges they meet. The third purpose is to explore different ways that international Muslim students use to negotiate the challenges they face during their stay in the United States. The fourth purpose of the study is to bring the experiences and challenges of international Muslim students to the attention of policy makers and campus administrators to design and ensure learning environments that support international Muslim students. The fifth purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature on international Muslim students since the studies on

international Muslim students are very limited in number and most of them are not conducted in the Southwest area of the United States.

### **Significance of the Study**

Studying the experiences and challenges of international Muslim students in a globalized education context is a topic of a high importance for several reasons. First, this study could guide and assist higher education institutions in terms of increasing international students' satisfaction which could lead to increasing their numbers on different campuses. Increasing international students' profile could lead to financial gains and achieving retention. Second, Internationalization also enhances academic reputation of institutions and provides opportunities of global connections. Third, this study could offer practical guidance to policy makers and campus administrators and educators to provide international Muslim students with meaningful social and academic experiences that could support their development using resources available. This could in turn enhance cross cultural understanding and provide opportunities for international students to be involved in university and local community life. Fourth, exploring the experiences of international Muslim students could uncover the difficulties that could be avoided or at least alerted against for future international Muslim students who are interested in pursuing their studies in the United States. Finally, this study could help international students in the future to arrange intervention sessions to raise awareness of the challenges that international Muslim students face on campuses and work on eliminating such difficulties.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

International students in higher education have been increasing in number in many countries (Coles & Swami, 2012). It is also anticipated that international students will continue to grow in number to reach 8 million in 2025 (Lee, 2010). The United States and the United Kingdom are the most popular choice in the world for international students to study (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014). Moreover, the economic benefits from international students in higher education have been reported by several countries. For example, education is among the top exports for both the United States and Australia (Lee, 2010). In addition, international enrollment is considered a critical marker of a higher education institution's prestige (Lee, 2010). It also supports peace and global connections between cultures due to the creation of inter-culturally competent international students. These international students serve as human bridges upon their return home as they take advantage of their cross-culture contact (Brown, 2009). Furthermore, international students increase tolerance in host countries and appreciation of different cultures (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Due to the economic and culture benefits stated above, understanding international students' experiences is critical. Improving their satisfaction and ensuring their retention as well as enrollment of new students are significant to host universities and countries (Lee, 2010). Research on international students and their experiences, needs, expectations, and perceptions of their host institutions have been carried out by several scholars. Some researchers suggested that international students' motivation to know about a new world and culture can help in decreasing the challenges that they might face when adjusting to a new culture (Brown, 2009). However,

other researchers found that international students face many hardships that hinders them from fully participating in host communities (Lee & Rice, 2007). The section below reviews different aspects around international students' experiences and challenges in western higher education, in general, and international Muslim students in particular.

### **A Framework for the Literature Review**

The following review is divided into four main sections. The first part of the review presents the goal of reviewing the literature with respect to the topic of the study. In addition, it shows the method I used regarding the selection of the studies in terms of years covered, search engines used, key words which guided the search, the criteria for including and excluding studies of the review, the rationale for choosing such criteria, and the names of the peer reviewed journals I used in my search. In the second section, I explain the framework I use to review the studies below. After that, I present a review of the previous research and studies I selected on the experiences of international students, in general, and Muslim students, in particular, in western higher education. Finally, in the fourth section, I discuss the findings of the studies reviewed, and I show the gap in the literature and how my study on international Muslim students within a globalized education context contributes to research and fills in the gap mentioned above.

### **The Purpose of the Literature Review and Selection of Studies**

The main aim of the literature review is to introduce the literature related to international students, in general, and international Muslim students, in particular, in western higher education. Such introduction helps in identifying gaps in the literature and put forth the rationale of my study.

In this review, I used search engines EBSCOHOST, Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Pro Quest. I was able to include studies carried out from 2002-2016. I used several key words that helped me obtain the articles included in this review. These key words and phrases were: *Muslim, students, challenges, difficulties, experiences, adjustment, higher education, international education, international students, sojourn, accommodation, and cosmopolitanism*. The relevance of the topics and recent publication dates were the criteria for the studies included. Relatively little literature was found related directly to international Muslim students in the United States. This is why studies from other countries on international students have been included. I also used peer reviewed academic journals including (but not limited to) *Journal of Research in International education, Journal of Studies in International Education, The Review of Higher Education, Journal of American Culture, Journal of International Students, International Muslim students, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, College Students Journal, Journal of Psychology, BMC Nursing, Journal of College Student Development, Education Tech Research Development, and TESOL Quarterly*.

### **The Framework of the Studies Reviewed**

The framework I use to report on the studies in this review is divided into five main sections. In the first section, I review studies that focus on exploring the adjustment process of international students, whether socially or academically, in host western countries. The second section contains a group of studies that emphasize factors contributing to international students' positive experiences as well as their needs in western higher education. A third group of studies examines the differences between local and international students with respect to the academic and social experiences, how far local students benefit from international students and interact with them, and how international students are viewed by local students.



The fourth group of studies reviewed narrows down the scope of the review and focuses on a particular group of students; eastern international students. This section of studies stresses the experiences and challenges eastern international students face in western higher education and how these are different from that of their counterparts from western countries. The fifth main group of studies narrows the topic further and takes the scope of the review to a more specific level. The fifth section focuses on international Muslim students' experiences and challenges. After each main section of studies. I provide a summary of the main findings of the studies reviewed.

## **The Review**

### **The Adjustment Process of International Students**

In the section below, I review studies that focus on investigating the adjustment process of international students, whether socially or academically, in host western countries. I follow this review by a summary of the reviewed studies' findings.

Chein (2016) explored whether the U-curve hypothesis could be applied to first year full-time graduate students in a south west university in U.K. The U-curve hypothesis is concerned with international students' adjustment process that starts with positive feelings at the beginning of their stay, followed by feelings of rejection, then the process ends with a compromise (Chein, 2016). Interviews were carried out with 26 participants. Visual graphical evaluations was the original method of data collection. Monthly self-evaluations were also used to collect data. Seven of the participants were doctorate students and 19 were Master's students. Nine were from Europe, eight from Asia, three from Africa, and three from the Middle East. According to Chein (2016), the findings of the visual graphical evaluations and the quantitative data of the study revealed that the U-curve hypothesis did not apply to the interviewees in the study who indicated

that each adjustment process could be represented individually. In other words, the adjustment process is variable and complex. In addition, the data from the interviews showed that factors such as globalization, age, religion, culture similarity, maturity, personality, and previous work, study, travel abroad experience play a role in the experiences of the participants and explain why the U-curve hypothesis did not apply to them. Another finding was that interviewees, over time, were able to better manage off campus life (Chein, 2016). The researchers recommended that support and help are needed for international students throughout their period of study. Also, a broader involvement for international students whether on or off campus is highly encouraged such as interactions with native-speakers and encouraging students to pair-up with English-speaking roommates.

Further research challenged the U-curve hypothesis and investigated the applicability of it to international students. Coles and Swami (2012) explored the sociocultural adjustment process of 58 first and second-year undergraduate students from Malaysia. The participants were recruited from three different universities in Greater London. Similar numbers of male and female students participated in the study. The ethnic background of the Malaysian students varied (Chinese, Malay, & Indian). The data was collected through interviews. According to Coles and Swami, the results indicated that the participants received support from members of the same ethnic group or culture. However, many participants blamed the co-culture community for their isolation from British students and other international students. Within the co-culture community, an ethnic division divided up the community between Chinese Malaysian and Malay Malaysian. The two groups had separate friendships groups. The participants also indicated that over time they developed an increasing self-confidence to break out of the co-culture community. Participants viewed student accommodation as the best way to meet British students

and other international students. They were able to develop friendships with the students whom they shared a kitchen with. Students who moved out of the student accommodation lost contact with non-Malaysian students. In addition, some participants were able to establish friendships during their academic courses. Other participants complained that the contact hours during their courses were not enough to interact with their classmates and that their relationships with them were superficial and routine. Malaysian university societies dominated the social life of the Malaysian participants. Moreover, the learning curve of some of the students was smooth and they steadily adjusted and did networking with British and other international students, while for others the learning curve was shallow for a sustained period which lasted for months or years. The researchers recommended that future work should continue to investigate the opportunities for culture contact during the process of adjustment for international students (Coles & Swami, 2012).

Similarly, Brown and Holloway (2008) carried out an ethnographic study to investigate the adjustment process of 150 international postgraduate students at a university in the south of England from the initial stages to the month of students' departure. Two thirds of the participants were from South East Asia and one third were from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Data was collected through interviews and observations. According to Brown and Holloway, the findings indicated that students derived some pleasure from interactions with the new surroundings. However, they suffered from developing communicative competence in academic and everyday life, depression, anxiousness about their linguistic competence, disorientation, loneliness, and homesickness with the initial stage of their study period. Most of the participants showed a decrease in acculturation stress as time progressed. Similarly, the anxiousness due to linguistic competence decreased over time. However, these findings cannot be generalized on all

the participants as some of them fluctuated in their sense of success in various facets of life such as academic progress and culture adjustment (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Towards the end of the academic year, all participants reported their growth professionally, acceptance of new practices, tolerance, and in their interpersonal relationships. They also reported their growth in intercultural competence. The researchers recommended that each student's needs and circumstances should be considered separately as the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all international students (Brown & Holloway, 2008).

Moreover, to further examine the learning experiences of international students, Evans and Stevens (2011) explored the experiences of 17 international doctoral nursing students from 6 different U.K. universities. The participants were from 9 different countries. Fifteen were from European Union countries, two from non-European countries, eight from the Middle East, two from South Asia, four from East Asia, and one from sub-sahran Africa. Their ages ranged between 33-49 years. Six participants were male. The data was collected through interviews. According to Evans and Stevens, the results showed that many students complained about the lack of structure of their program. They needed a stronger emphasis on professional nursing issues as well as research. Also, students felt isolated from their department's wider research environment, and wanted more opportunities to network with their U.K. peers (Evans & Stevens, 2011). In addition, students viewed a good supervision relationship as the most important supporting element in a doctoral program. However, sometimes it was difficult to maintain a good relationship with supervisors due to differences in student-supervisor expectations and in approaches to supervision. The researchers recommended that further research is needed to explore the relationships between students and supervisors and how far doctorate programs are suitable for international nursing students (Evans & Stevens, 2011).

Along the same lines of investigating the experiences of international students, Wright and Schartner (2013) explored the role of language proficiency in international students' experiences, students' perceptions of their interactions, and whether there were evidence of positive sociocultural adaptation. The data was collected through interviews and filling a self-reported diary of hours of interaction in different settings. The participants were 20 postgraduate first year students in an applied linguistics program in a university in the north east of England. One of the participants was from Turkey, two were from Saudi Arabia, and eleven were from China, or Taiwan. The participants were also divided into one male and the others were females. According to Wright and Schartner, the results revealed that the participants were frustrated in failing to achieve successful interactions because of the limited number of listening and speaking hours on and off campus. They also indicated that they had problems in socio-culture adaptation and establishing friendships with their co-national groups. The participants identified external factors outside their control to be affecting their successful interactions such as structures of their courses, university-provided accommodation, and unfamiliar content of their classes. Moreover, same-country accommodation arrangements, unfamiliarity with the kind of vocabulary for everyday activities, accent, and slang added to the difficulty of interactions with English speakers. Internal barriers such as being caught at the threshold between being aware of the chances of interactions with native speakers and not taking them were also reported. This reluctance of speaking with native speakers was because of sociocultural distance and a feeling of being caught between capacity and choice over interaction rather than linguistics barriers. In informal settings, participants preferred to communicate with their own country groupings to native speakers of English. The researchers urged greater continuous support for international

students throughout their period of study. They also recommended that students should be encouraged to interact on and off campus (Wright & Schartner, 2013).

In summary, the nature of the academic and social experiences of international students and their adjustment process have been investigated by several researchers (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Chein, 2016; Coles & Swami, 2012; Evans & Stevens, 2011; Wright & Schartner, 2013). These studies' findings revealed that the adjustment process of international students is a complex one that does not follow a smooth path but rather fluctuates and involves several factors such as language, academic content, load of work, area of study, on and off campus accommodation, culture, acculturation stress, sociocultural isolation, structure of the program, opportunities of interaction with native speakers, relationships with supervisors, and peers and same ethnic group relations.

### **Factors Contributing to Positive Experiences of International Students**

In the section below, I review another group of studies that explore factors that contribute to international students' positive experiences as well as their needs during their years of study in western countries. I provide a summary of the main studies' findings, after reviewing the studies.

Glass (2012) conducted a quantitative study to examine international students' educational experiences. Glass wanted to know if these experiences were associated with international students' learning, development, and perception of campus climate. Data was collected through a self-reported technique in which a survey was given to 29,404 undergraduate students who attended 55 American colleges and universities. One thousand nine hundred and ninety two among these participants were international students. These international students were from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Fifty-two percent of these students were females and 48% were males. Seventy three percent were doctorate students, 13% were master's

students and 14% were undergraduates from different university years. The results showed that international students who had positive perception of campus climate were those who participated in leadership programs, interacted with others from their own culture, took courses in which professors encourage intragroup dialogues. These students also got involved in community service, took courses focused on race and ethnicity, participated in discussions that promote culture diversity, and got in contact with students from other cultures.

Along the same lines, Ye and Edwards (2015) investigated how eleven Chinese overseas doctoral students (4 males and 7 females) adjusted successfully to a different academic, social, and culture environment in the United Kingdom. The participants' ages ranged between 26 and 39 from different disciplines such as Applied Linguistics, Engineering, Electrical, Education, Finance, and Information Management and Systems. According to Ye and Edwards, the findings of the study revealed that the participants used strategies such as autonomy, authenticity, creativity, self-reflexivity, and ontological identity to adapt and adjust to their new lifestyle. The researchers suggested that universities need to create an inclusive and welcoming environment that encourages intercultural communication.

To add to the picture of international students in western higher education, other researchers attempted to assess international students' needs by focusing on the similarities and differences of their academic and social experiences based on their gender, geographical region, and area of study. Hanassab and Tidwell (2002) investigated the needs of 640 international students enrolled at the University of California at Los Angeles. There were 369 males and 271 females. Their ages ranged from 17 to 47. There were 327 students from Asia (China, Taiwan, Korea, and India), 158 from Europe (Italy, France, Germany, and England), 62 from Americas (Mexico, Argentina, Brazil), 39 from South East Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and

Singapore), 27 from the Middle East (Turkey, Israel, and Iran), 6 from Africa (Egypt, Tanzania, Kenya, Namibia, Cameroon), 7 from Oceania (Australia and New Zealand), and 14 from Canada. The data was collected through a survey. The average number of years that the participants stayed in the United States were three years. According to Hanassab and Tidwell, the results indicated that students from different regions had different needs. For example, international students from Africa, Asia, and Southeast Asia had the greatest adjustment difficulties among all regions. Second, female international students expressed greater difficulty in adjustment than did their male counterparts. Third, undergraduate international students indicated higher needs and problems than did the graduate international students. Fourth, the results indicated that science-related fields' students had the most difficulties and highest needs. Fifth, African international students reported difficulty related to discrimination and stereotyping. Sixth, academic and career needs were the top priority for international students. Personal and psychological needs were low. Also, knowledge of visa requirements and immigration regulations were their most important needs followed by academic and career needs. The researchers recommended that future research should take in consideration students' needs based on their nationality, region, gender, and area of study. In addition, more information is needed about international students and explorations of subgroup differences (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002).

To summarize the studies above, within the framework of examining the nature of international students' experiences, scholars (Glass, 2012; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Ye & Edwards, 2015) carried out studies that highlighted factors contributing to international students positive experiences in western higher education. The studies' results indicated that leadership programs, intragroup dialogues, and community services contribute to a positive learning



environment for international students (Glass, 2012). While successful international students used strategies such as autonomy, reflexivity, and creativity (Ye & Edwards; 2015), it is important to consider students' needs based on their country, region, gender, and area of study (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002).

### **Local and International Students in Western Higher Education**

The section below is the third group of studies on international students. I review the studies that investigate the differences and similarities between local and international students in terms of their social and academic experiences, how local students view international students, and how far both groups of students interact with each other. After reviewing the studies, I provide a summary of the studies main findings.

Peacock and Harrison (2009) carried out a study to examine how far local students interact and benefit from international students. The study included 60 second year undergraduate U.K. participants from business studies, creative art and media in two universities in the southwest of England. Data was collected through focus group interviews, questionnaires from students, diversity awareness training sessions, discussions and feedback from academic staff. According to Peacock and Harrison, the findings revealed that language proficiency determined the extent of socialization with international students. European students were the most fluent English speakers which allowed them to interact with U.K. students. International students with weaker language skills, but who initiate conversations, were seen as requiring attention and concentration. However, a strong credit was given to them for trying to engage with other students. International students with poor language skills who did not initiate interactions were viewed by U.K. students as rude, unfriendly, distant, or arrogant. Some U.K. students expressed their unwillingness to interact with these international students.

Consequently, British students made a link between the level of proficiency of international students and their introversion or extroversion. In addition, U.K. students viewed international students as challenging the prevailing British culture and academic norms in the classrooms. A range of behaviors were related to international students such as poor timekeeping, boastfulness and arrogance, lack of respect for staff and other students, and misuse of virtual learning environment. Also, U.K. students expressed concern about group work with international students. They perceived a threat that international students could bring their grade down because of their limited language ability, lack of knowledge or understanding of British pedagogy. The U.K. students expressed their fears of talking with international students in case they say offending or wrong things (mindfulness). Moreover, U.K. students associated age with increasing maturity and commitment of international students to their studies and disinterest in socializing. Another finding, U.K. students mentioned that the British drinking culture was a significant barrier to international students. It is important to mention that U.K. students' interactions with students from Europe, Anglophone, and Latin American countries were active, of a stronger rapport, and more positive than international students who were categorized, by U.K. students, either by ethnicity (Chinese), geography (Africa), or religion (Muslims). Some U.K. students blamed themselves for the lack of communication with international students. Others blamed international students for their exclusionary behavior, while most of U.K. students blamed university and staff for the superficial interaction with international students.

In continuation of investigating how local students view international students in higher education, Charles-Toussaint and Crowson (2010) carried out a study to examine predictors of prejudice against international students in a southwestern university in the United States. The data was collected through a questionnaire. The participants were 188 American students (55

males and 133 females). Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 39 years. 76% were white, 6.9% were African American, 4.8% were Asian American, 4.8% were Native American, 2.7% were Hispanic, and 3.7% were other. According to Charles-Toussaint and Crowson, the results indicated that prejudice against international students stemmed from United States students' desire for power, superiority, and motivation toward social conformity, security, and achievement. United States students perceived international students as threatening their beliefs and values, while also posing threats to their social and economic status, educational, and physical well-being. The researcher recommended that intervention and more efforts are needed from policy makers and administrators in higher education to foster a deeper and stronger contact between international students and United States students. They also recommended further research to investigate whether the intervention and creating opportunities for contact between the two groups of students should reduce the prejudice that international students suffer from.

Along the same lines, Rhee and Sagaria (2004) have researched how international students are portrayed in higher education press. Using the concepts and critical perspectives of globalization and imperialism with respect to higher education, fifty-five articles and 23 opinion pieces published in the Chronicle of Higher Education (CHE), between 1996 -1999, were analyzed (Rhee & Sagaria, 2004). The purpose of the analysis was to raise the awareness and identify hidden power relations. According to them, the analysis findings revealed that international students were viewed as capital and regarded as the subjugated other. International students were seen as an inferior, homogeneous group of people. Rhee and Sagaria (2004) suggested further research on how international students are perceived in higher education.

In contrast to the previous studies reviewed, Klomegah (2006) reported no differences between international and local students' experiences in higher education. The participants 94

students, 51 were international students from Africa, Asia, Central America, South America, Oceania, Europe, and North America. Forty three of the participants were American students. The participants were divided into 52% females and 48% males. The average age was 21 years, with the range of 17 to 34 years. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Klomegah's (2006) study findings revealed no differences between international university students and local students in terms of their experiences on campus. Klomegah showed no difference in alienation between international students and other American students in higher education. The researcher also argued that American students were welcoming to international students. According to Klomegah, the size of the campus might be a factor in bringing students together or drifting them apart. Participants reported that attending culture events and orientation as well as participating in host families programs and programs that pair international students with American students are all activities that may help the adjustment of international students to new campus environment.

In brief, this group of studies focused on how international students were viewed by local students, how far they interacted and benefited from each other, and the differences and similarities in their experiences (Klomegah, 2006; Peacock & Harrison, 2009; Rhee & Sagaria, 2004; Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010). The findings revealed that international students were viewed as a source for capital, inferior, and threatening the values and beliefs of host countries (Rhee & Sagaria, 2006). Another study suggested that local and international students experienced no differences in alienation (Klomegah, 2006). Finally, local students associated the level of proficiency of international students with their introversion or extroversion (Peacock & Harrison, 2009). Local students also viewed international students to be challenging the western culture, values, beliefs, social and economic status, education, and physical being, and academic

norms (Peacock & Harrison, 2009; Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010). Further, international students were seen as a threat to local students' grades when involved in group work, rude to staff and students, poor timekeeping, and arrogant (Peacock & Harrison, 2009).

### **Eastern<sup>5</sup> International Students in Western Higher Education**

This section narrows down the scope of review by moving from reviewing studies that focus on the experiences and challenges of international students in general to focusing on studies that examine eastern international students in particular. This section is concerned with studies that explored the adjustment process of eastern international students and how this process is different from that of their counterparts from western countries. In the section below, I review these studies, then I provide a summary of the main findings of these studies.

Brown and Jones (2013) carried out a study to explore international students' experiences and reporting incidents of racism. Data was collected through a survey with 153 international postgraduate students and thirty three students agreed to be interviewed later. The international students were enrolled in a university in the south of England. Most of them were from China, Taiwan, Thailand, and India. According to Brown and Jones, the results indicated that forty nine students (one third) of the participants experienced racism and some experienced multiple racism. Forty three students of these forty nine students were from non-white and non-European countries. This finding suggests that physical distinctiveness from the host country increases vulnerability of abuse (Brown & Jones, 2013). The participants who experienced racism reported that they were subjected to physical assault such as throwing bottles, eggs, stones, and water as well as verbal assault such as being told to go back to their own country, pejorative comments about home country and perceived race, and aggressive laughter. The perpetrators of the racist

---

<sup>5</sup> The word eastern in this study is used to refer to people coming from the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. See <https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/me.htm>

assault were always white male in their teens, twenties, thirties, young boys around ten years old or old couples. These incidents of racism affected the participants negatively and threatened their well-being. Consequently, international students suffered from emotional reactions such as sadness, depression, and disappointment. The researchers recommended the topic of racism should be handled by a number of stakeholders. At an institutional level, universities need to take more measures to ensure the safety of their students. At a broader level, the Council for International Student Affairs and the National Union of Students need to take an active role in identifying solutions (Brown & Jones, 2013).

To further assert the differences in hardships between international students from western countries and other non-western countries, Lee (2010) collected data from 501 graduate and undergraduate participants through using a questionnaire in a southwest university in the United States. Sixty five% of the participants were from Asia, 10% were from Europe, 11% were from Latin America, 3% were from the Middle East, and 3% were from Africa. The aim of the study was to explore the educational experiences of international students based on their country of origin. Countries of origin were grouped into predominantly white regions (PWR) (Europe, Canada, and Australia) and predominately non-white regions (PNWR) (Latin America, Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia). Another aim of the study was to explore to what extent international students recommended studying at their host institution. The findings revealed that international students from PNWR experienced greater difficulties in social adjustment and felt they were not treated as fairly as national students and had more negative experiences compared to their counterparts from PWR. The students' perception of receiving fair and equal treatment was the most important factor in them recommending their host institution to other students. The researcher suggested that further research is needed to go beyond

international enrollment counts. Native students, faculty, administration should be positively interacting and exchanging ideas with international students (Lee, 2010).

The multiple hardships of non-western international students were also revealed in the findings of a study conducted by Lee and Rice (2007) who examined the experiences of 24 international students of different disciplines. Through using interviews at a research university in the United States Southwest, the researchers carried out their study with participants representing different countries, only one from the Middle East region, six from India, six from East Asia, four from Latin America, three from Europe, one from Africa, one from Canada, one from Caribbean, and one from New Zealand. According to Lee and Rice, inside or outside the academia, international students were ignored, negatively confronted, and received verbal insults. One of the important findings of the study was that western, English-speaking students experienced limited discrimination compared to those students coming from other countries. Thus, Lee and Rice (2007) concluded that discrimination in the host society might be responsible for the problems that some international students face. Lee and Rice (2007) recommended that further research be concluded on international students, with respect to the attitudes of faculty, staff, and students on the campuses of other universities and colleges.

In continuation of highlighting the differences in experiences between European international students and Eastern international students, Erichsen and Bolliger (2011) carried out a study that explored how international graduate students perceived their social and academic life. Using a mixed-methods approach, 54 participants completed a survey and eight participants were involved either in focus groups or individual interviews. The participants represented 24 countries. The majority of the participants were males from Kenya, China, and Indonesia, and studying for their master's program in the United States between 3 and 160 months without their

families living with them. The study was conducted in a western university within the United States. According to Erichsen and Bolliger (2011), the findings of their study indicated that at least 70% of the participants on the questionnaire responded that they do not feel socially isolated. However, several participants voiced high levels of isolation, whether socially or academically in the interviews conducted with them. Also, European students felt their input was valued by their advisors and colleagues more than students coming from Asia. The researchers suggested that further studies about international students need to be carried out in other contexts to explore the experiences of international students in the United States.

Similar to the international male graduate students in Erichsen & Bolliger (2011), Morita (2004) reported that international female Japanese university graduate students faced challenges in regards to power relations and how these learners socialize with their classmates and new academic communities. Morita (2004) investigated the perspectives and participation of six international female Japanese students in a Canadian university. A multiple case study approach was used to collect data over an academic year via interviews with participants and teachers, observations, and reports. According to Morita (2004), the Japanese students had difficulties with contributing to class discussions and understanding reading materials due to the participants' perception of their limited English proficiency and how other students would perceive them as not intelligent and their limited proficiency in English. Other participants felt insecure in class and inferior to their classmates. It is important to note that the students were actively negotiating their roles in classroom even when they seemed not active or withdrawn. The study suggested that instructors should design class discussions and various activities in a way that would include international students, ensure equitable collaboration, and use strategies to help international students' comprehension of class discussions (Morita, 2004).



In brief, the differences in experiences between Eastern international students, in particular and western international students in western higher education were highlighted in several studies (Brown & Jones, 2013; Erichsen & Billiger, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee, 2010; Morita, 2004). The findings of these studies revealed that students coming from non-white and non-English speaking countries experienced racism and physical and verbal assault (Brown & Jones, 2013). Furthermore, international students from non-English speaking countries experience greater social adjustment challenges and felt they were not treated fairly as national students and their counterparts from other white and English-speaking countries (Lee, 2010). Similarly, English-speaking students experienced limited discrimination compared to those students coming from other countries (Lee & Rice, 2007). Along the same lines, European students felt their input was valued by their advisors and colleagues more than students coming from Asia (Erichsen & Billiger, 2011). Finally, eastern students had difficulties contributing to class discussions and understanding readings materials (Morita, 2004).

### **International Muslim Students in Western Higher Education**

Under this section, a group of studies that investigates the experiences and challenges of international Muslim students narrows down the review further and brings it to its main point. In the section below, I review each of the studies on international Muslim students. Then, I give a summary of these studies' findings.

Marzouk (2012) examined the experiences of seven international Muslim graduate students in a southwestern university in the United States and explored the influence of cultural activities sponsored by university departments in bridging the gap between Muslims and western culture. The participants were from different countries, academic fields, and genders. Marzouk (2012) used in-depth interviews to collect data. The findings showed that all participants reported

that they had received more opportunities to get to know the American culture than Americans got to know the Islamic culture. In addition, the participants thought that culture events such as music, dancing, traditional cuisine, and clothes were all ineffective in bridging the gap between Islam and western culture (Marzouk, 2012). The participants also reported their concerns about the stereotypes of Muslims and Islam. Finally, they blamed media as the main source of negative Muslim portrayals. These portrayals created barriers between them and other Americans (Marzouk, 2012). The researcher recommended that further studies should be carried out to bring a better understanding of the Muslim Other (Marzouk, 2012).

Similar to Marzouk (2012), Poynting and Noble's (2004) participants reported that the main perceived sources of racism and discrimination in Melbourne and Sydney were: media and the state. These two sources reinforced negative beliefs and stereotypes of Muslims in Australia. Poynting and Noble (2004) carried out a study of 186 citizens and international students (these two cities have the greatest numbers of Middle Eastern and Muslims in Australia), who were Muslims, Christians, and atheists. Twenty nine percent of the participants were full-time students. The aim of the study was to investigate whether the participants experienced racism, abuse or violence and whether they had reported such incidents officially. Data was collected using a questionnaire and 34 interviews. According to Poynting and Noble, the findings revealed that Arabs and Muslims reported experiencing an increase in incidents of racism perpetuated against them. Muslims felt that they faced more racism than others at universities and colleges, work, streets, public transportation, schools, and shopping malls. Muslim women believed that they faced more racism than men in the streets because of their hijab. Racism in schools, colleges, and universities was reported by over quarter of the participants. They also reported that religion was the main reason for this racism and their beliefs in Islam. Ideologies linking

terrorism to Islam were also reported. The researchers suggested that further studies are needed to focus on the complexity of the social experiences of Muslims within the analysis of racism.

Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay (2007) discussed the relationship between religion and racism and referred to it as contemporary cultural racism. According to Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay (2007), contemporary cultural racism is a form of racism that judges a cultural group's ways of life (these are observable elements of culture such as ways of dressing, food, religious performances and ways of living) and on the basis that a cultural group does not fit or belong within a society. Consequently, cultural racism promotes hierarchies and inferiority of certain cultures while giving superiority to other cultures. Contemporary cultural racism aims to reinforce cultural privilege, differentiation, discourses of otherness, and inferiority. In my study, I equate Dunn et al's contemporary cultural racism to Islamophobia.

In continuation of stereotyping Islam and Muslims, several studies explored the role of the western media in the representation of Islam and Muslims and the effect of this representation on International Muslim students. For example, Brown, Brown, and Richards (2015) studied the British media representation of Islam and how international Muslim students perceived predominantly Islamic countries to be portrayed by the media. Eighteen students were interviewed. Two were doctorate students, one was undergraduate, and fifteen were Master's students. Students were from Turkey, Oman, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Gambia, Russia, and Nigeria. Their ages ranged from 22 to 29. According to Brown, Brown, and Richards, the findings of the study revealed that the participants perceived media representation of Islam in three ways: Muslims are terrorists, Muslim countries are strict and conservative, and Muslim countries are backward, dirty, and uneducated. Participants also revealed that the power of media influenced people's views and

behavior and they experienced a direct impact of media representation through mistreatment by members of the host country. The findings of this study suggests that participants well-being is compromised by the social climate discussed in the study.

Along the same lines, Peek (2003) reported how his participants blamed the media and considered it to be the main cause of discrimination and religious backlash. In his study, Peek (2003) interviewed 68 Muslim university students. Sixteen students were Arab Americans and thirty-seven students were South Asians. Others were Latinos, African Americans, and European Americans. Fifty-two were United States citizens and 16 were on students' visas or permanent residents. The aim of the study was to explore participants' experiences in New York university seven different campuses amongst professors and colleagues and with the students' parents. According to Peek (2003), the findings showed that though the students felt that universities, professors, counselors, and administrators supported Muslim students, some Muslim students expressed how they wanted their universities to raise awareness of Islam by posting more general information about Islam and holding educational events (Peek, 2003). The researcher suggested that further research is necessary to explore the long-term consequences of the attacks of September, 11 and how these affect the entire population of Muslims in the United States (Peek, 2003).

In the United Kingdom, Hopkins (2011) examined the experiences of international Muslim students on campus. The researcher collected data through conducting 29 interviews with Muslim students enrolled in higher education institution in the U.K. Sixteen were female and 13 male. Eleven identified as home students and 18 as international. Twenty-one were graduate students while eight were enrolled in undergraduate degrees. The participants reported that though they viewed the campus as tolerant and liberal, they were concerned about how

certain negative events and global issues, such as 9/11 and the London bombings, might influence the policies on campus and their experiences as well. On campus and on daily basis, the students did not feel comfortable as they felt monitored and surveyed. In addition, the students voiced several concerns such as dominant drinking culture on campus, lack of halal food, and the separated and marginalized location of the mosque on campus (Hopkins, 2011). The researcher recommended promoting good practice and less exclusionary campus atmospheres.

Furthermore, Brown (2009) carried out an ethnographic study to investigate the adjustment process of postgraduate international students at a university in the south of England. Thirteen participants were involved in this study. Four students were Muslim, three were Buddhist, and four were Christian. Data was collected through interviews and observations. According to Brown, the results showed that the contact with the host community was limited. The reason for this limited contact was Islamophobia abuse which caused anxiety and segregation. Also, participants portrayed the host environment to be hostile and threatening. Faith played an important role in the lives of Muslim students. These students created a sub-group based on faith. This sub-group provided international Muslim students with coherence, stability and protection against the hostile environment of the host country. The researcher recommended further studies on the impact of faith and the macro political context on the experiences of international students.

In addition, Asmar (2005) carried out a study on Muslim students in higher education in Australia to examine their experiences in universities and compare international Muslim students to the local Muslim students. The comparison between the two groups was with respect to academic integration, feelings of belonging, and how they perceived discrimination. Most of the

international students were graduates. Half of the local students were undergraduate female students (53%). Over three-quarters of women wore the hijab. Through conducting interviews with 28 Muslim students and receiving questionnaire replies from 174 Muslim students in 13 universities, the findings revealed, according to Asmar, that local students consistently showed to be more critical of their course experiences than international students. According to Asmar, with respect to academic integration, international students felt part of a group committed to learning more than local students. However, only a minority group of the participants who felt belonging to the whole campus community as a whole. The culture of campus was perceived to be the main cause of Muslim students' sense of alienation and isolation. In addition, over half of the local students and a third of international students reported negative attitudes towards them on campus. What still existed on the campuses were the stereotypes and negative expectations. As for the overall satisfaction of the participants, Muslim students reported their dissatisfaction of universities services. This dissatisfaction was due to the lack of universities services for practicing their faith on campus or places for prayers and washing up before prayers. Asmar (2005) suggested further research on issues related to Muslims in the era post 9/11, Muslims perception of their courses, and how the interactions between non-Muslim teachers and students with Muslim students are perceived by Muslim students.

In summary, several scholars (Asmar, 2005; Brown, Brown, & Richards, 2015; Brown, 2009; Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007; Hopkins, 2011; Marzouk, 2012; Peek, 2003; Poynting and Noble, 2004) have investigated the experiences of international Muslim students, in particular, in the West post-September, 11. The findings indicated that international Muslim students were concerned about linking Islam to terrorism and stereotypes of Muslims such as being backward, uneducated, dirty, the role of mass media in perpetuating these stereotypes, and

how culture events on campuses were ineffective (Brown, Brown & Richards, 2015; Marzouk 2012; Peek, 2003; Poynting & Noble, 2004). Also, they reported an increasing incidents of racism, in universities, colleges, public transportation, shopping malls, and streets, based on religion more than other international students, and how women are more subjected to racism than men (Marzouk, 2012). Lack of halal food, being monitored, alienated, dominant drinking culture and marginalized location of mosque were all reported by international students (Hopkins, 2011). In addition, limited contact with host community, hostile and threatening host environment, lack of places for prayers, dissatisfaction with university services, and isolated on campus were all reported by international Muslim students (Asmar, 2005; Brown, 2009). However, some Muslim students felt that their universities, professors, administrators, and counselors supported them (Peek, 2003).

### **Discussion**

When summarizing the results of the studies carried out on international students in western higher education, there are four main points that can be highlighted. First, the amount of literature on international Muslim students is limited. It is clear from the review above that the number of studies on international students, in general, is bigger than those on international Muslim students. Second, this huge number of studies allowed researchers to investigate many aspects of international students' experiences whether socially or academically. On other hand, studies on international Muslim students in the United States focused mainly on the social aspect of the students' lives, while ignoring the academic aspect of their experiences. My study added to the literature by exploring both the social and academic experiences and challenges. Third, while the studies on international Muslim students presented the challenges that students face in higher education, they neither investigated the perceived reasons behind the challenges nor ways

of negotiating them in depth. My study added to the literature by critically investigating these two aspects.

The fourth point is related to the methodology used in the studies reviewed above. Several studies (Coles & Swami, 2012; Evans & Stevens, 2011; Glass, 2012; Hopkins, 2011; Klomegah, 2006; Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Marzouk, 2012; Peek, 2003; Poynting and Noble, 2004; Rhee & Sagaria, 2004, Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010) relied only on interviews or surveys in their data collection. Using additional methods in data collection such as conducting observations, analyzing documents or educational materials, and interviewing professors or others who are related to international students is necessary to triangulate the findings revealed and enhance the credibility of any patterns found in the data. Moreover, several studies reviewed above (Marzouk, 2012; Rhee & Sagaria, 2004) do not give a clear description of the participants of the study. In other words, there are not demographic data in the study that would speak to the background of the international students studied. In my study, several methods of data collection were used and a clear description of participants was given to increase the accountability of the study



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter consists of six sections: The first section includes the reasons for choosing a case study design for my study; the second section covers information about the participants of the study; the third section consists of information about data collection methods; the fourth section details data analysis; the fifth and sixth sections are concerned with credibility and consistency respectively.

### **Research Design**

I chose a qualitative type of research, Case Study in particular, as my research paradigm. This choice of research paradigm was based on several reasons. Case study is viewed as a qualitative approach in which an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system is provided using multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, documents, reports, and audiovisual (Bogden & Biklen; 2007; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). This definition of a case study applies for what I intended to do in this study. The bounded system in the study was the group of Muslim international students in a southwest university of the United States. In my study, I explored the social and academic experiences and challenges of the bounded system, Muslim international students, to obtain an information-rich description of their experiences and challenges and how they negotiated these challenges in a globalized educational context. To this end, I used interviews, documents, and artifacts to gather my data.

In addition, Case study is an appropriate design for researchers who are concerned with interpreting social life, historical problems of domination, alienation, and envisioning new possibilities (Creswell, 2007).

Furthermore, I also chose case study design because it is heuristic in the sense that it allows for factors to emerge during a study. These emerging factors would help rethinking a phenomenon under investigation (Abramson, 1992).

Finally, a qualitative researcher is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences that they have in the world (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1998), this view is rooted in the philosophical assumption of interpretive qualitative research that states that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds.

A Case Study, as a qualitative research paradigm, reflects a philosophical assumption that attempts to analyze and understand the social world through giving people from outside academia the space to reflect upon their experiences and share their own worldview (Agger, 1991). Thus, it creates a more democratized scientific field that empowers muted speakers who engage with the world from the irreducible perspectives of their own experiences thereby, legitimizing and celebrating their interventions and discussions around issues that are related to their lives (Agger, 1991). Case Study, as a research paradigm, is also a reflection of Postmodern Social theory which examines the social world from multiple perspective and prefers knowledge that engages people who get involved with the world from the irreducible perspectives of their own experiences (Agger, 1991).

### **Participant Selection Method**

The participants in the study were international Muslim students who came from different predominantly Islamic countries (Saudi Arabia, Oman, Pakistan, and Iran) as well as two employees from the office for international students (OIS) in a large southwest university in the United States. I used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling assumes that the goal of the

researcher is to gain insight and discover and therefore must select participants rich with information from which most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). I also used a typical sampling as one type of purposeful sampling. This means that participants are selected because they represent the average person of interest. I used this strategy of sampling to help me identify and seek out those who represent the case study under investigation (Merriam, 1998). The selection of participants was through sending out a Letter of Invitation [See appendix A] via email to the director of the office responsible for international students and the head of the Muslim Student Association (MSA) on campus. While the head of the MSA did not reply to my several emails, the director sent the letter to the list serve of the office for international students. This letter was sent to announce the study and the need for participants. Initially three participants contacted me. However, after Donald Trump, the businessman, and the nominee of the Republican Party for president of the United States in the 2016 election gave his speech in January, 2015 on banning Muslims from entering the United States, I asked the director to resend the letter of invitation of the study. Eleven participants replied to the second invitation letter expressing their interest in participating in the study. I exchanged several emails with all of the fourteen interested participants in which I asked about their age, gender, discipline of study, and the number of years spent in the United States. However, later, seven students (five males and two females) of these fourteen students stopped responding to my email and further contact with me. Based on this situation, seven participants were selected to participate in the study. The criteria used for the selection of participants were mainly being an international Muslim student and spending at least one year studying in the United States. The study was opened to both graduate and undergraduate students to obtain the biggest number of students possible. The criterion of minimum one-year experience was not stated in the invitation letter. However, I used this

criterion to ensure that each participant has a minimum level of experience broad enough to share in my study.

Furthermore, I contacted the director of the office for international students to ask her to recommend two employees to participate in the study. The criteria I used for selecting the employees was that they have at least three years of experience in dealing with international students. I specified three years of experience as one of my criteria based on a previous informal conversation with the director of the office for international students about the average number of years of experience among employees. The director showed a willingness to participate in the study herself along with another female employee she recommended. Both of them had interacted with international Muslim students for many years. In total, the number of participants in this study was nine; seven international students and two employees. The age range of the international Muslim students is from 20-29. All the international students in the study were male and single. Six students were studying engineering and one student was studying human resources. The employee participants' ages are 48 and 53. Both of them are females.

I followed IRB procedures to protect the identity of the participants in the study as well as the data collected. Participants were given pseudonyms and the data was stored on my computer with a protected password in my office. I also went through the details of the Consent letter, which was written in English since all participants' proficiency level whether undergraduate or graduate students allows them to understand the Consent form in English without difficulty, with the participants [Appendices D & E] to make sure that they understood all the parts of it before signing the form. This data will be later destroyed upon the completion of the study. Below, I provide information about each of the participants in the study.

*Participant 1: Sally* is the director for International Students and Scholar Services in the OIS at a southwest university in the United States. She is fifty three years old and have been working in her position for fourteen years. Sally also has seven years of experience from her work in another university with international students in the United States.

*Participant 2: Suzan* is an international advisement specialist in a southwest university. She is forty eight years old and has been working for the OIS for four years. Prior to her current position, Suzan was a teacher for English as a Second Language for twenty years where she taught English for international students on the same campus.

*Participant 3: Samir* is an undergraduate student from Saudi Arabia. Samir is single and he is twenty six years old. Samir has been studying mechanical engineering since 2014 in a southwest university. He also studied English in Arizona for one year. Samir has a brother who studies English in the same southwest university. He is also on scholarship from Saudi Arabia to study mechanical engineering.

*Participant 4: Sami* is an undergraduate student from Saudi Arabia. He is single and he is twenty one years old. Sami studied English for one year and two months in Los Angeles, California before moving to a campus of a southwest university to study mechanical engineering. Sami is funded by the Saudi government scholarship. He also has two brothers who study in the United States.

*Participant 5: Mohamed* is an undergraduate student from Oman. He is single and he is twenty years old. He has been studying chemical engineering since 2013. Prior to his studies in a campus in a southwestern university in the United States, he was in Texas for a year where he joined a language institute to improve his English to be able to join university. Mohamed is on the Omani government scholarship.

*Participant 6: Fahed* is an undergraduate student from Saudi Arabia. He is single and he is twenty years old. He has been studying human resources for two years on a campus of a southwest university. Prior to him studying human resources, he studied English language in the language institute on the same campus for a year. Fahed is funded by the Saudi government scholarship. He likes photography and making motivational videos. Fahed has two brothers who also study in the United States.

*Participant 7: Asem* is an undergraduate student from Saudi Arabia. He is single and he is twenty nine years old. Asem has been studying mechanical engineering for a year on a campus of a southwest university in the United States. He was in Canada before coming to the United States. Asem stayed in Manitoba for three years; he studied English there for one year, then he jointed university for two years. After that, he moved to Montréal and joined university there for another two years. Asem left Canada in 2014.

*Participant 8: Amin* is a graduate student on a campus of a southwest university for two years. He is studying to obtain a doctorate degree in civil engineering. He is single from Iran. He is twenty seven years old. His main reason to come to the United States is to escape his own country and publish science fiction books in the United States. He has already written 4 books in Farsi, one of them was nominates for a prize at the age of fifteen. He is now working on translating his books into English and editing them to publish in the United States. Amin also wants to have his own non-profit organization that would support students from the Middle East to have good education abroad. Amin has two jobs. One job is paid on campus and the other is volunteering work with a peace organization. Both jobs involve writing grants.

*Participant 9: Ali* is a graduate student on a campus of a southwest university for two years. He is single from Pakistan and he is twenty four years old. He studies to obtain a masters in

mechanical engineering. He is also interested in pursuing his academic studies and earn his doctorate degree from the United States. Ali is a teaching assistant, research assistant, and he has an additional assistantship with his professor. He came to the United States to earn his graduate degrees, while transferring the money he earns from his jobs on campus to his family back in Pakistan. He is responsible for funding his family in Pakistan after his father's death.

### **Data Collection Methods**

To obtain a thick description of the topic under investigation, I used the following methods of data collection.

*Interviews:* Interviews as a method of data collection is an effective inquiry, when a researcher's goal is the meaning involved in their education experiences (Seidman, 2006). During conducting an interview, knowledge is constructed as a result of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) mentioned that interviewing depends on how far the interviewer follows a specific governed method. I used semi-structured interviews [Appendices B & C] in which the questions used are flexibly worded. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore issues related to international Muslim experiences and challenges guided by list of questions without following a strict order or wording (Merriam, 1998). I interviewed 7 international Muslim students [Appendix B]. Each participant was interviewed two times and each interview lasted from an hour to two. I conducted the initial interviews with the 7 participants. I read the consent form with the participants and made sure that they understood it clearly before them signing for approval. Two months later, I conducted the follow-up interviews. Only one participant did not show up for the follow-up interview. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to make sure I interpreted the initial interviews correctly and clarify ambiguities from the initial interview. I gave my

participants the option of using either Arabic or English in conducting the interviews. This way I can respond to any situation at hand.

Five interviewees asked to be interviewed in Arabic as they feel more comfortable in their first language. However, four interviews were carried out in English since English is either the first language of some of the interviewees or it is the common language between the researcher and the participants. The interviews with the international Muslim students were mainly held in a reserved room in a library on campus. The reserved room ensured privacy of the interviews. Only one interview was held in the office of the research assistants as one of the students used this room as an office. As for the interviews with the two employees [Appendix C], they were held in their offices and privacy was ensured.

*Artifacts:* I used the university catalogue to explore how far the courses offered are related to international Muslim students. Also, I analyzed the National Council for Accreditation of Teachers Education<sup>6</sup> (NCATE) report to check the numbers of enrollment of international Muslim students and their rates of graduation and success.

*Discussion Board:* I used an online private discussion board supported by Google Plus (Blogger feature) to initiate a discussion among the international Muslim students, two of whom did not participate. I used a newspaper article to stimulate replies from the participants related to the research questions. The newspaper article was published in 2012 on the website of U.S. News and it is entitled “3 Surprises for International Students at U.S. Universities”. The article discusses classroom differences, culture barriers, and city disparities. I asked the students participants to read the article and reflect on it in relation to their own social and academic experiences during their study years in the United States. Through students’ responses and

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://ncate.org/Accreditation/tabid/100/Default.aspx>



reflections on the article, I was able to obtain multiple perspectives on their social and academic experiences and challenges on campus. This discussion board was different from the interviews in that it introduced the participants to each other in a private indirect way and allowed them to exchange their experiences on campus in a way that led to either raising new points that were not revealed before in the individual interviews or triangulated the data from the interviews. The participants were able to share their opinions on the article through creating new Gmail accounts with pseudonyms to protect their identity.

### **Method to Analyze Data**

The data analysis stage started with transcribing of the data gathered in the interviews. The interviews that were carried out in English were transcribed by a freelance transcriber who is a native speaker of English and has a previous experience in transcribing interviews. In addition, a graduate student who is also a native speaker of English transcribed two interviews that were carried out in English. I spent with her a day to make sure that she fully transcribed the recordings in an intelligible way that would allow me to access it later for coding. The interviews that were carried out in Arabic were transcribed by a native speaker of Arabic who is also a doctorate student in the United States and has a previous experience with transcribing interviews. I also translated the interviews which were carried out and transcribed in Arabic. Translation was necessary to help me in analysis and reporting results later. The following step after transcription was coding. Coding was the first step in analyzing the data collected. The term coding refers to assigning a shorthand designation to certain pieces of data so that it can be retrieved later (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of coding was to create an inventory of the data collected that would allow me later to access the data, apply intensive analysis, and write up the final report. These shorthand designations assigned to the data were either a word or phrase. I also used

phrases of my own words in combination with the participant's words to label or code the data. I was also open to anything in the data that might be useful to answer the research questions. This is called an open-coding process. The open-coding process allowed me to identify as many units (a unit can be a word, phrase, or several pages) as possible in my data related to my research question (Merriam, 2009). I applied the open-coding process to the transcripts of the interview as well as to the participants' reflections on the article that I collected from them.

The following step was to develop themes or categories from the coding of the data. The process of analyzing qualitative data was inductive. This means that data builds up groups of small units to bigger units. In order to make sense of the data, I looked for recurring regularities in the data by comparing one unit of information with the next with the aim of grouping these regularities under a theme or a category. This process of grouping the open codes is called axial coding or analytical coding (Merriam, 2009). These categories or themes informed the answers to my research questions (Merriam, 2009).

When forming the categories I considered several things. First, the number of categories is manageable. The fewer the number of categories or themes, the easier I can communicate my findings (Merriam, 2009). Second, the categories or themes that I developed were mutually exclusive. In other words, a particular piece of data fitted exclusively under one theme or category (Merriam, 2009). Third, the same level of abstraction was a feature of all themes developed (Merriam, 2009).

Finally, I tried, after developing the themes, to develop relationships among the themes or categories and inferences. In other words, I tried to link the conceptual elements (themes or categories) in a meaningful way. The criteria for linking the developed themes was checking with the participants first how they viewed the relationships between the themes developed

before doing inferencing myself. The aim of drawing such inferences and links was to attempt to answer the research questions of the study.

### **Credibility**

There are various ways researchers use to ensure credibility of the data collected. For example, triangulation, member checking, reflexivity, researcher's positionality, and alternative explanations of data saturation are all ways of ensuring the credibility of case studies (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, Stake (1995) suggested several steps to ensure credibility in research: 1) provide raw data prior to interpretations that would enable readers to construct their own interpretations, 2) give a detailed description of triangulation methods and ways of confirming and refuting assertions made in a study, and 3) provide information about the researcher and his/her positionality. In my study, I used the following strategies to enhance the credibility of the study:

*Triangulation:* using multiple sources of data and multiple investigators increases the credibility of the study (Merriam, 1998). I used multiple sources of data such as interviews, artifacts, and discussion board to triangulate the data obtained. I also asked another colleague to examine the data and provide his interpretation of the data collected.

*Members check:* throughout the study I asked the participants what they think about my interpretation of the data. This was achieved through the follow-up interviews with them, repeating orally what I understood from them, and checking whether the information I recorded was accurate. Involving participants in data interpretation and the results of the study is a procedure suggested by several researchers (Merriam, 1998).

*Peer examination:* asking colleagues and peers to comment on the findings of the study as they emerge is one of the ways of increasing the credibility of the study (Merriam, 1998).

Consequently, I contacted one of my colleagues to go through the data interpretation I provided. My colleague is the doctorate student who transcribed the Arabic interviews in an earlier stage.

*Researcher's positionality:* As a qualitative researcher, I am self-critical in that I attempt to consider my own subjectivity, ideologies, and epistemological presuppositions. In other words, qualitative researchers reflect on their backgrounds and what they bring to the research site. I am an international female, Muslim, Egyptian, doctorate candidate. I have lived in the United States for six years. Although I am aware that my background might have influenced the way I analyzed and interpreted the data, I tried to maintain consistency and credibility throughout my study.

I played the role of an insider and an outsider throughout my study. Since I share with all the student participants the same religious affiliation and with some of them my first language, the international Muslim students considered me an insider of their community and that helped in facilitating the interviews and encouraging the international Muslim students to share their experiences with me in an opened and relaxed manner. However, Muslims are not one homogenous group. Though I share with all the students my religious background and with some of them my mother tongue, I identify myself as a highly liberal Muslim woman, and I found myself to be disagreeing about several religious topics that several participants brought up during the interviews. However, I refrained from either showing or sharing my disagreement with my interviewees as not to affect the results of the interviews or channel the interviewee to a biased perspective.

Furthermore, I have been doing extensive readings and taking courses, during my years of study on social and power relations with the aim of changing them to create a better supporting learning environment for international Muslim students. My readings and experience

as an international graduate student and as an Arabic instructor was a simultaneous process. This process involved interactions with the “other” including the learning environment, colleagues, professors, and classmates, while contemplating about my readings and area of study. My interactions with the “other” have deepened my critical understanding of theories and research I have been reading such as Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Karl Marx, Du Bois, Max Weber, Philip Altbach and his work on Push-and-Pull Model, Lysgaard and his work on U-curve Hypothesis. According to Rossman and Rallis (2012), theory and experience are in a continuous process of interaction. Theories are guided and informed by our actions and experiences. Also, our actions are constantly re-informed by theories. Theories get rejected or modified when they are isolated from human realities. Consequently, a person’s worldview is a result of interrelatedness of theory, practice, and research.

### **Consistency**

The aim of a qualitative researcher is not to generalize the findings to large populations, but hopefully contain helpful information that will offer deep understanding to the topic under investigation. The results can be further examined by empirical research (Merriam, 1998). The value of the study is to uncover information that will lead to further researcher with larger and more representative samples.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

This chapter reports the results of the data collection procedures regarding the experiences international Muslim students encounter during their studies in the United States from the perspective of seven students and two administrative staff. All of these students were studying at the same university in the southwest of the United States. The two administrative staff were also at the same university as the students. The chapter consists of four main parts. The first and the second parts of the chapter report the data obtained from the initial interviews (IV), follow up interviews (FU), and the discussion board (DB). All the interviews were audiotaped. Then, they were transcribed by two native speakers of English and a native speaker of Arabic as mentioned earlier in chapter three. Later, I translated the interviews conducted in Arabic into English.

In the first part, the social experiences, I examine four aspects to answer the social part of the three research questions of my study: their positive experiences, challenges (i.e., negative experiences) they faced, their perceived reasons for the challenges, and the ways they negotiated (i.e., coped with) these challenges. I follow with a summary of the main findings for social experiences.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the academic experiences of international Muslim students. Using the same participants, I use the same four aspects that I used for social experiences: academic positive experiences, challenges they faced during their study years, perceived reasons for these challenges, and ways of overcoming of the challenges. I follow this with a summary of the main findings of the academic experiences. The four aspects of academic experiences attempt to answer the academic part of the three research questions of my study.

The third part of the chapter deals with the data obtained from the document analysis of a report on international students' rates of enrollment, success, and graduation, and university catalogue respectively. The fourth part of the chapter is the conclusion.

### **Social Experiences of International Muslim Students**

The first main part of this chapter is divided into two sub-sections. First, I report the results of my two interviews with the seven international Muslim students and the discussion board according to the four aspects previously mentioned. Only two students did not participate in the discussion board. Second, I report the results of my interviews with two university administrative staff.

#### *Ali*

Ali is a single, Pakistani master's level student studying mechanical engineering. My two interviews with Ali lasted two hours and seven minutes in total, and they were conducted in English. Ali was willing to share his experiences with me with no reservations. He was confident and helpful. He offered me his teaching assistance office in which to conduct my interviews with the other participants.

In Ali's initial interview, he talked about positive experiences he had with the OIS, and how this office played a positive role in supporting Muslims students. He said, "The Office for International Students, they are supporting to all international students, and they are supportive to their cultures and their religions." He further added,

They hold special events. ... When they knew we are Muslims they give us the Muslim Students Association. ... The Muslim Students Association is one of the biggest associations and the Office for International Students is supportive. ... They give Muslim

students special access to this room. ... They give a lot of money for the prayers. ... The Quran is available in different languages like Spanish.

Ali also mentioned that interactions between himself, locals, and other international students help lift culture barriers, and foster mutual understanding (DB). He said, “The more I interact with locals and other internationals here, the more mutual understanding is developed.”

Another positive social experience that Ali reported happened during the Islamic Week put on by the Muslim Students Association (MSA) (IV). This event had an impact on Ali. He was the only one among the participants in this study who mentioned and attended it. Ali considered the Islamic Week important because the Imam who came to speak condemned the terrorist attacks of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). To Ali, the Imam was a symbol of a religious leadership that would give credibility to the talk about Islam. He clarified confusions, condemned terrorist attacks, and gave a positive image about Islam.

However, Ali was critical of the MSA. He believed that the association was inactive and the students who were in charge of it lacked effectiveness and efficiency (IV). He said, “I know that they have events ... but I don’t go to them.” Ali gave reasons for why he viewed the MSA to be ineffective (IV). He mentioned, “The students who are in the association now are only students ... undergrads ... but they are quiet.”

Ali proposed a solution to this challenge by suggesting that in order for the MSA to improve and attract more students, those in charge of the association need to focus on the cultural events from more than fifty predominantly Islamic countries that consider Islam as their official religion (IV). Ali elaborated that it should

focus on the arts and crafts, they focus on the food and the culture, and the dresses and everything from these countries, so that’s very rich reservoir that we can use to unite



Muslims over here as well and show off the better side of Muslims to the people in the U.S. (FU)

It is clear from the above that Ali attempted to think about new and creative ways that would make the MSA an attractive place for international Muslim students and at the same time give a positive impression about Islam to the West.

Ali reported a second social challenge when he interacted with some Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) students on campus (IV & FU). The students mocked him and were rude to him when he talked to them about his Pakistani friend wanting to join the American army (FU). He recalled,

I went to that booth, and they were like, you know, there was a little bit of a grin on their face. They were like a little bit laughing, sort of mocking sense. Like they answered me, like “ok, how can I help you?” and I told them about the thing that my friend wants to join the army and he’s like, “no, you gotta be a US national. Other than that there is programs for foreign nationals. ... and you can get information over there.” Ok, but he had a lot of free samples on his booth as well. I just ask him for a ribbon, and he was like “no, you can’t have that” and I was like “why can’t I have it?” ... and he was like “no, no”

Later, Ali added, “He just wanted to mock me on that small, stupid thing, and I was like, ok.” (FU). He elaborated,

After that I got angry and I wanted to say a lot of things ... because like, you know, his tone was changing ... and I was going to tell him a thing or two, ok, but still a friend of mine just took my arm and he dragged me along with him.

In the quotes above, Ali perceived the mocking of the ROTC students as a social challenge. When Ali revealed his friend's nationality, the ROTC student was provoked by Ali's questions about his Pakistani friend who wanted to join the American army.

Later, Ali perceived that racism was the main reason for this challenge (FU). He mentioned that the ROTC person's choice of words, tone, and attitude toward him made him feel he was looked down upon and stereotyped as a terrorist from a Muslim country. He mentioned,

He didn't say anything upfront, that you're from like those Muslim countries that are like terrorists, he didn't say anything upfront. But that was just his tone, how he was dealing with me and how he was making his choice of words and his attitude.

This one incident affected Ali to the degree that he stated, in his initial interview, that the American society is "50% racist and 50% not racist." He added in his IV, "In campus 75% racist." Ali went on and mentioned in his IV, "I think people get this idea after 9/11 people have become scared of Arabs, Muslims." Ali also felt that the attacks in San Bernardino "California incident" increased racism against Arabs and Muslims. In addition, Ali thought that mass media play a negative role against Muslim culture. He mentioned, "General public gets their views of each other's cultures through the media where opinions are almost always skewed." (DB)

To sum up Ali's social experiences at this university, he had a positive experience with the OIS which is part of the university administration designed to help international students. This organization was supportive to the MSA whose role was to promote better understanding between Islam and the West. Ali also thought that the interactions with locals, and other international students create mutual understanding, and lift culture barriers. However, Ali had two challenging experiences with two student organizations at the university. The first was with the MSA, consisting of international and American Muslim students. He felt that this group

could do a much better job exposing the cultural diversity of the Muslim world to the rest of the university. The second was with students running the ROTC booth, who manifested behavior that Ali took to be racially biased. He contributed this to the association of terrorist attacks in the US with religion and nationalities, and to the role that mass media is presenting Muslim culture in a negative way. His conclusion from the ROTC experience was that there is still a lot of racism in the United States based on nationality and religion, which is an example in this study of Islamophobia. He did not provide any solutions to this challenge he faced.

### *Amin*

Amin is a twenty-seven year old, single Iranian doctoral student specializing in civil engineering. My two interviews with him lasted one hour and thirty-six minutes in total and were conducted in English. Amin was more reserved than Ali in some of the answers he gave me especially when he shared the personal aspect of his life. His voice was also low most of the time during the interview, which I interpreted as being shy or feeling uncomfortable.

Amin mentioned that he had a positive social experience with a Christian family who introduced him to an international student group (IV). He stated, “They were inviting me for the fall break. We usually got to the Grand Canyon together... They also go for the spring break.” This family also introduced him to a Bible study group. He mentioned, “They helped me to go to the Bible study. They’re very nice people.”

Amin was the only participant who had such an experience with a Bible study group. He attended it once a week for over two years. In his follow-up interview, Amin reported that he felt that it was his duty to study other religions, and this motivated him to attend the group. He stated, “I take a look at the Bible because even though I’m a Muslim, but as part of our beliefs as Muslims, we have to believe in Old Testament, Quran, and New Testament.” This experience

allowed him to interact socially with the members of the study group and other international students.

Although Amin had positive social relations on campus with the Bible study group and the Christian family, he had a negative experience when dating an American woman. Amin mentioned that he dated this woman twice but was not satisfied with this experience (IV). He stated, “She never asked me anything, really, she just asked me once ‘where are you from?’” Amin added, “She never asked me who I really was.” Later, Amin explained, “She told me that she has got of a relationship, and she does not want anything to be serious, and she said that it’s better if we just stay friends.” (FU)

Amin viewed the reason for the dating being a challenge was that his purpose of dating was different from what is common in the American culture (FU). He wanted to date only with the purpose of marriage, which he knew that would not be easy in the American culture. He said, “I’m not going to date anyone unless it’s anything related to marriage.” Amin further added, “It’s hard actually to start something ... a relationship with the purpose of marriage right at the beginning, at least in the American culture.”

Another reason Amin gave for the challenge of dating was how he wanted to marry a woman who believed in Islam (FU). He stated, “Because I think Quran says you’re not supposed to marry someone who is not a believer.” He further explained that she “must be believing Quran and Islam as well, must believe in Mohamed as the messenger of God.”

Amin stated that what complicated the dating challenge further for him was that most of his friends were either atheists or did not believe in Islam (FU). This fact decreased the chances of dating any of his women friends or meeting a suitable woman. He mentioned, “most of my friends, I’m not saying all of them, but most of them are non-believers because either they are

Christians or Jews. They believe that Mohammad was a liar and Quran is just a lie, or they are agnostic and they don't believe in God.”

According to the above, Amin cared to live his life guided by the teaching of Islam. Sharing the same religious beliefs with his future wife was an important factor for Amin when choosing his future spouse. This made his chances of meeting his future wife diminish since most of his friends did not fulfil the condition he put for his marriage.

Amin negotiated his social challenge of dating and widening his social circle by substituting it with socialization in the mosque (FU). He stated, “I was thinking about, like socializing in the mosque. That’s actually what I thought that would be a good way to find, like, to see, to meet with, brothers, and sisters. ... I’m not saying only women, but I mean everyone, the brothers, sisters who are Muslims.” Amin extended the role of the mosque from a place of worship to a place of socializing and compensating for his lack of communication with the host country community.

Another social challenge Amin talked about was with his Iranian peers who studied with him in the same department (IV). Amin thought that his relationship with his Iranian peers was tense and not a friendship as he thought it should be. He shared with me how he viewed his relationship with his peers. “First as normal friends, but I think, they look at me as someone who is trying to take their position.” Amin clarified further by giving an example of how his relationship with his peers was, “Seeing my professor more than normal, they’re thinking he is trying to show himself off.”

Amin supposed that competition was the reason for the challenge he faced in his relationship with his Iranian peers (IV). He said, “I think there is a kind of a competition between us that is ruining this friendship.”

Amin stated that he addressed the difficulty he faced in his relationship with his Iranian peers by reading the Quran which he thought helped change him and make him love people more than before (FU). He stated, “I just take everything easy if someone’s behavior is bothering me, I just try to love everyone, so, yeah, reading Quran has changed me a lot in the last month.” Amin added, “I try to calm down, think about the good sides.” Amin also thought that reading the Quran has shifted his relationship with his peers from competition to cooperation:

I think it actually helps a lot, because they’re doing the same, like, sometimes they help me too, like if I have a problem, they help me too. If they have a problem, I know the solution I will give them, yeah. Before, it was like if I know something, I would not let them, I would not give them the answer, because I want the only person to know.

The above is a further evidence of how Amin lives his life guided by Islam teachings. He cared about his relationship with his peers more than competing with them. He appreciated their relationships and tried to enhance it by helping them when needed and loving them more than before.

The last challenge Amin pointed out was a unique challenge that no other participant talked about during the interviews. He had a logistics problem with the location of stores in the city he lived in (DB). He said,

The city is very widespread and scattered. Unlike my home country, that we have grocery stores at each block. Here the closest grocery store was 2 miles away. I did not know these things when I came to US so I was super shocked.

Amin handled this problem by buying a car to be able to go to the stores he needed and to other places as well (DB). He said, “I had to buy a car, and I couldn’t go much around until I bought a car because the transit as well is very poor in the city which I live in.”

In summary, Amin reported four social relations during the interview: a positive one with an American family, a positive one with a Christian student group, a negative one with a woman he tried to date, and a negative one with a peer group from his own country. In the first relationship, Amin had the opportunity to socialize and visit different places. In all the other three relationships, religion played an important role. The first involved his interest in studying the Bible because he felt that Islam honored this book as part of Holy Scripture. The second helped him to realize that he wanted to find a spouse who was in agreement with his religious beliefs. The third drove him back to his religious roots to find ways to cope with conflicts he was having with his Iranian peers. Amin illustrates the importance that religion can play in the relationships that international Muslims students might have when they come to the non-Muslim West.

The last challenge Amin shared in his DB was a logistics problem concerning the how stores in the city where Amin lived are located far from where he resided. Amin handled this problem by buying a car to go to the stores he needed because the public transportation system was poor.

### *Mohamed*

Mohamed is a single, twenty-year old undergraduate student from Oman. He is specialized in chemical engineering. Prior to his undergraduate study at this university, Mohamed studied English for a year in an English language institute in Texas. The interview lasted for one hour and thirty-seven minutes. The participant did not show up for the follow-up interview and he did not also participate in the discussion board. The interview was carried out in Arabic. Mohamed was open with me and willing to share his experiences. Initially, it was

difficult at some times to get enough detail from him. So I followed up my main questions with many probing questions.

Like Amin, Mohamed had a positive interaction with the host community when studying in Texas and his Omani peers (IV). This experience took place during an open day organized by the language institute that he attended. Mohamed was required by the institute to talk to an American student for an hour during the open day event. There he met an American student who invited him later to attend a football game and have dinner. They went out together several times. This student later introduced Mohamed to several American friends. Mohamed also had a positive social relationship with some Omani students when he was in Texas. He mentioned that he spent most of his time with these students (IV).

When Mohamed came to the current university, he had another positive experience with his roommate in the dormitory who was from Tanzania. Mohamed mentioned that they went out together several times (IV).

Mohamed revealed that he faced a social challenge with some of his professors and peers both in Texas and on the campus of a university where I interviewed him (IV). Some of Mohamed's peers and professors suspected him to be drunk or using illegal drugs. He stated, "Wherever I go to any place, I usually meet Americans who would ask me "Are you drunk? Are you high?" Mohamed added,

At the first day of my class, a professor used to smile a big smile whenever he sees me.

One day after class, he talked to me and asked me, "Are you drunk? Or is this your nature?" I have always faced this problem since I was in grade four before coming to the U.S.



Mohamed also mentioned that another professor asked him about why he had black circles around his eyes, and he asked him whether he has a problem with his face (IV).

Mohamed's perceived reason for his challenge was his sleeping problem since he did not sleep normally. He stated, "according to what doctors say, it's a sleeping problem. I don't sleep normally." Pre-existing physical conditions like Mohamed's problem and the challenges they make for international students have not been mentioned in previous research. This finding adds to the literature regarding challenges faced by international Muslim students in the United States.

Mohamed used to face this challenge by fighting when he was young. Now he got used to such comments from his peers and professors by not taking them seriously (IV). He said, "When someone accuses me of being drunk, I laugh." (IV)

To summarize the social experiences of Mohamed, he reported several social experiences with his peers and professors. He had positive social relationships with his American peer on campus with whom he went out for dinner, a football game, and got introduced to other people. Mohamed also had positive relations with his Omani peers from his back home. He was also a friend with a Tanzanian student in the dormitory. The physical well-being of Mohamed constituted a challenge for his social experiences with his peers and professors. They thought he was drunk or used illegal drugs because of the black circles around his eyes and asked him about it. Mohamed suffered a sleeping problem that caused him these black circles. He handled this problem by not taking it seriously and laughing at people who would pass such comments on him.

*Sami*

Sami is a single, twenty-one year old undergraduate student who came from Saudi Arabia to study mechanical engineering. He studied English for one year and two months in Los Angeles, California before moving to the campus where the interview took place.

I consider the interviews I conducted with Sami as the hardest of all interviewees. Sami was not open to share his experiences with me. The answers he gave to my questions were usually short lacking details. Regardless of how many questions I asked to probe for further elaborated answers, Sami continued giving me short answers about his experiences in the United States. In my opinion, I think Sami is not used to talking to females. Many times, I felt he was embarrassed or not knowing how to deal with me. The interviews were conducted in Arabic. My transcriber told me that when he listened to the interviews and transcribed them, he also felt that as I pursued to probe Sami he seemed to continue giving me short answers. In the following section, I present data from the initial interview with Sami since the follow-up interview was more focused on academic experiences than social experiences.

Sami shared with me that it was not difficult for him to adapt to his new life in the United States and how that made him proud of himself (DB). He said, “It’s not difficult to adapt in the new place, and as soon as you get comfortable, you will like it and be proud of yourself.”

Sami had similar experiences to Mohamed in socializing with local students and other international students. Sami revealed that he had many discussions with his Brazilian peers in the southwest university dormitory about TV shows, religion, women’s ban from driving cars in Saudi Arabia, Muslims not being allowed to have romantic relations outside of marriage, and drinking alcohol (IV). According to Sami, when he explained about his culture to his peers and answered their questions they were in shock. Sami said, “They were shocked.” However, these

cultural differences did not affect their relationships. Sami mentioned, “They were good with me.”

Sami also interacted with American students (IV). He shared a positive experience about his interaction with an African American Muslim student whom he met in the same community college his brother used to attend in Los Angeles. The African American Muslim student used to invite Sami and his brother to his house to spend time together.

Not all relations were positive. Sami faced a challenge with his Swiss peers in the language institute he attended in Los Angeles (IV). He shared how these people rejected and ignored him after defending why women do not drive in Saudi Arabia, Muslims do not drink alcohol and eat ham. He said, “I felt that they will never talk to me again.” Later, Sami was proven correct about these Swiss peers. He said, “They did not talk to me again.” Sami did not provide me with his perceived reasons behind this social challenge or how he negotiated this challenge.

Sami mentioned that he had another challenge when he tried to talk to some Americans (IV). Sami stated, “Sometimes I talk to people, and they don’t answer me.” He added, “Sometimes when I need to ask about something sometimes I tell myself that people would laugh at me.” This challenge led Sami not to communicate with Americans or ask them questions. Sami’s reason for why people did not reply to him was his limited English (IV). He said, “Maybe because I’m a bit slow.” He added, “Or maybe my English is bad.”

Sami negotiated this challenge by referring to his Saudi friends for advice (IV). He shared, what they told him,

My Saudi friends here told me it's ok. We are all international here, so there is not problem ... if people don't understand what we are saying ...no problem. Just tell them that you are international.

Sami was also challenged in his classes when he noticed that students would turn their heads and look at students who ask questions (DB). He said, "One thing I have noticed in classes is that when somebody talks most students will turn around and look at him, I do not know if that was some respect manner or what exactly but it's uncomfortable." However, Sami did not share with me how he handled this challenge.

Sami also noticed how there are negative stereotypes about Arabs in the United States (DB). He mentioned, "Stereotypes about Arabs is all over the US in a bad way unfortunately." However, he did not share with how he handled these stereotypes.

In conclusion, Sami found adaptation to his new life in the United States not difficult and was proud of himself. He had positive social experiences with non-white students, while he was ignored and rejected by white students. Sami had positive social relations with Brazilians and an African American Muslim student, while he was ignored by white students from Switzerland who stopped talking to him after he explained certain aspects about his Islamic culture, suggesting Islamophobia was even among these Swiss students. Also, the limited proficiency level of Sami played a role in minimizing his social interactions with Americans. Sami referred to his Saudi peers for support and assurance. Another challenge Sami shared with me was the negative stereotypes about Muslims in the United States. The last challenge he shared with me was his feeling of not being comfortable asking questions in class because of how his peers looked at him. He did not share with me how he handled this problem.

*Fahed*

Fahed is a single, twenty-year old undergraduate student who came from Saudi Arabia majoring in human resources management for two years. Prior to him studying human resources, he studied English language at the language institute for a year at the same university he joined later. The interviews I conducted with Fahed were informative and lasted for two hours and fifty-four minutes in total. The interviews were conducted in Arabic. Fahed did not participate in the discussion board.

Fahed seemed to be confident and open minded person with many activities that he did with his American peers. Although Fahed showed a willingness to share his experiences, I felt that he was equally reluctant to provide reasons behind some of the social challenges he met, especially those of a racist nature. Several times during both interviews, I felt that he was worried of being surveilled. I also felt that he was worried the challenges he shared with me might be used against him, in his mind, or hurt him in the future.

I follow a different way of presenting the data concerning Fahed in the section below. Rather than begin with his positive experiences like I did with previous participants, I report an immediate challenge he faced when he first arrived in the United States. Then, I present data focusing mainly on two groups of people that Fahed socialized with; peers and faculty on campus respectively. For each group, I present Fahed's positive experiences followed by the challenges he faced with each group.

Fahed shared how he faced an immediate challenge that turned to a positive experience when he first arrived at Denver airport (IV). He told me that he had lost directions, and did not know how to reach his gate for his next flight. He felt that the reason behind this challenge was that his English language was poor at the time and could not communicate to ask about directions. He said, "when I first came to the United States my English was very bad ... I

couldn't speak English at all." (IV) Fahed solved this problem by showing an American man in the airport his flight ticket and the man volunteered to guide him to his gate.

Fahed mentioned that this experience with the American man in the airport changed his idea about white Americans. He said, "There is a stereotype on Americans that they are racist and not friendly but this is not true." Fahed realized that his stereotype about white Americans being racists and against Muslims came from the media and how the United States was involved in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan as well as the problems between the whites and blacks in the United States. He mentioned,

The media and especially in the Middle East and you know what happened in Iraq, and Syria and Afghanistan so all the thinking is against Muslims. So, in my mind Americans are against Muslims ... always will be racist and the problems that happen between blacks and whites that we hear about on National Geographic. (IV)

From the above, Fahed pointed out how media played a role in how he, as an Arab, viewed Americans as racists and against Muslims. This role of media in stereotyping Americans is a new finding that was not discussed in the literature on international students. The existing literature on international students discusses the role of the media in stereotyping Muslim students but not how it stereotypes Americans as well.

Fahed also revealed that he had positive experiences with Brazilian students similar to Sami (IV). He had a Brazilian friend who trusted Fahed and shared with him problems he had with his girlfriend. She used to talk with Fahed as well and he became a good friend with both of them. Fahed further highlighted that Saudi and Brazilian students typically had good relationships with each other. He said, "In the institute, the relationship between the Saudis and the Brazilians has always been good. The relationship was better than any other nationalities."

Similar to Mohamed and Sami, Fahed stated that he had positive experiences with three other male students he shared an apartment with in the dormitory (IV). One was Native American, the other was half Native American, and the third was half white American. They talked about religion and the culture of Native Americans. They asked him about religious topics such as the nine wives of the prophet Mohamed and about Jesus. Even after these discussions, the relationship between Fahed and these students continued to be positive. Two of them asked him to give them a Quran, while one is still in contact with him and asks questions about Islam.

Despite the positive relationships Fahed enjoyed with his male friends on campus and dormitory as previously mentioned, he did not know how to make friends with female students (IV). He said, “I had a lot of friends when I first came, I made male friends and not female friends... I didn’t know how” (IV). Fahed added, “I didn’t know how to talk to women.” According to Fahed, the reason for this situation was his background. He viewed his gender segregated background to be the reason for why he had difficulty in talking to women on campus and making friends with them. Fahed stated, “In Saudi Arabia we don’t mix males and females so I didn’t know how to talk to a woman.” (IV). Fahed did not share with me how he tried to solve this challenge.

It is important to note that the problem of Fahed not being able to make friends with other women on campus was also reported by Amin, an Iranian student who is also a participant in the study. Previous literature on international Muslim students in the United States did not report such a challenge. Thus, the problem of international male Muslim students not being able to make friends with women adds new insight into international Muslim students’ experiences in the United States.

In addition to the positive relationships he had with the Brazilian students and his apartment mates in the dormitory, Fahed revealed that his hobbies of soccer and basketball enabled him to socialize and interact positively with American students on campus (IV). He used to go out with his American friends to watch soccer games, and he said he enjoyed these experiences. He also socialized with his American neighbors in the dormitory about sports. Consequently, he felt that his speaking skills were improving because of his intense interactions and conversations with other American students due to sports. This is an interesting finding because previous research did not report the role of sports in socializing with host communities for international students.

Although Fahed was able to have positive experiences with his American peers through sports, he said that he felt uncomfortable and disrespected during conversations he had with some other American friends (IV). According to Fahed, the reason for this discomfort was how American students used a lot of slang in their conversations (IV). He viewed this as these students not taking into consideration international students like himself who was not proficient in English (IV). He stated,

Sometimes when we talk about a topic, Americans use a lot of slang, and sometimes there were people from Saudi Arabia and others from Korea. So if I were an American, and I say something I have to care about the culture of others, but Americans don't care about it.

Fahed did not share with me how he negotiated this challenge.

Another positive experience that Fahed shared was how people in the state where he lived supported him after president Trump's negative talk about Muslims (FU). He said, "They were supporting me against Trump." He added that faculty and other people also supported him.



According to Fahed, many people he knew were against what Trump said about Muslims. He also met a teacher who used to teach him in the language institute and was interested in politics. She told him not to feel bad about what Trump said about Muslims and that he was one of them. The teacher said, “You are one of us. The American people love internationals and we welcome internationals.” She also told him that an event might be held in support of Muslims.

Although Fahed enjoyed the support of some of the faculty on campus against Trump’s negative rhetoric about Muslims, he was offended by some comments that one of his teachers in the language institute, at a southwest university, used to pass during class time (IV). Fahed said that his teacher used to smile when he passed his comments on Arabs. He understood these comments as jokes. Yet, he did not like these jokes and found them to be inappropriate and offending. Fahed gave an example of the jokes that this teacher used in class. He recalled, “you Arabs talk very much.” Another joke that Fahed’s teacher said in the class was, “you are an Arab, you never do your homework”.

Fahed did not share with me his perceived reasons for why his teacher used to make jokes about Arabs or how he negotiated this problem. However, it is clear to me from the examples of the jokes above that the teacher made racist jokes in which he targeted a group of Arab students and associated them to negative features such as talking a lot or not doing their homework. Though it can be argued that the students might had been talking or not doing their homework, in my opinion, the jokes the teacher passed are a form of culture racism

Fahed had another teacher in the language institute who used videos from Fox News that attacked Islam for discussion in the class (IV). He mentioned that one video was about a university Muslim female student who attacked Islam. Such videos made Fahed angry. Although he did not share with me why he thought the teacher did this, he told me that he faced this

challenge by confronting the teacher and asking her why she chose Fox News in particular. When the teacher answered that Fox News was a channel like any other channel, Fahed mentioned that this channel is racist. The teacher, then, ended the discussion with Fahed.

The last challenge Fahed revealed was with an American white man whom he met in a restaurant (IV). Fahed recalled,

I was with my friend. The two of us are Saudis. We were talking in Arabic. The guy in the line before us looked at us then asked us where we are from. So I told him Saudi Arabia. So he answered with a serious face, “Are you here to make some bombs?”

The American man made a generalization about Saudi males to be terrorists through connecting Fahed and his friend home country’s religion with terrorism. Though it is true that the terrorist attack of 9/11 was committed by mostly Saudi males, the generalization that all Saudi males are terrorists is a form of Islamophobia.

This problem of Islamophobia toward Fahed and his friend was resolved by another American man who was in the same restaurant and supported them. The other man defended them and told the first man that he was wrong. Fahed quoted the man as saying, “I’m in the army right now and I know them very well more than you do. You have to respect them and they are here because we offer them good education.” Fahed was impressed by what this man said about him and his friend and he said that this man apologized to them on the part of the first man who offended them.

To summarize, Fahed had positive social experiences with Brazilians, Native Americans, and white Americans. He managed to socialize with his peers by exchanging conversations over sports, culture, and religion. Fahed also experienced support from one of his teachers him against Trump’s rhetoric used against Muslims in his speeches during his campaign time.

However, Fahed faced several incidents of Islamophobia in the language institute and in a restaurant he went to with a friend. Two teachers in the language institute on campus practiced Islamophobia toward Fahed based on his faith. Fahed was also insulted by a man whom he met in a restaurant and accused Fahed and his friend of being terrorists after he learned that they were from Saudi Arabia. However, this was counterbalanced when another American man defended Fahed and his friend which resulted in an apology to them. Furthermore, Fahed's limited English proficiency caused him difficulty in understanding his American peers and in finding his way to the gate in the airport when he first arrived in the United States. Fahed was able to find the gate with the help of an American man who showed him the directions.

### *Samir*

*Samir* is a single, twenty-six year old undergraduate Saudi student studying mechanical engineering since 2014. He also studied English in another adjoining state for one year prior to the university where the interview took place. The interviews I conducted with Samir lasted for 2 and forty-six minutes in total. These were conducted in Arabic. Similar to Fahed, Samir was reluctant to share with me his perceived reasons behind some of the challenges he faced. He might have thought that what he would share might hurt him in the future or be taken against him.

To familiarize himself with the American culture and people, Samir mentioned that he chose to live in an apartment twenty minutes away from campus with American students to improve his English and to get to know the American culture better (IV). He became close to one of them and did culture exchange with that particular American student where they talked about food, traditions, and religions.

Samir had another positive experience revealed with two female students that he met in a café (IV). He saw an Arabic textbook with one of the students and started chatting with her about studying Arabic. Samir suggested meeting one of the students to meet for one hour on daily basis on campus. They planned to speak half an hour in Arabic and half an hour in English. This way they could help each other with the languages. Samir said, “I suggested to her that if she has free time, we can meet on campus every day for an hour. I teach you Arabic and you teach me English.” The student agreed to Samir’s suggestions and showed willingness to help him with his English. This positive social experience shows how a social experience could lead to a beneficial academic progress.

Samir mentioned that he had other positive experiences through volunteering with the OIS and the language institute (FU). He volunteered with the OIS for the Welcoming Event for new international students. Samir mentioned that he arrived early before the event to help the OIS staff with arranging the chairs and tables and was the last person to leave the event. During the event, he helped with serving food, holding conversations with the new international students, socializing, and making friends. Samir said, “You give them food, you welcome them. Anyone can talk to you or ask you about anything. You want to help them as much as you can. So I made friends with people. I like to talk to people and get to know them.” In addition, Samir volunteered with the language institute. He helped the staff with data entry work and participated in the Orientation session that the institute held for new students. Samir stated, “It was the same thing ... familiarizing everyone with the system over breakfast, taking care of the tables and chairs, checking students’ names, and welcoming them.”

When Samir was in another state for a year to study English, he participated in an international festival the school held with the Saudi association (FU). According to Samir, they

introduced the Saudi culture by talking with people who visited the festival about their food, Ramadan, and Islam. Samir said, “The people asked us whether we fast for the whole day in Ramadan, and they asked us about Islam and things they wanted to know about Saudi Arabia.”

It seems clear to me from the above examples that Samir had a positive perception of campus life and was proactive toward campus life and knowing the American culture and people. Similar to Ali, Samir mentioned that the more he interacts with locals, and other international students, the more he can understand their culture, maintain mutual understanding, and overcome culture barrier (DB). This attitude of Samir was his driving force to do volunteering work.

Despite his overall positive experiences, Samir complained about one of his teachers in a language institute he attended in another state (IV). When he asked his teacher to give him a few minutes to pray then come back to class, the teacher used to refuse his request. Samir tried to clarify to his teacher that his prayers will only be for a few minutes, but the teacher warned him that if he was late for class, he would be considered absent and refused to give Samir time to pray. Samir did not share with me his perceived reason for his teacher behavior, and how he dealt with this challenge. However, in my opinion, even if the teacher had a strict policy of not allowing students to be late for class, he would still not prohibit students from going to the restroom whenever they needed which might sometimes exceed the few minutes that Samir asked for to pray. This is why I think that the teacher’s attitude toward Samir was discriminatory based on the participant’s faith which is an example of Islamophobia.

To sum up Samir’s social experiences, he has a positive attitude toward the American culture and studying in the United States. This is why he focused more, in the interviews and discussion board, on his positive experiences than negative ones. Samir believed that when he

interacted with locals and other international students, he had better mutual understanding with them. Samir had a positive attitude which motivated him to volunteer with the OIS and the language institute. These experiences of volunteering allowed Samir to build friendships with new students, help them, and familiarizing them with the university system. Samir also participated in the international festival held in his university in Arizona where he answered some students' questions about Islam and familiarized them with the Saudi culture. He also took the initiative to live with American students to socialize with them and familiarize himself with the American culture.

In addition, Samir made use of his Arabic language and offered to help American students with their Arabic language requirement in exchange of them helping him with his English. He used his Arabic language as a tool to socialize and improve his English as well.

Though Samir shared mostly positive experiences, he shared a negative one with one of his teachers in the language institute who refused to allow him to pray. Although he did not share with me why the teacher behaved this way, I understood this to be rooted in religious prejudice.

#### *Asem*

Asem is a single, twenty-nine year old undergraduate student from Saudi Arabia studying mechanical engineering. My interviews with him lasted for two hours and fifty-four minutes in total. They were conducted in Arabic. Asem was willing to share his experiences without reservations during the interviews. In the section below, I present the data mainly from Asem's initial interview since he did not mention new information on his social experiences in the follow-up interview.

In his initial interview, Asem mentioned that he had a positive experience with his American peers who shared a four-bedroom apartment. He said, "We had a friendship. We went

out together and did activities together. I did not feel that I was marginalized.” Eating outside was one of the activities Asem had with his friends (DB). He mentioned, “I took my American friends to a Sushi restaurant.” He also helped his friends with their homework. He mentioned, “They also used to ask me to help them with their homework or explain something to them. This is because I was more advanced in the courses of specialization.”

Another positive experience Asem revealed was with the Arabic club in which he volunteered an hour a week (IV). He participated in the Arabic club by socializing with the students in the club. He became friends with a British student who wanted to eat Saudi food. Asem cooked for him Saudi food and they socialized over lunch with the organizer of the Arabic club.

Though Asem had several positive experiences on campus, he was challenged in cafes he used to go to. He felt that the staff of these places smiled and talked more with white customers than they talked and smiled to him (IV). He said,

When I was in a cafe, I realized that white people treated each other in a way that was different from how they treated colored people. I was in a cafe to buy ice cream and the person selling the ice cream there would talk to the white person in front of me in the line, explained things to him, and smiled to him, but with me there was no smile or explanation or any talk.

Although Asem did not share with me how he handled this challenge, the perceived reason he gave behind the challenge was racism (IV). He mentioned, “White people think that they are better than others.” I do not think that this was a case of Islamophobia since no one in the café was aware that he is a Muslim.

Asem was also not able to socialize with his peers after class time (IV). He shared several reasons for this problem. He thought that it was difficult because they were divided into groups based on race. He commented on how his peers in the class acted: “They never mingle together in class, and when they leave, you can find them divided into groups based on their race, each group talking together.” He clarified, “You can see the Hispanics are one group and the whites are one group.” Asem also mentioned that lack of respect from the white students was a second reason for him not being able to mingle with his white peers. He said,

The Hispanics they always respect me but the whites they are disrespectful... meaning today you can talk to them and everything is fine ... the following day they can simply ignore you as if they don't see you ... I can't predict the whites... but I don't want to generalize.

A fourth reason Asem gave, in the initial interview, for not being able to socialize with his peers was that his department did not hold any social gatherings to enable students to meet one another. Though Asem gave several reasons his inability to socialize with his peers, he did not share with me how he tried to solve his problem.

Asem shared another challenge he faced in the computer lab on campus. He mentioned that he was in the computer lab trying to use one of the computers but he could not figure out how to turn on the computer (IV). A white male student was sitting beside him and he thinks that the student saw him trying hard to find the switch key, but he never tried to help him. Then, a white female student came in and sat beside Asem. She also started looking for the switch key, but the white male student helped her right away to find the key.

In his initial interview, Asem thought that the student did not help him because of his race. He stated, “They practice racism in a subtle way.” He added, “The whites together help



each other. They deal with each other in a different way than how they deal with people of color.” In my opinion, from the experience above, Asem was made to feel inferior to the white student in the computer lab. This feeling of inferiority is an expected result of the practice of racism.

A fourth challenge that Asem faced was when he felt that he was not benefiting from the program organized by the OIS (IV). He mentioned that the OIS had a program for grouping each new international student with an American student to orient the new students in the culture of campus life. Asem attended their first meeting in a restaurant and talked with an American student who told him that they would go out together in the future. After this event, he sent this student a text message asking him if he was free to go out. He could tell that the message was read, but the American student did not reply or try to contact Asem. He concluded that such behavior was due to lack of respect. He said, “Whites do things that would show you they don’t respect you.”

Asem overcame this problem by stopping to attend the events of OIS (IV). He stated, “I went two or three times after that then I stopped.” Asem’s reason behind him losing interest in the activities held by OIS or the university in general was that he lacked confidence in these institutions. He gave me an analogy to clarify his point: “When kids want to play with the Play Station and their parents do not want them to play with it, they give them the play stick and disconnect it from the computer.” He added, “What I mean is that it’s does not matter, the activities and the events they all don’t matter.” Asem further clarified, “I view all the activities that are carried out on campus between students and the institution are all fake whether the students are Muslims or not.”

Asem justified his view by having more negative than positive social experiences with people on campus and outside campus (IV). He said, “Maybe my lack of confidence in these activities is because I had previous negative experiences.” Asem gave another reason for his challenges (DB). He said,

Americans are individualistic while I come from collectivist society. So, I encounter some issues in many aspects of my life, especially that I couldn't make a generalization about their society because I noticed that each one of them has different values and norms, which surprise me sometimes.

A fifth social challenge, reported in Asem's initial interview, was the stereotypes many non-Muslims have on Muslim men as being oppressive to women. He said that he met with the female organizer of the Arabic club, and she told him that she talked with the language institute female teachers who complained to her about the Saudis studying English in the institute and how they treat women with disrespect. Asem defended Saudi men by accusing media of being responsible of the bad image about Saudi men. When I asked Asem how the media can be responsible for the bad behavior of the male Saudi students in the classroom with the female teachers, he excused their behavior again by talking about the gender segregated education background of the Saudi men. Asem mentioned that the Saudi students try to avoid dealing with women or they try to deal with women in a formal conservative way because they are not used to deal with women back in Saudi Arabia. Asem said,

Education in Saudi Arabia is gender segregated. So what's here in the US is new to the Saudi male students. That is why sometimes you see Saudi men trying to avoid women and deal with women in an official way.

To overcome this problem, Asem thinks that the media should change how it represents Muslims.

In summary, it is important to note that Asem was highly critical of how Americans in the United States interact with international students, and in his interviews he mainly focused on negative social experiences more than positive experiences.

Asem had several positive social experiences. He socialized with his American friends who shared with him the same apartments. They went out together and he helped them with their homework. He also volunteered an hour weekly with the Arabic club where he socialized over Saudi lunch that he cooked with the organizer of the club and a British student. However, Asem faced several challenges during his study. He mentioned that coming from a collective culture and now living in an individualistic culture might be the reason behind several social challenges he faced during his study years in the United States. Asem also shared with me that racism was the reason behind several social challenges he faced such as café experience and in the computer lab when a white American student did not help him while he helped another white female student. Asem did not share with me how he handled these challenges.

Asem also had a problem with mingling with his peers. He mentioned that the reasons behind this problem was the short time of the class, students themselves mingle together based on their own race, white students not respecting him and the department not holding social events for the students to mingle. Asem did not share with me how he handled this challenge.

Asem also did not benefit from the OIS program that aimed at pairing international students with American students. The American student who he met did not continue any kind of relationship. Asem viewed the reason to be lack of respect. He handled this problem by ceasing

to attend the activities of the OIS and thinking that these activities are a waste of time and ineffective.

The last challenge that Asem faced was the stereotypes he thought Americans have on Muslim men based on some language institute female teachers complaining how Saudi men treat women with disrespect in the classroom. He blamed mass media as the main reason behind this stereotype. He also mentioned that Saudi men come from gender segregated background which made them uncomfortable dealing with women in a direct way in the United States. Asem thinks that to deal with this problem media should change how it represents Arab and Muslim men. Although Asem felt that western mass media promote stereotypes within Islamophobia toward Muslim and Arab men, the behavior of Saudi students reported by the teachers of the classrooms reinforces such stereotypes.

### *Sally*

Sally is the director for the Office of International Students and Scholar Services in the OIS at the same southwest university where all the student participants being interviewed studied. She is fifty-three year old and has been working in her position for fourteen years. The interviews lasted for an hour and half in total. They were conducted in English. Sally was willing to share with me her experiences and answered all the questions in detail.

In her initial interview, Sally viewed the social experiences of international students to be country and personality specific. Sally mentioned that there is a difference between Iranian and Saudi students in their social interactions. For example, Sally commented on Iranian students' social engagement and their openness to women participating in society. Sally said, "the Iranians are pretty cosmopolitan ... the men are not preventing women from being out and about in society. You know, uncovered, or at all." She added,

We have very few undergraduate students from Iran and they are very savvy people. My impression of them is that they are super intelligent. They are good at working systems ... they recognize the importance of finding the way to go through the bureaucracy and they are very good at self-advocacy in general. So, they tend to be very highly educated, pretty cosmopolitan, counter to what the U.S. perspective is on Iran.

The presence of the Iranian students on campus and their engagement in campus life challenged the stereotypes on Muslims being backward and having an inferior culture.

According to Sally, although Iranian students were known to be socially open and cosmopolitan, they faced social challenges while studying in the United States (IV). Sally was contacted by Iranian students who complained about their architecture professor. The students believed that their professor discriminated against them based on their country of origin. She stated, "Several students have had a complaint about a specific professor in the architecture department." Sally added, "They feel really bad about that. They feel like he's discriminating. He doesn't like some facets of them because they are from this country." Sally clarified that the professor told his students: "It must be really hard to be here when everybody hates your country because everybody perceive your country as the evil empire."

Sally's perceived reason of this problem between the professor and the Iranian students was his poor choice of words (IV). She mentioned, "He is not really being racist, he just keeps sticking his foot in his mouth."

Based on her initial interview, Sally helped to negotiate this conflict of the Iranian students with the professor by contacting the advisor in the same department of the professor and agreed with the advisor on how the professor chose his words poorly with the students.

Sally also shared with me the social challenges that male Saudi undergraduate students faced and created while studying in the United States (IV). She complained that the Saudi students ignored the OIS staff and did not communicate with the office about the immigration laws and their legal stay in the United States. Sally recalled,

You'll send them sixteen messages and say, "you just dropped a class, you are below full time. I have 21 days to report you to immigration." And you give them every, every opportunity. And they don't reply, they don't return your phone calls, and then they do things like, all the young ones have these phones where you can't leave a message, or it doesn't accept phone calls, it can only come out from a phone.

Sally added, "Yeah, they don't want to talk to 'those administration people'. They don't want to talk to them."

From Sally's perspective the Saudi students show careless behavior toward their education and staying legally in the United States (IV). The OIS staff was offended, according to Sally, by this recklessness of the Saudi students.

Sally's perceived reason for the attitude of the Saudi undergraduate male students was related to cultural background (IV). She mentioned,

Saudis are not poor people ... I don't think that every Saudi is rich, but I think the people that come here are probably upper middle class or higher, but I feel like, with the younger, male students there's a lot of people always did stuff for me, so I don't really know how to do stuff for myself, or I don't really care I think it varies with the individual. Some students are not serious about their education. Some students might be serious about their education, but they just don't know how to go about being functional

in this bureaucratic ... You have to get yourself from point “A” to point “B”, and you have to have initiative and you have to kind move yourself here in the U.S.

She also gave another perspective (IV),

A lot of people that you see in the Saudi population are young males, who are not used to being adults. I think that, I wouldn’t attribute that to being lazy, or I wouldn’t necessarily attribute that to being Saudi, but I would attribute that to being a young male who hasn’t really learned to do much for themselves up to this point in their lives ... These are immature boys.

Sally made a connection between the Saudi cultural backgrounds and their success in the United States. She thought the way Saudi male students were raised in their home country did not prepare them to act independently and responsibly to be successful in the United States. This connection that Sally made has not appeared in previous research.

Sally said, in her initial interview, that the OIS held orientation sessions and workshops in order to negotiate the challenge of the Saudi students not communicating with the office. According to her, the OIS sends messages at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester to remind students of immigration laws as well as to stay in full-time enrollment every semester. The OIS also offers workshops about the laws concerning working off campus and let students know that they are not allowed to work off campus until they speak with the office.

Sally added another way the OIS handled the students who ignored the OIS staff. She mentioned that they call and send messages to emergency contact people, students’ associates to reach students who disappear (IV). Sally shared with me a story about a student who disappeared and the OIS advisor found out that it was the last day before her reporting him to the immigration office for disappearance. This advisor found out that the student was taking a weight lifting class.

So, the advisor went to the weight lifting class to meet the student. This strongly suggests that the OIS had a priority of updating international students on immigration regulations. They reached out to a student in a weight lifting class to avoid deporting him from the United States.

According to Sally in her initial interview, the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission<sup>7</sup> (SACM) also helped solve the problem of the Saudi students not communicating with the OIS. Previously, this committee did not use to monitor Saudi students or follow up with them. However, this committee improved and became stricter with the students. Sally said,

Since there's been a shake-up of the Culture Mission, they're apparently getting more strict on things and not granting a scholarship once somebody has had a record of not succeeding. But prior to the last year and a half they were just kind of, you know, basically just signing off on anybody regardless of what their performance had been.

Sally also mentioned that a Saudi Arabia Basic Industries Corporation<sup>8</sup> (SABIC) helped to negotiate the problem of Saudi students not communicating with the OIS. This committee is more concerned about their students' performance than SACM does with theirs. The committee follows up with the Saudi students' progress and their legal status in the United States. Sally stated,

And then we had this other group of students who were SABIC. And they were more handpicked students, so they were supposedly better, at least at the high-school level. In their performance, they were a little bit more concerned about their performance as a whole than the other group, but they were also monitored very carefully. Like, their advisors from SABIC would fly in to Huston every semester and meet individually with each one of them. So, they were being handled a lot more.

---

<sup>7</sup> A Saudi government committee that offers scholarships to Saudi students to study in the United States.

<sup>8</sup> A Saudi manufacturing company that offers scholarships to highly selected Saudi students.



Sally pointed out another social challenge regarding the communication between international Muslim students in general and their advisors (IV). She stated, “People have problems, general communication problems with their advisors. And they will come in and say, ‘I can’t get them to do X, Y and Z.’”

Sally did not give a reason behind the communication problem between students and advisors. However, she revealed that she attempted to solve the problem by offering help (IV). She said,

I see myself as an advocate for the students, so I’m gonna try to figure out when is it appropriate to intervene? When is it not appropriate it intervene? What does the student want to do? You know, what action do you want me to take on your behalf ... and a lot of times it’s not advantageous for me to get in the middle of it.

Though she sees herself as an advocate for the students, Sally was cautious not to interfere between the students and their advisors or professors except when needed and with the approval of the students involved in the problem. This shows that she cares about students’ interest and puts it as her first priority.

Another social challenge that Sally shared with me, in her initial interview, was how students, who looked different, felt unsafe. Women wearing the head scarf, whether American Muslims or international Muslim students, and other international students who looked different complained about how people acted awkwardly, or said something mean to them. Sally mentioned that she also noticed that international Muslim students, in particular, hid their identity in social events by wearing hoods. This made Sally concerned that international Muslim students might have felt targeted and unsafe.

Sally's perceived reason for the international Muslim students' feelings of unsafe was the political hostile environment resulting from the media and then-candidate Trump's rhetoric against Muslims following the terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino (IV). She mentioned, "since the Paris thing, and all the rhetoric in the media, with Trump being an idiot ... saying these horrible basically fascist, 'Hitlaristic' things ... and then ... that whole thing with San Bernardino people."

To address this problem, Sally mentioned that the OIS decided to hold a social discussion forum for Muslim students in response to the increasing incidents of racism toward Muslim students (IV). She said,

We wanted to have a dialogue with our students and then we also invited a couple of offices that are related to students' affairs. So, there is an office called Go Respect ... it's kind of a new initiative that's kind of a spin off from the dean of students office ... that is just dealing with issues related to race, gender, ... sexual orientation, ... and trying to make sure that the campus climate is very good for diversity ... So, they came, the dean of students office came, I invited somebody from African studies who is an American Muslim

Sally also invited the Saudi Students Association, Muslim Students Association, and Bangladeshi Students Association to the discussion forum (IV). However, only three Muslim students showed up, while no one showed up from the heads of Muslim associations.

Sally's explanation for why there was poor attendance by these groups was in her words: It could be that people don't want to talk about it... because it's uncomfortable, or it could be that it's culturally not something you go do have a discussion forum.

Sally addressed the discussion forum failure by deciding to change her priorities with respect to social events the office organizes. She mentioned, “Obviously, it took down a notch in terms of priority, right?”

The last problem Sally referred to was the isolation of the female spouses of international Muslim students lived in while their stay in the Family Students Housing (FSH) (IV). Sally mentioned that the FSH complained to her about how Saudi and Bangladeshi spouses isolated themselves from the host community and were too liberal with their children (IV). According to Sally, one Bangladeshi spouse left her seven-year-old in the playground by him/herself. According to Sally, the FSH considered such an act to be irresponsible for the child’s parents, while the Bangladeshi spouse did not see any problem with leaving her child alone in a playground. Sally also added that the concept of child care is a source of a conflict between the Saudi and Bangladeshi students, on one hand and the FSH on the other hand. She elaborated that the Bangladeshi and Saudi spouses were not willing to communicate with other groups in the FSH, which people in the FSH interpreted it as their having ill-will toward them.

Sally’s reasoning behind the isolation of the Muslim spouses was due to their unwillingness to learn the culture and their limited English proficiency (IV). She stated,

If there is a big enough community, it can kind of create that insular... problem, you get people speaking their own language all the time and not learning about the culture and that kinda creates, sometimes just creates ill-will because people kind of look at that and go ‘they don’t want to hang out with anybody else.’

Another perceived reason for the isolation problem of Bangladeshi and Saudi spouses was the tradition gender roles these two groups have in their culture (IV). Sally explained,

I also, don't want to blame it on the men either. It might be just that people are following traditional gender roles. It's not like, I'm saying that the men are making them do that. I don't know that for a fact. They're following sort of a more gender stereotype ... roles, so, it might be the women who are wanting to stay home with the kids because they apparently do. It's not necessarily that every woman wants to go out.

The OIS attempted to solve this challenge by starting a group for international couples. However, Sally mentioned that the Muslim students' spouses were not active in any of the activities of the group (IV). She thought that this might be due to the traditional gender roles present among international Muslim students more than other students.

Based on the above, Sally and the OIS cared about international students and their spouses and wanted to reach out to them. They also cared about engaging them in a community where they could interact with other international students. However, according to her, Muslim international students and their spouses were negative about participating in any events or socialization and did not try to interact with other communities or international students.

In her follow-up interview, a students' social experience that Sally shared with me was the participation of Muslim students in events of International Research and Exchanges Commission<sup>9</sup> (IREX). Sally explained that the OIS had two Tunisian and four Pakistani exchange students from IREX for one or two semesters. These students volunteered certain number of hours in elementary and middle schools to give presentations and prepare food from their home countries.

In summary, Sally shared with me the international Muslim students' positive social experiences that focused on the participation of the international Muslim students in the IREX

---

<sup>9</sup> An independent nonprofit organization that empowers youth and focuses on quality education. This organization is funded by several countries such as Iraq and Oman.

program. In addition, Sally viewed the social experiences of international students to be country and personality specific. Sally mentioned that there is a difference between Iranian and Saudi students in their social interactions. For example, Sally commented on Iranian students' social engagement and their openness to women participating in society without forcing women to wear head cover.

However, male Saudi students had a communication problem with OIS during their study years. They avoided communicating with the OIS about the immigration laws and paperwork. Sally viewed this behavior as a result of the cultural background of the Saudi students and the way they were raised in their home countries which did not prepare them to be responsible, successful, and independent. Sally mentioned that the OIS held orientation sessions and workshops to raise the awareness of the students with the immigration laws and the paperwork required. The OIS also sends messages throughout the semester, contact emergency contacts of the students. In addition, the two Saudi organizations SACM and SABIC help with the follow-up on the Saudi students' performance.

According to Sally, there were other social challenges that international Muslim students faced caused by discrimination. The first challenge was when the Iranian students complained to Sally about their professor whom they reported to be discriminating against them based on their country of origin which is also a Muslim country. Sally said that the professor chose his words poorly with the students. She tried to solve the problem by following up with one of the advisors in the students' department. Another challenging incident of discrimination was when the international Muslim students among other students reported feeling unsafe, people giving them evil eyes, and saying something mean to them. Sally shared with me that the current hostile political environment resulting from media and then-candidate's Trump "Hitlaristic" rhetoric

against Muslims following terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino might be the reasons behind such challenges. All of instances above are examples of how Islamophobia is still very much alive and constitutes a challenge for Muslim students. The OIS handled this problem by holding an event for Muslim students to discuss these challenges they face. However, only three Muslim students showed up which made Sally think that students might have felt uncomfortable to be focused on during the event. This made Sally decide not to hold similar events in the future.

Another social challenge Sally reported was how international Muslim students had a problem of communication with their advisors. Sally did not give a reason for this difficulty but she considered herself to be an advocate for the students whenever they needed help. Sally was cautious not to interfere between students and their advisors except with the approval of the students.

The last social challenge Sally shared with me was how the Saudi and Bangladeshi spouses isolated themselves from the FSH and OIS. These two groups of international students' spouses were unwilling to communicate with the community of the FSH. According to Sally, this was due to their limited English proficiency and the culture difference regarding the concept of child care. The OIS attempted to solve the problem by offering a program for international couples. However, the Muslim spouses isolated themselves from OIS events and did not attend the OIS program. This might be due to the traditional gender roles that are present among Muslim spouses.

### *Suzan*

Suzan is an international advisement specialist at the same university where Sally worked. She is forty-eight year old and has been working for the OIS for four years. Prior to her current position, Suzan was a teacher of English as a Second Language for twenty years where

she taught international students on the same campus. The interview with Suzan went smooth and was informative and lasted over two hours each time we met. She seemed enthusiastic about the topic of my research and was willing to share her expertise and previous experience with me with no restrictions. However, Suzan had more experience in teaching international students than dealing with international students outside the classroom. That was why her social experiences section below was shorter than her academic one.

An experience Suzan shared with me was her experience with Iranian students. Like Sally, she commented (IV) on Iranian students and how modern and progressive they were. She also said that Iranian students were opened minded. They had tolerance for homosexuality, religious ideas, philosophical issues, Socratic dialogue, and atheism. They were also critical of Iran, and they hoped that their country would change one day. Suzan stated,

They have religious ideas, enjoying Socratic dialogue about philosophical issues, critical of Iran, and what's going on there, a lot of freedom of thought, frustration with the way things are in Iran and desire a hoped for their country to change. They were the people who chose to leave.

In contrast to Sally's negative experience with Saudi undergraduate students and their unwillingness to communicate with OIS, Suzan shared a positive experience with the Saudi students while teaching them English as a second language (IV). Suzan invited her Saudi students to her house to meet her family. The visit went well and she said that the Saudi students were "a lot of fun."

Suzan also commented on the high social skills and the confidence of the Saudi students when talking to Americans (IV). She said, "These guys have no trouble talking to Americans. They are really comfortable and confidant." She drew a relationship between the cultural

background of the Saudi students and their high social skills with their ability to talk with Americans. Suzan mentioned that the Saudi students in their home country are used to socializing and making conversations as an activity in itself which facilitated their socialization with Americans in the United States. She said,

We had this group of students and we were having lunch together at the orientation, and I said, ‘You Saudis, I just love the way that you guys just get together and just talk. That’s the activity. Your houses have a sitting room for thirty people because on weekly basis, many people are going to come to visit.’

In addition to Saudi students’ high skills, Suzan mentioned how Saudi students had very close relationships together as a group in the United States (IV). Unlike Iranian students in Sally’s experience previously mentioned, who had competition between themselves affecting their friendship, Saudi undergraduate students stayed together as a unified community doing activities together such as going to the mosque and socializing among themselves. Suzan said, “Well, they do stick together and really have their group, their very tight group.”

In her follow-up interview, Suzan shared with me an experience about international Muslim students attending a workshop about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) students and their rights whether on campus or the larger scope of the United States. Suzan was impressed by the respect international Muslim students showed during the workshop. They listened politely and they showed interest in the topic. She told me,

I was impressed. I really felt people were listening with a lot of respect and one teacher, who is a Muslim, asked the guest speaker, “have you tried to do any outreach to Muslim leaders in the community?”, and I think the speaker of the workshop said, “we like to talk to everybody, I don’t think we sought out opportunities but, we would be glad to”



The attendance of a group of international Muslim students to a workshop on the rights of LGBTQ students challenged the stereotype that Suzan had about international Muslim students' conservatism. This is why she expressed her impressiveness to their attentiveness, interest, and the respect they showed to the event and the speaker.

Suzan shared with me a challenge which international Muslim students faced in general. Similar to Sally, Suzan talked about (FU) a discussion forum for Muslim students the OIS organized to discuss the social challenges that face Muslim students during their study years in the United States. However, it was poorly attended by the students. She said, "We reserved a room, and we had food, cheese and crackers but sadly only three students showed up." Suzan added, "There were probably ten to fifteen faculty members. I mean, it was really remarkable how much faculty came to support the event. But very few Muslim students showed up." Suzan and the OIS did not expect this response by the students. In my opinion, this is important because it reflects how international Muslim students might not be ready or willing to discuss their problems openly with faculty members and staff. Consequently, in my opinion, the OIS needs to plan different events for inclusion of international Muslim students than the event they had for Muslim students.

Suzan perceived reason of the low attendance of Muslim students to the forum was related to the academic environment of the event itself. She said that it was held in a reading room similar to a library which made it not attractive to the students to attend. She added that other events that the OIS held for international students were more popular because they were held in social halls with sound systems and a dancing area. Suzan did not share with me how she and the OIS negotiated the challenge of the discussion forum that was not successful with the Muslim students.

In conclusion, Suzan shared with me the positive social experiences of international Muslim students. Suzan mentioned to me how international Muslim students attended a workshop on LGBTQ students and their rights. Suzan was impressed by the respect and attention the students gave to the speaker of the workshop.

Similar to Sally, Suzan confirmed how Iranian students are modern and progressive. They also had tolerance for philosophical ideas, religious ideas, and Socratic dialogue.

Contrary to Sally's perspective on Saudi students, Suzan shared how Saudi international students had a positive social experience when she invited them to her house to meet her family. They socialized with her family and enjoyed their time. Suzan also commented on their high social skills and how comfortable they were in communicating with Americans. Suzan thought that these social high skills were developed in Saudi Arabia. Unlike Iranian students, Saudi students, according to Suzan, had close relationships among themselves and acted as a unified community.

Like Sally, Suzan stressed the same social event and discussion forum that received little attention from Muslim students. Suzan's perceived reason for this problem was that Muslim students might not be ready or willing to discuss their problems openly with faculty members and staff. This is why Suzan thinks that the OIS needs to plan different events to include these students.

**Summary of the participants' social experiences.** The purpose of this section is to identify themes (i.e., patterns) that I found in the data for social experiences. The first theme that emerged from the data collected was religion. Several participants revealed the role Islam plays in various aspects of their social life. Ali shared with me the importance of the Islamic awareness week and the significance of the imam's speech in clarifying the link between Islam and

terrorism. He also mentioned the MSA and suggested ways of improving it to attract more students. Amin highlighted that he wanted to date a Muslim woman with the purpose of marriage when facing problems of dealing with the opposite sex. He also joined a Bible study group because he believed as a Muslim that he should know about other religions. Sami shared how his Swiss peers rejected him after defending why women do not drive cars in Saudi Arabia and Muslims do not drink alcohol and eat ham. Fahed was supported by the people in the state he lived after then-candidate Trump's negative rhetoric about Muslims. Also, he had a teacher in the language institute who used videos that attacked Islam for discussion in the class. Samir participated in the international festival held in his university where he answered some students' questions about Islam and familiarized them with the Saudi culture. Also, Samir was offended by his teacher refusing to allow him his prayer time. Asem mentioned that there were stereotypes many non-Muslims have on Muslim men as being oppressive to women.

The second theme was the role that local, international, and same-country peers played on facilitating the social experiences of the student participants. These experiences took place in dormitories, on campus events, sports events, and off campus as well. Amin had positive relations with Iranians, Americans, and other international students. Fahed had the same with Brazilians, white Americans, and Native Americans. Mohamed interacted well with Omanis, a Tanzanian student, and Americans. Sami did the same with Brazilians, and an African American student. Asem enjoyed relating to with a British student and American peers, and Samir liked Americans and other international students.

The third theme was the role events, clubs, and organizations on and off campus played for social interactions for international Muslim students. The OIS events, LGBTQ events, IREX events, Arabic club activities, and MSA provided these students with multiple opportunities for

socializing, making friends on campus, exchanging information about different cultures, and familiarizing students with campus and western life and values. This was revealed in the interviews with Ali, Samir, Asem, and confirmed by Suzan, and Sally. Ali highlighted the role of OIS in supporting international Muslim students by providing a location for the MSA meetings and translated copies of the Quran. The MSA held the Islamic Week event to bridge the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim students and clear confusions about linking Islam to terrorism. Suzan also underscored how impressed she was by the interest and engagement international Muslim students showed in the LGBTQ event that was aiming at raising the awareness of the LGBTQ rights on and off campus. Sally mentioned the IREX presentations that international Muslim students gave about their home countries to middle schools and the culture exchange that took place in these events. Asem volunteered one hour a week for the Arabic club, socialized with students, and cooked Saudi food for one of them. Samir participated in welcoming events and orientation events with OIS and the language institute.

Although many international Muslim students had successful social experiences with the various organizations on campus, others did not benefit to the same degree from organizations such as the OIS, and MSA. Saudi male undergraduate students ignored the OIS staff and did not return their calls or messages about immigration laws and staying legally in the United States. OIS overcome this problem by holding orientation sessions, workshops, and contacting Saudi students. Saudi and Bangladeshi students' spouses did not participate in the international couples program established by the OIS to become more engaged in the community. International Muslim students did not participate in the discussion forum organized by the OIS to discuss the social challenges Muslim students face during their stay in the United States. Asem did not benefit from the OIS program that aimed at pairing international students with American

students. The American student who he met did not continue any kind of relationship. Asem viewed the reason to be lack of respect. He ceased to attend the activities of the OIS as a way of handling this problem. He also thought that these activities were ineffective. Ali was critical of the MSA suggesting that it needed to focus on culture events rather than religious events.

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was limited social interaction related to English proficiency level. For example, Fahed lost his directions in the airport when he first arrived in the United States because he could not communicate with people at the airport. Fahed also could not understand the slang of his American peers in the conversations and he felt disrespected. Sami also mentioned how some Americans did not answer his questions because they could not understand his English.

Islamophobia was noticed as a fifth pattern that emerged among several participants in the study. Ali, Fahed, Samir, Sami, and a group of Iranian students revealed negative social experiences caused by Islamophobia. Ali was mocked by the ROTC students on campus when he asked about joining the American army for his Pakistani friend. Fahed's teacher in the language institute passed racist jokes on Arabs and his other teacher played a video against Islam during class time. He was also discriminated against in a restaurant by an American man accusing him of being a terrorist. Samir was not allowed few minutes to pray at the beginning of his class, and Sami was cut off by his Swiss peers because of his cultural background. Most of these incidents of racism were handled by participants with silence and avoidance. Fahed was the only participant who faced his teacher in the language institute and complained about how the video against Islam was from a racist TV channel. Finally, a group of Iranian students complained to Sally about how their professor used to discriminate against them based on their country of origin.

The sixth theme was interacting with the opposite sex. According to Amin, he had a dating problem, and he could not find a suitable woman to marry. Fahed was also challenged with the opposite sex social interaction and did not know how to make female friends on campus.

Physical appearance was the seventh theme for the social experiences of some participants in the study. For example, Mohamed had a negative experience because of the black circles around his eyes due to lack of sleep. He was accused by his peers and some of his faculty, of using illegal drugs. Also, the counseling center revealed to Sally how international students who looked physically different (e.g. wearing head scarf or having a dark skin color) were socially challenged as they felt unsafe.

Another pattern (eight) I found in the data was how student participants believed that mass media played a role in creating stereotypes about westerners and easterners. Ali talked about how the media plays a negative role in shaping public opinion about foreign cultures. Fahed mentioned that mass media represents the American culture in a negative way. Asem shared with me how mass media in the West perpetuates negative stereotypes about Muslim men.

The role of cultural differences was the ninth pattern I found common among several participants. Ali suggested using cultural events to promote the MSA to the community on campus. Asem mentioned how the differences between collective and individualistic cultures might account for his social challenges. Sally mentioned cultural background as a possible reason for how Saudi male undergraduate students ignored the OIS and avoided communication with it. Suzan also mentioned that cultural background might account for how the Saudi students have high social skills and communicated efficiently with her and other Americans.

There are several topics that came up with single participants but did not show any pattern in the data. However, I think they are important for later discussion in chapter five. I found one social challenge reported by Amin concerning the difficulty he had with his peers from his own nationality due to competition. Although this was not found among other participants, I will discuss it in chapter five regarding future research.

Another topic that I found in the data was the communication problem that Sally reported, between international students and their advisors. Sally tried to solve this problem by advocating for the students when needed. I will discuss this further in chapter five.

Amin also reported a logistics problem that no other participant talked about. He mentioned that, due to how things are spread out in this country, shopping was more difficult and required having a car since public transportation was not reliable. I will discuss this further in chapter five as a potentially important issue to be studied.

The last point is about how international Muslim students' social experiences could be country specific. Sally and Suzan both confirmed that Iranians differed from Saudis on a number of issues. The Iranian and Saudi students that Sally and Suzan mentioned were not the same participants I interviewed in this study. Consequently, I could not develop a pattern to report in the summary. However, I will discuss this observation in chapter five.

### **Academic Experiences of International Muslim Students**

The second main part of this chapter is divided into two sub-sections. First, I report the results of my two interviews with the seven international Muslim students and data from the discussion board according to the four aspects previously mentioned. Second, I report the results of my interviews with two university administrative staff.

*Ali*

In his initial interview, Ali found studying in the United States to be easy and similar to studying in Pakistan. He did not find any differences between studying in Pakistan and the United States. He said, “Classes are almost the same whether in Pakistan or United States ... the study was almost the same, so I did not find any differences.” Later, he added, “It is a lot easier here.” Ali further stressed similarities of classes between the United States and his home country (DB). He said, “Discussions in class are more open and participation is highly encouraged here. But I didn't find a huge difference in the course matter discussed here and back home in Pakistan.”

Ali also talked about how his professor provided him with useful academic opportunities (IV). He stated, “It is also for international students. So, this was a special opportunity for international students.” Ali also mentioned that there were different nationalities in this project (IV). There were students from Turkey, Germany, Spain, Belgium, UK and other European countries. Ali was the only student from Pakistan. He said, “I was the only one from Pakistan. So, I was representing the youth in my country.” Ali clarified that the program accepted students from all over the world. However, Ali thinks that if he had applied from Pakistan not the United States, he would not have been accepted (IV). He mentioned, “If I was applying from Pakistan, there would be no way to get accepted.” Ali added, “It was not possible if I was not here and my professor recommended me.” This suggests that Ali believes that studying in the United States provides students with opportunities that they might not obtain in their home countries.

Ali talked about how he benefited from the project. He said, “Whenever I have interaction with Americans or others professionally or academically, I was thriving.” Ali described further what he did in the project he joined (IV). He mentioned,



I was sort of the designer for the group. I was designing the project. And I was responsible for delivering the devices, and Germans will go to textiles and the other Americans will go to analyze the results. So, I set the whole thing for them ... like this is the process ... this is the design. I showed them the process, and they were supportive they were not hostile.

However, Ali felt he was treated differently with respect to the procedures of obtaining clearance to get enrolled in the project (IV). He said, “All people from Europe are asked to only show their passport and for ID, but for me they ask for my visa, my passport, my state ID, a photo ID, I-20, I-94 and other things.” Although Ali talked positively about his positive academic experience in the project for international students, he faced a challenge of being treated differently, being a Muslim, in the midst of this positive experience.

Another positive experience Ali was the funding for his research that his professor provided him (FU). He said, “He was paying for my research, like thousands of dollars and stuff.” He added (FU), “I do other research for him, so he pays for this.”

Though Ali enjoyed the academic support that his professor provided him, he was academically challenged by the competition he had with his peers with respect to grades and the job market (IV). He said,

It is a competition in academics about who get the highest marks or the highest grades. It is good if someone gets high grades without affecting others. This is a relative grading system ... of course I see that they see me as a little bit a competition.

Although Ali did not share with me how he handled the problem of competition with his peers, he thought that the reason behind the competition challenge among international students was the limited job opportunities that were offered in the job market to international students

(IV). According to Ali, there were only three companies who offered international students jobs from seventeen companies that were present in a job fair Ali attended on campus. The remaining companies, other than the three companies mentioned earlier, required permanent residency to get the job offered (IV). He said,

I went to this job fair, and there were 17 companies I met there, but there are only three companies that offer jobs to international students ... rest of them say, “OK, but you have to have a green card or citizenship.” So this is how I see that there is a competition, but it is harder to me to get a job.

Ali faced another academic challenge when his professor told him that he will be leaving to another university that offered him a better job (FU). Ali stated, “He got a nicer opportunity in Kansas, so they’re paying him better over there and there are just overall more opportunities, like research, funding, and stuff. So, he’s going to move there.”

Consequently, Ali’s funding will be terminated in the summer, and he will not be able to resume his master’s (FU). Ali said, “I’m not going to have any funding in the summer, so it’s going to be a problem.” When I asked Ali about his reason for not moving to another university with his professor, he said that the lack of halal restaurants, markets and mosques were all factors that contributed to his decision of not moving to a new place. In addition, Ali did not have a car to use and go to other cities where he might find halal restaurants or markets.

It is important to note that religion played an effective role in Ali’s decision not to move with his professor to another university. To Ali, living according to Islam instructions exemplified in eating halal food and praying in mosques was a main priority that came before his studies and academic future.

Ali handled this challenge by talking to his graduate advisor about other possible sources of funding such as teaching assistantship opportunities to cover his tuition fees for his master's studies (FU). He said, "I sort of talked to the graduate advisor and told him to give me a TA."

In summary, Ali generally commented that his studies in the United States were similar to Pakistan and sometimes easier than what he studied in his home country. Ali had several positive experiences that allowed him to advance during his studies in the United States. His professor provided him with opportunities such as joining a project to work with other international students from all over the world. Ali believed that he could not have obtained this opportunity if he was outside the United States. However, he mentioned that the clearance procedures for him were stricter than those for the rest of his colleagues from other western countries. Ali's professor provided him with another opportunity for well-funded research. He benefited from this research and was also paid for his work in it by his professor.

Although Ali benefited from his professor's academic opportunities, he was challenged by the competition of his peers' grades. His perceived reason for this challenge was the limited job opportunities offered in the job market.

Another challenge Ali faced was losing funding to pursue his studies. This problem was caused by his professor moving to another university for a better job offer. Ali tried to look for another source of funding his studies by talking to the graduate advisor about other possible sources of funding his studies.

*Amin*

Similar to Ali, Amin talked positively about his academic experience in the United States (IV). He mentioned, "You know the courses are easy." Amin added, "Very easier than one in my own country, I didn't have any problems these past few courses." Also, Amin mentioned that his

graduate courses in the United States was equal to the bachelor degree in Iran (IV). He said, “That reminds me, having a bachelors.” He also thinks that his education in Iran prepared him well to his studies in the United States (IV). Amin added, “The type of education I had in Iran I told you, was hard. So, I can be prepared for this.” He also said that even if there were differences in classes between his home country and the United States, they were not shocking to him (DB). Amin mentioned, “Classrooms are a little bit different, which are different everywhere new you go, but the difference was nothing shocking at all.”

Amin had another positive experience with his professor thinking he can advise others. Amin helped out his American and Indian friends in their studies upon his professor referral of his friends to him whenever they had questions (IV). Amin stated, “Sometimes my professors refer them to me.” Amin also took courses with these friends (IV), he said, “Few times I have taken courses with them and studied together.” He added, “There are computers we have big tables, peoples sit there in the evenings, and just study.”

However, Amin shared with me a difficulty he faced with his professor (FU). His professor did not have enough time to meet and provide him with the guidance he needed. For example, Amin needed to publish his work, but his professor was too busy to review his work (FU). He said, “I’m preparing some papers for publishing, and he doesn’t have time to review them and send them for publication.” Amin also said that he used to email his professor but he did not answer his emails (FU). He mentioned, “Sometimes I even email him about something ... he forgets to email me back, before he was not like that.” He also needed to make progress with his proposal and dissertation but his professor was not available to provide him with the guidance he needed (FU). Amin stated,

I was going to defend my proposal this semester, but I'm going to do it next fall. I think part of it because he didn't have time to read it and help us with our dissertations... the ideas about our dissertations. It affected my progress.

According to Amin, he viewed the reason behind the lack of guidance on the part of his professor to be the new project that the professor was busy with (FU). This project caused the professor to be busy and not give enough guidance and time to Amin which affected his progress negatively (FU). He said,

Because he's more busy with the project, we just meet once a week. Before we used to see each other like more often, like every day. He would just walk to the lab, and we see each other, but so recently after we got this project, new project, he has been so busy in his office, and we don't see him much. Only in a biweekly meeting, actually once every two weeks.

Amin did not seem to be bothered by the limited amount of attention and time his advisor gave him (FU). He mentioned that his advisor was a good man, and he did not want to pressure him to read his work. Amin believed that his advisor will read his proposal and papers when he has the time (FU). He stated,

I never talked about it because I don't want to push it because ... he is a nice guy and I don't want to push it and ask him to read it. Whenever he has time, that's ok. He will finally read it.

Amin was not bothered by the academic challenge he faced with his advisor because he needed more time to look for a job in the United States and make connections in the job market (FU). He mentioned, "I need more time to go out and make connections with companies... I still need one or two more years to make connections with companies."

In conclusion, Amin had several positive experiences during his study years in the United States. He found studying at the graduate level in the United States equals to his bachelor in Iran. Second, Amin's professors treated him as an advisor by referring his Indian and Americans friends to him to answer their questions. The only challenge Amin faced was that his advisor was busy and did not provide him with the feedback he needed concerning his proposal writing and publishing other academic papers. The reason Amin gave for this problem was that his professor was too busy with another project. Amin was not bothered by not getting the feedback he needed from his professor as he needed more time to build connections with companies and look for a job for him.

#### *Mohamed*

Mohamed, the Omani student, did not share any positive academic experiences in the United States. However, he had several challenges in the university where the interview took place. His first difficulty was in a photography class when he could not describe the pictures in this class. His perceived reason for this problem was the lack of vocabulary required to describe the pictures. Mohamed handled this challenge by referring to his professor (IV). He said,

I talked to the professor, and he told me that I need to try as much as possible ... the most important thing to him that I see you trying. You have limited vocabulary but this does not mean that you don't try.

Mohamed further added, "I don't remember he provided me with anything in specific that would help me to improve, but he told me try to speak and describe the pictures."

It seems that the professor advice to Mohamed to try as much as possible to describe the photos was not helpful. The professor did not provide him with material, useful tools or a specific guidance that would help him improve his vocabulary or English language proficiency

which would consequently improve his ability to fulfill the task of description required in the photography course.

Another academic challenge that Mohamed faced was the reading course and how he used to lose his concentration after an hour of reading (IV). He handled this challenge by trying to finish the reading exams before the hour was up. He mentioned, “I always tried to finish exams before an hour or forty-five minutes maximum.” Mohamed also tried to eat three meals a day to raise the level of his concentration. He said,

When I was in Texas, I always tried to eat two meals a day. Currently, I eat three meals at least and I always have cookies with me and other types of food ... in Texas I did not eat at all ... I only eat very little.

It seems that the physical state of Mohamed affected his performance in the reading class. Mohamed did not try to see a doctor to know the reason for his low concentration. Rather, he decided to eat better in hope of increasing his concentration spans. This shows that the level of awareness of Mohamed is not high on this matter especially that this problem has been with Mohamed for years causing him not only academic problems but social too.

Mohamed faced an earlier challenge concerning the placement test he took in the language institute in Texas to specify his level of English (IV). He did not get the required score. According to Mohamed, he was placed in a level lower than what he thought his level was. The reason he gave for his low score was that he did not understand the instructions of the placement test. He was also not ready to take the test (IV). Mohamed said,

I thought it was an ordinary test, no one told me that this test can place me one level below my actual level. They told me it might place me higher not lower and psychologically, I was not ready to write.

He added, “I was supposed to write a paragraph about a trip or something like that. I was not ready to write. So I only wrote one sentence and they placed me in level one.”

He handled this challenge by talking to one of the teachers responsible for the placement test. Mohamed said,

I tried to talk to one of the teachers and I told him that my current level of English is higher, but it did not work out ... so I entered the second level, and I already knew half of the grammar they taught us.

Based on the challenge stated above, Mohamed’s weakness in English proficiency interfered with him benefiting from the class he was placed in (IV). He solved this situation by finding himself other alternatives for learning English than what he got at the language school in Texas. Mohamed relied also on YouTube to improve his English. He added, “I searched YouTube I found a comedy video or an informative video in English. I watch it several times so that I can gain some vocabulary and use it later.” Also, Mohamed used Netflix with English subtitles to improve his English. He stated,

I watch TV shows on Netflix and they have the subtitles in English and I use this way ... some of my friends keep searching for shows translated to Arabic but I tell them, ‘no English is better. This way we will understand more and there is no problem in watching each episode more than once.’

The last challenge Mohamed mentioned was that he did not benefit totally from the institute in Texas because he resided with Omani students and this did not give him an opportunity to be in contact with other people with whom he can practice his English (IV). He said, “Most of the people I lived with were Omani students. I did not meet other people. I was supposed to speak English outside the class ... but I did not do this thing.” He solved this



problem by trying to get to know more Americans. He said, “I tried to get to know Americans regardless where I live ... I tried to get to know them better.”

To summarize the experiences Mohamed had, he faced several academic challenges due to his low English proficiency. He faced a difficulty taking a placement test at the language institute in Texas. He did not understand the instructions, and he was not ready to write the paragraph in the writing section of the exam. He attempted to handle this problem by talking to one of the teachers in the institute explaining his difficulties, but he was placed in a lower level of English. This created another challenge where Mohamed did not benefit from the class he was placed in. He handled this problem by finding alternative ways of improving his English such as watching Netflix with English subtitles and YouTube videos in English.

Another challenge Mohamed faced was that he did not benefit from the language institute he attended. The reason for this problem was that he resided with Omani students and this did not give him an opportunity to be in contact with other people with whom he can practice his English. He handled this problem by getting to know more Americans.

The last challenge Mohamed reported was his inability of concentrating for more than forty-five minutes to an hour while reading. He tried to solve this problem by timing himself to finish his reading exams before an hour. He also thought that eating three meals a day would help.

### *Sami*

Similar to Mohamed, Sami mainly focused on the challenges he faced during his study years in the United States (IV). The first challenge he faced was when he did not benefit from the language institute that he attended in Los Angeles. The reason for this challenge was that, like Mohamed, he believed he was placed in a lower level than his actual one. Another reason for

Sami's problem was that he did not like the institute he was enrolled in. He said, "I didn't like it." Sami mentioned that most of the students in the institute joined to only improve their English then travel back to their home countries which was a different goal than his since he wanted to improve his English to join an American university in the future. He handled this problem by ignoring it, and he did not try to change the institute. He said, "I could have gone to another institute but I was lazy."

Sami's relationship with his advisor was another challenge he faced (IV). When I asked him whether his relationship with his advisor was good, he said, "No." The reason he gave for this was "He wants me to take courses that I do not want to take such as English." Later in the conversation with Sami it became clear that the English course that Sami did not want to take was a core course, and it was required of all the students including American students. He said, "It is even required from Americans." He further added, "There was a requirement that I should take before I register English." When I asked Sami why he did not ask his advisor about the pre-requisite for the English course, he mentioned, "I thought it's not important, but later I registered it." It seems that Sami was confused about his core courses, and he was not aware of their pre-requisites. This confusion might have led him to think that his advisor was forcing him to take courses he should not take.

Sami faced another challenge with courses in Humanities (IV). He said, "My problem was more with the courses that needed talking like humanities." The reason for this difficulty was his low English proficiency level. He mentioned, "I was supposed to leave these courses till the end, not to take them at the beginning of my study years on campus till I get used to things, and my English would get better than this." When I asked Sami what he did to improve his English or overcome this challenge, he stated, "I did not do anything to improve myself." I also

asked Sami whether he tried to refer to the teaching assistant of the course for help, he mentioned, “The assistant herself was not attending the course ... I did not see her.”

Another Humanities course that was a challenge to Sami was the linguistics course (FU). He said that he did not understand the course and its content. He said, “I attended twice before and I did not understand anything at all.” There were several reasons why Sami did not attend the linguistics class. Sami mentioned that his low language proficiency was a reason for his challenge and that he did not have a background about linguistics before. He said, “My problem was that the whole class was about group discussion.” He added, “American students, they understand things because it is their language, and they took linguistics in high school”. Besides not understanding, Sami said that the professor was unable to answer his questions, and other students’ questions, which suggested to him that she did not understand the content of the course she taught. For example, Sami asked the professor about the origin of languages and she answered that they were created by humans. This answer was not satisfying to him. Sami also mentioned that his professor said in class that the origin of mankind was Apes, which is Darwin’s theory of evolution. Sami said, “This is a lot of wrong information that she says.” When I asked Sami why he thought that this was wrong information. He said, “She was supposed to say that this is a theory and not to generalize.” Sami added, “Because I am like religious people in any religion of the major religions, and religions have a different way of thinking about these things. They have different theories.” Sami went further expressing that what his professor said in class might be a conspiracy against his religion. He mentioned, “One person told me that these scientists on purpose give us wrong information because they want us to doubt our religion and I believed him right away.” Sami added, “They want to destroy religion.” He also mentioned that the professor was unable to answer other students’ questions

and that she presented excuses for not being able to answer questions by saying that she used to teach English in the second language department and recently she joined linguistics.

Sami handled his problem with the linguistics class by not going to class. He said, “She said that attendance is not mandatory so I decided not to attend.” He added, “I did not attend because all the quizzes were online.”

The programing course was another academic challenge that Sami faced during his study of engineering (FU). Sami’s problem in this course was that he did not understand the explanation of his professor in class and considered the professor to be inefficient and not explaining well. The reason for this problem, according to Sami, was that he thought that there should be a lab to practice programing or at least he should be allowed to bring his laptop to class. He said, “This is a programing class but we don’t have a lab or computers in the class. We are not even allowed to bring our laptops and the professor does not show us the programing. I see the professor as inefficient and doesn’t explain well.” He added, “This is programing. My two brothers, they study programing, and I asked them. They told me that we are supposed to have a lab for this class.”

Sami handled this challenge by referring to YouTube videos for further explanation and practice. He said, “There are Indians who have YouTube videos and they have experience in programing.” Sami added, “They are straightforward and explain things in five minutes.” Sami elaborated, “For my homework, I start with YouTube videos, and if I don’t understand, I check the net.” When I asked Sami what he did when he could not find answers on YouTube he answered, “If I had a homework and I couldn’t find answers on the net, I used to ask anyone, I asked my brother.”

Sami had another problem concerning choosing his elective courses (FU & DB). He did not know how to choose them. The reason he gave for this problem was that “high school students in the US can choose their classes (DB). Therefore, when they go to university it is not a big deal to choose classes but for me it was because it was my first time”. Another reason Asem gave was the absence of his advisor’s guidance when Sami chose his elective courses (FU). It seems he was confused about the role of his advisor and thought that he could not refer to his advisor to help him choosing his electives (FU). He said, “I didn’t know that I should take his opinion in all the classes I want to take.” He added, “He helped me with registering math and engineering ... then he wrote 6 elective hours.” Sami explained, “There is another list I should choose from my electives.” He solved the problem of choosing elective courses by relying on other sources to give him more information about the courses he chose (FU). He said,

I depend on the website named ‘rate my professor’. This is what I use to check the courses and professors. There are comments there and evaluations and everything, and the average grade he usually gives to his students. This is why I don’t ask anyone when I choose electives

Sami added that he did not refer to anyone when he chose his elective courses, and that he preferred to take courses with either cheap textbooks or no textbooks to save money. He said, “I don’t refer to anyone when I choose my electives, I didn’t ask anyone. I chose the linguistics class based on the price of the textbook. The psychology textbook was for \$ 160”. Later he said, “Linguistics had no textbook.”

The last academic challenge Sami talked about was the hold he received from the university that put him under probation (FU). He said, “I received a hold from the university or something like probation.” One reason he gave for this problem was “Last semester my grades

were low, and I also withdrew two courses. They told me this semester I have to modify these grades and do mandatory tutoring.” The reason Sami gave for this challenge was his feelings of depression and feeling incapable of going further in his studies. He said, “I felt that I am not going to continue my studies.” He added, “I felt something like depression, and I told myself I won’t continue and that I have stopped studying long time ago so my brain must have stopped functioning, these were my ideas.” Sami solved this challenge by doing his assignments, attending tutoring, and all the classes. Sami said, “This semester I do all my assignments, and I attend tutoring ... I am improving.” He added, “I attend all the classes.”

To summarize the experiences of Sami, he faced several challenges that were related to his professors, English proficiency level, and advisor. Concerning professors, Sami had challenges in the linguistics and programing courses. He could not understand the content of these courses. According to Sami, the reason for this challenge was how professors taught these classes. In the linguistics class, Sami viewed the professor as unable to give fulfilling answers to students’ questions including his. He also viewed the professor as not specialized in the area she taught. Also, he refused to accept certain aspects of the course that went against his religious beliefs and considered it a conspiracy against Islam. In the programing course, the professor taught about programing without using computers and in a way that complicated the content unnecessarily. In the linguistics class, Sami stopped going to class, while in the programing class, he relied on outside help such as YouTube videos and his brother when he needed further explanation or guidance.

Sami had other challenges that were related to his proficiency level of English. In the linguistics class, Sami mentioned that he did not understand the content of the class because it was all based on group discussion and that his English was not strong enough to handle these

discussions. He handled this problem by ignoring the course and not going to class. Sami also mentioned that he was challenged in the humanities courses because of his low proficiency level of English and how he should have delayed it till his English improves. In the language institute that he attended in Los Angeles, Sami believed that he was placed in the wrong English level and that his actual level was better than the level he was placed in. However, he was lazy to handle this problem and move to a new institute.

Sami's relationship with his advisor was surrounded by confusion regarding the role of an advisor. He claimed that he did not know that he could ask his advisor about elective courses. He also mentioned that his educational background did not include experience of choosing elective courses. So, Sami used other means to choose his elective courses (e.g. ease of course based on average grades given by professors, and price of textbooks). He was also confused about pre-requisites for core courses by not referring to his advisor.

As a result of all of the above, Sami's overall academic performance received put him under probation. The reason for this probation was his low grades not to mention he withdrew two courses the previous semester. Sami also felt depressed, and his mind stopped functioning since last time he studied engineering was years ago in Saudi Arabia. He handled this problem by attending classes, doing his assignments, and attending mandatory tutoring.

### *Fahed*

Similar to Sami, Fahed mainly focused on the challenges he faced during his study years in the United States. Fahed was challenged by the Critical Text Analysis course (IV). He said, "Text Analysis was different ... A lot of them were Americans, and I found it hard for me." The reason for this difficulty he gave was that he could not understand what the teacher required the

students to do during class time. He also mentioned that the class was fast for him to catch up Fahed mentioned,

Every week we had a long story to read it and discuss it in class. The first two weeks they were too fast, and I couldn't understand ... One time we had a quiz, and the teacher kept explaining how the quiz will be, but I couldn't understand. They all did the quiz, but I chose the wrong because she asked for a side of the quiz, and I chose another side.

Fahed handled the problem in the Critical Analysis course by contacting his professor about not understanding the instructions of the quiz. He said, "I went to the teacher after class and I told her that I'm international ... she dropped the quiz for me. In addition, he was introduced to a group of American students who he relied on to understand better the content of the course. He mentioned, "I got introduced to a group of students, and I felt that I can stop them anytime when I don't understand something and ask them to explain to things to me." He added, "They were all Americans ... They needed me because I used to do summaries, and when I finish these summaries, I gave it to the group." However, two students in the group were upset about him being in the group. Fahed said, "When I used to say hi to them they didn't say hi back." The reason for their upset was that they saw him as slow or delaying them compared to other groups in the class. He mentioned,

They saw me as slow ... slower than them. For example, we used to finish in 4 minutes as a group, while other groups finished in 2 minutes. But I didn't care, the most important thing to me was that I understand things.

Fahed shared with me another challenge he experienced with his two advisors; the scholarship advisor; and the academic advisor on campus (IV). Fahed's relationship with the scholarship advisor was not positive (IV). He said, "He does not care." Fahed elaborated, "He



communicates with me only when he needs me to send him my grades (IV).” I enquired further about whether the scholarship advisor helps him with registering his courses each semester (IV), Fahed mentioned, “No, he does not interfere with my courses unless I take one of the restricted courses such as music, dancing, and religion.” Like Sami, Fahed was challenged by his academic advisor on campus (IV). Fahed thought that his advisor was not clear with him about the courses he should have taken which resulted in Fahed taking an extra course that he did not need (IV). Although Fahed ended by taking this extra course, he still thinks that his relationship with advisors as imprisoning to him (IV). He said, “I don’t like advisors to be watching me closely and tell me do this and don’t do that.”

Fahed solved the problem of his advisors by relying on the curriculum that was given to him by the university to guide him in choosing his courses. Also, he relied on a friend he had in the fourth year of university to choose his courses. His friend shared the same specialization he was in which helped Fahed in consulting him when registering courses. He said, “I also have a friend and currently he is in the last year of university. He is also in the same specialization I am in, and I ask him about the courses I should take.”

The economy class was another difficult course for Fahed (FU). He stated, “I’m not doing well in that class.” Fahed gave several reasons for the difficulty he faced in the economy class. He said, “The teacher was hard to catch up with her.” Fahed explained further, “The teacher talks very fast and her English is very fast. Also, her writing is cursive, I couldn’t read it.” He also could not stop the professor to ask questions when he felt lost. Fahed said, “You have no chance to ask... It’s a huge class.” He added, “And if I ask, I feel nervous because there are 200 students and only 5 international students so you feel you don’t have the language as they do.” Fahed did not share with me how he negotiated these challenges.

Fahed faced another challenge in the religion class (FU). According to Fahed, the professor of the class was boring. He kept lecturing the class for a long time without any participation from the students. Fahed said, “The teacher keeps lecturing for an hour and fifteen minutes nonstop. There is no participation from the students.” Fahed handled this challenge by not attending the class.

In summary, there were several academic challenges Fahed faced during his study years in the United States. These academic challenges were related to limited English proficiency, professors, and advisors. Fahed was challenged by the economy and the Critical Analysis courses due to his limited English proficiency. The economy class was fast for Fahed to catch up. He also felt nervous asking questions because of the big size of the class and how most students in the class were native speakers of English. Fahed also did not understand the cursive writing on the board. In the Critical Analysis course, Fahed could not understand the instructions the professor gave to the students, and could not keep up with the class.

On the positive side, the professor dropped a quiz he did poorly on, and asked him to ask whenever he needed. Fahed also joined a group of students to help him. However, two students of the group seemed upset because of Fahed slowness that showed compared to the rest of the groups in the class.

Similar to Sami, Fahed was challenged by the way his professor conducted the class. The religion class was boring to Fahed and he stopped attending it because the professor kept lecturing for over an hour without asking students to participate in class.

Also, similar to Sami, Fahed’s relationship with advisors was a challenge. He thinks that the advisors might be overly confining, although he had confusion with one of his academic advisors that resulted in taking an extra class not needed. The scholarship advisor’s role was

limited to receiving grades and checking that Fahed did not register in any of the restricted courses such as religion, dance, and music.

### *Samir*

Samir shared with me his positive experience of his academic performance in university (IV). He mentioned that he obtained high grades in all the courses he registered. He said (IV), “In all the courses I got A+ except one course where I got A-.”

Samir also shared with me how his positive relationship with his advisor guided him to make right decisions about the courses he should take (FU). He said that he wanted to register for all engineering courses first then he can register the specialization courses. But the advisor advised Samir not to do so as this might lower his grades and it would be better for him to take the remaining of the engineering courses in the summer.

Samir shared how he enjoyed the differences in classroom between the United States and his home country, and how he these differences maximized his learning (DB). He said, “There are too many differences in the classrooms, but it is a really good one that let us learn from each other and enjoy the classroom more” (DB).

Besides these positive experiences, Samir faced several academic challenges during his study years in the southwest university he attended. The first challenge he shared was a course he took in which the technical terms were hard for him (IV). According to Samir, the reason for this problem was that his English proficiency level was not high enough to enable him to deal easily with the technical terms or to express himself fluently in writing as his American colleagues. He solved this problem by asking his professor to give him extra time during the exam. The professor mentioned to Samir that she would not treat him the same way she treats other American students because she knows that English is not his first language. Samir said, “She told

me that it's impossible that she would treat me the same way she treats others in the class or to expect the same thing from me like others ... because I don't speak the language." When I asked Samir how his professor's reply affected him, he said that it had a positive effect on him, motivated him, and he wanted to prove to her that he was a good student.

Another challenge Samir faced was in his computer science course when his professor did not give an extensive explanation during class time and was mainly focused on application (IV). He solved this problem by referring to senior students in the engineering college who volunteered certain number of hours weekly to help other students with their studies.

Samir shared another challenge he faced when he was unable to write enough notes and details during the lectures (IV). The reason Samir gave for this problem was that his professor lectured for a long time and did not write enough notes on the board. Samir solved this problem by referring to the teaching assistant to complete his notes.

Another challenge Samir talked about was the chemistry course (FU). He found the course to be difficult as he had previous negative experience with the same course back in Saudi Arabia. He said, "I already have a negative experience with chemistry from before. But when I arrived in the U.S. I told myself I have to change my idea about chemistry." Samir turned his previous negative experience to a positive one by taking advantage of the assessment plan the professor had for this course. Samir stated,

The way the assessment of this course is set is way better than what I used to have before in Saudi Arabia ... the level of difficulty of the course is almost the same but how the grade is being distributed out it is way better than how things were in Saudi Arabia ... For example, when I studied in Saudi Arabia, the final exam received 40% or 50% of the total grade. This means it affect your grade drastically, but here the final exam is not a

big percentage... If you work hard throughout the semester, you can still make it even if you messed up a bit in your final.

He also commented on how continuous assessment helped him with his grade in the chemistry course. Samir said, “We have class assignments and daily quizzes we also have readings and all of them are graded.”

The challenge Samir had in his chemistry indicates how previous negative educational experience can play a role in current student’s perspective and academic experience. Samir compared between his experiences with the chemistry course in Saudi Arabia with respect to the assessment plan with the continuous assessment plan he has in his course in the United States. This indicates that previous negative academic experience might be due to problems with how some courses are set or designed rather than problems related to students’ level of intelligence or inabilities of academically performing in a satisfying manner.

Another academic challenge Samir faced was the physics course (FU). According to Samir, the professor used to write for a long time on the board without explaining enough to the students or taking their questions, Samir handled this challenge by forming a study group with another American student in the same course. Samir said,

I introduced myself to an American student with me in the same course. I asked him whether he is open to the idea of studying together in the library. He liked the idea and we have been meeting in the library once a week for four hours

Samir elaborated, “We used to sit together and do the assignments together ... when there was something difficult he would explain things more to me.” He further added, “Unlike the professor of this class, my American colleague explains things to me in a simple way and answers my questions.”

The experience of forming a study group Samir had with another American student refers to how proactive Samir is toward his academic challenges. He sought help from one of his peers and was able to find an alternative source of information to understand better his physics course. This experience also raises questions on how far professors are ready and equipped to teach in engaging modern way that would attract their students and maximize learning.

In summary, Samir had several positive and negative experiences during his study years in the United States. Samir pointed out how the differences in classrooms between his home country and the United States maximized his learning. He had high scores in all of the courses he had taken so far. He also enjoyed a positive relationship with his advisor who guided him about what courses he should register first to keep his grades high.

In addition to his positive experiences, Samir reported several challenges he had with his courses. One was due to his low proficiency level of English when dealing with new technical terms. Samir solved this problem by asking his professor for extra time during his exams. Other challenges that Samir faced were related to the way his professors conducted their classes. In the computer science course, his professor focused more on application than explaining concepts. Samir solved this problem by referring to senior students to help him. Samir was also unable to write complete notes in another course because the professor lectured for a long time without writing enough notes on the board. Samir referred to the teaching assistant to complete his notes. In the physics course Samir faced another challenge as his professor used to write for a long time on the board without giving enough explanation about what he wrote. Samir overcome this problem by forming a student group with an American student to study physics together. Finally, Samir found the chemistry course to be challenging as he had a previous negative experience

about the same course in Saudi Arabia. He handled his challenge by making use of the continuous assessment plan that the course had.

*Asem*

Asem shared with me several positive academic experiences as well as challenges he faced during his study years in the United States. He talked about how his professors care about all students and their future (IV). He said, “They answer their emails, and they are there for the office hours ... you feel like they care about the students and their future.”

Asem also talked positively about his experience in the Dynamics class and how the professor gave questions and mentioned that students should expect similar questions in their exam (IV). Asem said,

After the first week of class the professor said there is a possibility that a similar question like that one would come in the exam ... I couldn't believe my ears ... she just gave me a hint for the exam ... in the exam I did find a similar question as she told us ... I did several mistakes but she didn't deduct many points ... my GPA now is 3.5.

Although Asem had several positive academic experiences, he shared with me a challenge he faced in one of his courses. Asem went through a negative academic experience with his white American peers in one of the projects they were assigned in one of his courses (IV). Asem felt excluded from his classmates' communications in the group. One in the group also referred to him in the emails they exchanged as “someone.” He said,

I was with three white American students ... Of course, I was not the one who chose the group ... The professor grouped us together. They used to talk to each other and communicate with each other while excluding me. When one of them sent an email, he referred to me in the email by ‘someone’

In addition, he reported that “The other student in the group used to communicate with me superficially and the other used to look in the opposite direction when I talked to him and that was a sign of disrespect.” He further added, “It was like they were working behind my back and not involving me in their conversations.”

When I asked Asem how the project went, he answered, “They gave me certain assignments in the project, and I did my part and all the calculations needed, but I found that one of them also shared doing the calculations with me. I did not like it.” Consequently, Asem did not feel comfortable with how his group did not give him credit for the work he had done when presenting the project. He said, “When the project was presented in the class, they did not mention my name or gave me any credit for me work. This was why they shared doing the calculations with me so that they won’t mention my name.”

Asem’s perceived reason for him being excluded from the project was related to him being a foreigner and belonging to a different culture (IV). He said, “I expect that since I am not one of them or I am not from their country and environment then that’s it.” He handled this problem by confronting one of the students in a reply to an email one of the students in the group sent. Asem’s reply was direct and straight forward. In his email, he wondered why he was being referred to as “someone” by one of the group members. He also mentioned that his name could have been mentioned in the same way other people’s names were mentioned. In the same email, Asem expressed how a leader of a group should be familiar with the names of his group members before assigning tasks to them (IV). He said,

When one of them was assigning tasks and referred to me by “someone” in his email to the group, I replied to his email by asking him why he referred to me in this way, and I told him in the email that he could have mentioned my name just like how he did with the



other two members. I also told him that he shouldn't have made himself a leader and assign tasks if he does not know the names of people whom he works with.

Another challenge that Asem shared with me was with his advisor (FU). Asem is a transfer student who was told by professors in mechanical engineering that he needed to finish two courses before he registered in mechanical engineering. Later, he met with his academic advisor and told her about his meeting with the professors. Yet, the advisor was convinced that he can join the mechanical department without waiting to finish the two courses the professors mentioned to him. Consequently, she wrote an email to the professors in the mechanical department and they replied by referring to the meeting they had with Asem and repeated to the advisor how he needs to take two courses before joining the department. What bothered him the most was how the professors issued a probation letter to Asem based on the recent email exchange with his advisor.

The last challenge Asem shared in his DB was about his Public Speaking course. Although he did not share what he did to solve this problem, he shared with me the reason for this challenge. He gave the reason for this challenge, his lack of background knowledge related to American society (DB). He said,

I had an issue like that when I took Public Speaking class. So, I had to talk about topics that are related to the American society, so it took me more time to educate myself more about their society's issues first and then trying to analyze the topic from my point of view. Consequently, my performance was weak compared to other American students. However, that was not the case in science classes, because, for instance, math is math everywhere. So the only differences I had in these classes that the American students have better knowledge background than what I had, but not in all courses.

In conclusion, Asem had positive and negative academic experiences during his study so far in the United States. He thinks positively about his professors' availability, their teaching, and care about their students' future. However, Asem was challenged by working on a project with the white American peers. He felt ignored and disrespected by his peers. He was also not given credit for his work on the project. He thought that his peers treated him with disrespect because he is a foreigner coming from a different country and culture. Asem handled this problem by confronting his peers in an email. Asem was also challenged in a Public Speaking course due to lack of knowledge about topics related to the American society.

Another challenge that Asem shared was his academic advisor. He believed that his advisor was the reason of him being put on probation. She insisted on sending an email to the professors in the mechanical department asking them to enroll Asem in their department regardless of what he told her about him meeting with the professors and how they asked him to finish two courses before enrolling him in the mechanical department. This resulted in the professors replying to the academic advisor's email by putting Asem under probation.

### *Sally*

Sally shared with me how international Muslim students were more interested in studying engineering sciences than other disciplines because engineering was more employable than other areas of study (IV). She mentioned, "We get a lot of people who want to major in engineering sciences typically from predominantly Islamic countries." Sally added, "Engineering is an employable degree also very easy to get positions in their countries." According to Sally, "I think they get funding more easily from the agencies and organizations where they have those kind of disciplines and I think they get visas more easily."

According to Sally, international Muslim students chose to come to the United States to study engineering because the United States is known for being advanced in more innovative ways than other countries, such as Europe (IV). They are known more for focusing on theoretical ways of studying engineering (IV). Sally stated,

The U.S. is known for at least good technology with those disciplines at least. I know that opposed to Europe, which is very theoretical, so the math and science might be more advanced than us, the practical elements are much more advanced here. Innovative type of study is better here than in Europe, so that's part of the factor.

Sally differentiated between Saudi males and females saying that female Saudi students are more responsible than their male counterparts (IV). She mentioned that the Saudi female students are serious about their studies, more disciplined and behave like adults with their families. She said, "With the girls, when they're older and with families ... they're serious, they're studying, and they're disciplined. They are much more together because they're adults, it's different." Sally also thinks that Saudi female students are culturally allowed to study in certain academic disciplines more than male students (IV). She stated, "We have one or two that are in that special education program. So, education is probably ... acceptable in that culture."

She added that Saudi women who succeeded to come to the United States to study were different than other women because they went against societal norms that expect them to get married and have their own families (IV). Instead, they traveled to the United States for education.

Sally also distinguished between young and adult Saudi students in terms of their academic experience (IV). According to Sally, the older the Saudi students, the more responsible and disciplined they become.

Sally shared with me the academic challenges international Muslim students faced during their years of study in the United States. She focused on Saudi undergraduate students as the most problematic group that faced major academic challenges (IV). She mentioned that students who tended to drop classes and disappear from their classes were likely to be Saudi undergraduate students (IV). Sally mentioned, “Frequently, those students that do that, that are dropping, are Muslim students.” She added, “Mainly Saudi undergraduate students.” Sally gave an example of a Saudi undergraduate student who stopped going to class, and the instructor gave him a letter grade “W” for disappearing after twenty-one days of the course (IV). Sally stated,

One instructor told me, ‘Well I have this policy that after twenty-first days I don’t drop anybody from the class. I only assign them a grade of W at the end.’ And this guy has enrolled for three different semesters, for the same class, and disappeared after the twenty-first day.

According to Sally, the consequences of dropping classes affect international Muslim students the most (IV). The university Customs Enforcement was likely to contact the student and deport him or her, especially if they came from a Muslim country due to terrorism. This might not happen with other international students who came from non-Muslim countries.

Sally suggested that the reason behind Saudi male undergraduate students dropping and disappearing from their courses was that they did not care about their education (IV). She said, “You can tell from their attitudes that they are not serious about the education part.” Sally also questioned the reasons for the Saudi undergraduate male students to be in the United States (IV). She said they might be here either because they were escaping something in their home country or that they were in a stage in their life just being irresponsible. She stated, “They are either

running away from doing something at home, or this is like a stage of their life that they ... I don't know." Sally did not share with me how the OIS negotiated this challenge.

Another academic challenge that Sally shared with me was a Saudi female student wearing hijab who complained to her about how her instructor in her Islam class keeps looking at her constantly (FU). In addition, the Muslim Saudi student complained that the instructor, when discussing the word "Jihad", associated the meaning of Jihad to aggression and violence. However, according to the student, the word "Jihad" has many interpretations that the instructor seemed not to be open to discuss (FU). Sally mentioned,

It did not actually mean aggression, so but that is a different interpretation on different people's language ... So she was kind of upset ... She said, 'I don't know why the instructor doesn't talk about how it doesn't necessarily mean that it's violence, it doesn't necessarily equate to'

Sally viewed the faculty on campus as not well educated in Islam and might be lacking sensitivity, knowledge on certain areas or disciplines toward other cultures (FU). She mentioned, "The faculty themselves are not terribly educated." Sally talked about faculty insensitivity by suggesting how faculty should attend training for teachers (FU). However, those who attended the training, according to Sally, had the needed sensitivity when teaching students coming from different backgrounds. Faculty, who need to develop this sensitivity, do not attend the training designed for faculty who teach students coming from different countries and backgrounds. She said,

We talked about teaching excellence, which has training ... in service training for teachers, and that's really great; but a lot of times, the people that volunteer to come to those are people who already have that sensitivity

To summarize the academic experiences of international Muslim students, according to Sally, she believed that gender played an important role on how students chose their disciplines. She mentioned that most male students choose to study engineering in the United States. They choose engineering because it is an employable degree and they can obtain funding and visas easier than other disciplines. In contrast, she noticed that female Saudi students were free to choose other disciplines such as education. Sally also believed that the Saudi female students differed from the male Saudi students in their study habits. Women were more serious about their education and more disciplined than their male counterparts, whereas young Saudi undergraduate male students were the most problematic group dropping and disappearing from classes.

Another factor that Sally identified as important for success among Saudi students was age. Sally believed that the reason of such behavior is that the Saudi undergraduate male students did not seem to care about their education. According to her, they either came to the United States escaping something in their home country or they are irresponsible.

Another challenge Sally talked about was the insensitivity that faculty had toward international Muslim students. She had a complaint made by a Saudi female student wearing hijab about her professor in a religion class who kept looking at her constantly and was not open minded about possible other interpretations to Muslim terms like “Jihad” rather than associating it with aggression and violence, while the term does not necessarily refer to violence. Sally mentioned that faculty insensitivity and ignorance toward other cultures have been a reason for such academic challenges for students.

*Suzan*

Suzan shared with me several academic experiences of her international Muslim students in the language institute on the campus where she used to teach. Suzan mentioned that she believed that language skills are gender specific with respect to international Muslim students (IV). According to her, international male Muslim students, in general, have high and exceptional listening and speaking skills (IV). She mentioned,

Across all groups, it would have to be gender specific, and it would only be the men. And what struck me about all of them is, and this is speaking directly to English ability, was a really impressive ability with spoken and listening.

Furthermore, Suzan noticed that the differences in her students' English language skills were not only gender specific but also country specific (IV). Suzan mentioned that the Saudi students "did not do well academically." They struggled with reading and writing more than other Muslims students. They could not process written information and their writing had many problems such as mechanics. Suzan mentioned, "Getting them to read was challenging, they didn't read well, they didn't process written information well. They had a lot of difficulty writing, you know, spelling was impossible. They weren't really good at mechanics" (IV).

Suzan mentioned that students from Qatar, Kuwait, and Burkina Faso were more advanced in reading, grammar, and writing skills than the Saudi students (FU). She said,

They seemed super comfortable, their speaking abilities just like fluent. So it's always remarkable that their speaking abilities shine more brightly than the other skills. But their reading and writing and grammar skills were superior to those of their Saudi counterparts.

Although she did not share with me what she did to handle the problem of reading and writing with the Saudi students, Suzan viewed the reason behind Saudi students' academic challenge was due to their educational background in Saudi Arabia (FU). She claimed that their

education system did not emphasize any reading of literature except of the Quran. Also, reading and writing assignments were not emphasized in the Saudi education system since Saudi students had problems with reading, writing and mechanics of writing (FU). She mentioned,

The only book they've read is parts of the Quran and only because they have a religious education, but reading literature or have reading assignments and writing essay ... it does not seem like that, that their education system really focuses on that.

Suzan highlighted another challenge for Saudi undergraduate male students related to academic ethics (IV). She said that the Saudi male students cheated on tests, did not do their homework, were not accountable, and were dishonest in situations in order to save themselves. According to Suzan, these students also negotiated everything including their grades, the amount of homework they should do, and missed their classes or “trying to get more absences and going to any limit they could to get medical excuses” (IV). Suzan also said, “I didn't really observe that in any other group” (IV).

Suzan gave extensive reasons for the challenges that Saudi male students faced (IV). Suzan perceived Saudi students as a generation that belonged to a culture that started to flourish after the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia (IV). This type of culture, according to Suzan, raised the children in a luxurious environment where everything was given to them on a silver platter. In her opinion, this spoiled the male youth of Saudi Arabia and made them think that everything is negotiable. However, in the United States, the culture is different. According to Suzan, the United States has rules that students need to follow. If they do not, there will be consequences. Also, unlike women in Saudi Arabia, women in the United States can be government officials or teachers with power and be able to make decisions. However, in her opinion, this status of women was a foreign concept to Saudi male students. She thought that this was why many



instructors in the language institute on campus were frustrated with Saudi male students and did not find them easy to teach.

What helped Suzan to overcome this problem with the male Saudi students was her age (IV). She mentioned that she being old enough to be their mother gave her some advantage and respect with the Saudi students (IV). She said,

I'm at an age where I could be their mother. They looked to me as a maternal figure and that helped because that gave me more respect. I got more respect as a maternal figure that I would if I had been twenty years younger as a peer.

In addition to the challenges of the Saudi undergraduate male students, Suzan mentioned the challenges facing Saudi female students. Unlike Iranian female students who expressed themselves freely in class, Saudi female students had a problem with speaking and participating in class (IV). Suzan mentioned that it was very difficult to make the Saudi female students talk in class (IV). She stated,

Over the course of all those discussions over all those conversation classes, I would have a hard time drawing the female students out ... The Saudi Arabian women would be really silent, and I would have a difficult time extracting spoken word from them. They just seemed really reluctant.

Suzan learned from her students during her conversation class with them that the reason for the reluctance of Saudi female students to participate in the conversation class was because shyness is considered a positive quality in Saudi Arabia for women but not men (IV). In addition to shyness, Suzan viewed gender segregation in the Saudi culture to be another reason for why her Saudi students, whether males or females, did not feel comfortable interacting with the opposite sex in her conversation class (IV).

When Suzan attempted to solve the above problem for the female Saudi students, she had a conflict with herself whether to mix the Saudi male and female students together in conversation classes or to separate them during group work. Suzan realized that mixing male and female students in her class would be going against what these students have been taught throughout their lives. So Suzan handled this problem by asking the Saudi female students to form women-only groups. She mentioned that this helped the female Saudi students to feel more comfortable in class. Suzan's priority was to provide her students with a friendly learning environment to become proficient in the English language not to Americanize her students. Suzan mentioned, "I let them form girls-only groups. I would kind of respect their comfort levels." She added,

As a teacher, isn't to Americanize them, my goal is to make them proficient in the English language, so, if I can make an environment that is more conducive to being more comfortable and mastering the language, my goal for them to master the language takes priority over me wanting them to get Americanized culturally.

Another challenge Suzan shared was one of her female Saudi students wearing *niqaab*<sup>10</sup>. That made it very difficult for others in the conversation class to hear what she said (IV). Suzan mentioned (IV),

It was a conversation class, so she was very reluctant to speak because she was not proficient in the language at all, complicated by the fact that it was very difficult to hear anything she said because she was wearing a *niqaab*.

Suzan understood that the student's husband was the reason for this student's problem. She mentioned that this student told her, "It's up to my husband and whether or not he will let

---

<sup>10</sup> A face veil that covers the hair, neck, and face leaving only the face visible (Peek, 2003). It is usually black or in dark colors.

me take it off.” Suzan helped the student by introducing her to another group of female Saudi students to act as a support group for her.

Suzan also pointed out that female undergraduate Saudi students had problems with attendance (IV). She said, “Attendance was an issue... that was really tough, because in some cases, they weren’t coming to class.” Suzan perceived the reason behind her Saudi female students’ absences were their husbands. The husbands did not allow their wives, in many cases, to go to class, and the wives were not empowered to do anything about it. The wife also had to take her husband’s permission before getting involved in extra-curricular activities. In the Saudi culture, according to Suzan, the husband is the guardian of his wife. He controls her and controls any extra-curricular activities she would like to participate in. Suzan did not share with me how she solved this problem.

Another academic challenge Suzan talked about was that the types of topics in her conversation class created tension and conflicts among the students (IV). These topics were homosexuality, marrying a first cousin, having multiple wives, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, Suzan did not share with me her perceived reason behind the topics that created tension and conflicts in the conversation class.

Suzan handled this challenge by talking to her students about the importance of listening to each other and getting to know more about other cultures (IV). According to her, having a conversation and understanding among people is the only way of stopping wars and conflicts in the world. She told her students, “How are you gonna solve wars and conflicts and arguments until you get people to begin to understand one another?”

Another academic challenge that Suzan shared with me was how age affected the dynamics of student interaction in her conversations classes (FU). She noticed that younger

students would not interact with an older student in a class. Suzan stressed that age gap between the student and the rest of the class was a reason for this challenge (FU). She said, “They had to treat him with certain amount of deference.” She added “I don’t think they would call him out or argue with him ... or joke around.” Suzan did not share with me how she handled this problem in her class.

Suzan also talked about an Egyptian student who stopped doing his grammar homework (IV). She stated, “He was very hard, giving a hard time for not giving his grammar homework.” The reason Suzan gave for this challenge was the political unrest that was in Egypt during the Arab Spring period and how this political unrest affected his performance in class (IV). She said, “Because this was the least of his worries at the time. He was being affected more by what was going on at home than he was by what was going on here.” Suzan further explained what this student did in the conversation class. Suzan added that this student was a Muslim Brotherhood activist whom she believed wanted to disrupt the conversation class by constantly talking about his group and cause. She said “He really wanted to talk a lot about that, he was quite an activist for the Muslim Brotherhood. He was trying to get the other students to wear the t-shirts.”

Suzan tried to handle this student by giving him the floor to talk about his cause and how Muslim brotherhood were oppressed in Egypt (IV). However, later, she did not seem to support this idea anymore as the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood activist student affected other students and recruited them to wear shirts supporting his cause. This seemed distracting to Suzan and she thought it might cause problems in the future. Suzan stated,

I wanted to give him an opportunity to talk about what he was going through because I thought it was a really great experience for the rest of us. But, when the other Chinese students in the class started wearing the t-shirt, I thought ... this is not fun and games.

To summarize the academic experiences that Suzan shared about international Muslim students, there were four main groups of students she referred to: undergraduate male Saudi students; female undergraduate Saudi students; a Muslim student coming from a country with political unrest; students differing in age.

Undergraduate Saudi male students had several academic ethical issues such as cheating on tests, not doing their homework, negotiating grades and the amount of homework they should do, acting in a dishonest way in situations to save themselves, and making absent excuses to not attend their classes. Suzan thought that these students acted this way because they were raised in a culture that promoted luxurious style of life where everything was presented to these students on a silver platter. This resulted in the Saudi male students acting in a spoiled irresponsible way.

Suzan mentioned that although most male Muslim students had advanced proficiency level in listening and speaking, only Saudi male students were struggling with grammar, reading, and writing. Suzan perceived reason for this challenge was that the Saudi educational background did not expose the Saudi students to written and reading material except the Quran and religious texts which was not enough to prepare the students to their studies in the United States.

Female Saudi students were the second group that Suzan focused on. They had problems participating in Suzan's conversation class, unlike Iranian female students. Saudi female students did not feel comfortable participating in conversation classes or working with other male students in group work. Suzan was told by her students that shyness is a favorable quality for women in the Saudi culture. However, Suzan also believed that the gender segregated background of the Saudis was an additional reason for them feeling uncomfortable working in

mixed groups. Suzan resolved this by forming gender-segregated groups to make her Saudi female students more comfortable.

Another female Saudi student wearing *niqaab* was challenged in the conversation class as other students could not hear her and her participation was not easy. Suzan mentioned that the student's husband was the reason behind such challenge as the student needed to take her husband's permission to take off her *niqaab*. Suzan tried to support her student by introducing her to other female students in the class to make her feel comfortable.

The female Saudi students had another challenge of absences from their classes. Suzan reported that the reason behind such absences was the husbands who did not allow their wives to attend their classes regularly or participate in the extracurricular activities. At the same time, the female students were not empowered to decide for themselves what they should do.

Age seemed to play a role interfering with how students interacted in classes requiring student discussions. Suzan observed that a student was challenged by how his younger peers in class did not engage him in arguments and discussions in the conversation class. Suzan perceived reason for this problem was the age gap between the student and his younger peers in the conversation class.

Lastly, Suzan noticed what was happening in the home country of a student can affect how they behave in class. An Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood activist student stopped doing his grammar homework during the political unrest in Egypt during the Arab Spring. Suzan tried to handle this problem by giving the floor to this student at the beginning. However, later, Suzan felt that this student became a distractor in class by recruiting some students for his cause.

**Summary of the participants' academic experiences.** The purpose of this section is to identify themes (i.e., patterns) that I find in the data for academic experiences. There are several

patterns that I have identified. The first is concerned with participants' professors' support, and availability. Ali talked about how he benefited from the academic opportunities that his professor provided him when working with other international students from all over the world. He also mentioned how his professor provided him with funding opportunities to carry out research. Amin mentioned that his professor referred his peers to him when they needed extra help with their studies which reflected the professor's trust in Amin and support of him. Asem talked about how professors cared about their students and their futures and how they were available during their office hours.

On the other hand, several participants expressed how they were challenged by the way their professors carried out their classes, interacted with the students, and their unavailability when needed. Ali reported how his funded research and studies got negatively affected by his professor moving to another university. Amin was challenged by how his professor was not giving him enough feedback in his proposal writing and publishing other papers. Similarly, Mohamed did not think he got enough feedback and guidance from his professor about solving his problem in his photography class. Sami had several complaints about how his professors conducted classes. His linguistics class professor was not able to answer all questions in the class, and generalized a scientific theory that contradicted his religious beliefs. The programming course was another challenge for Sami because the professor did not allow students to bring their laptops to a computer lab. Samir was challenged in a physics class because the professor did not provide adequate explanation for topics. Samir was also challenged by how a professor focused mainly on applications and did not give enough explanation of concepts. Fahed found a class boring because the professor gave long lectures without asking students to participate. Sally reported how a Saudi student wearing hijab complained to her about how her professor kept

looking at her constantly and was not open minded about discussing alternative definitions of Islamic words like Jihad.

A second pattern that I noticed among several participants was students' educational background. Ali expressed how the courses he took in the United States was similar to the courses he took in his home country or even easier. Amin mentioned that the courses he took in the United States in his graduate studies was equivalent to the courses he took in Iran for his Bachelor's degree. This is why both felt that their education background prepared them well to study in the United States. On the contrary, Sami lacked experience in choosing elective courses from his educational background. Samir felt he was ill prepared to study chemistry due to his educational background. He did not understand it in his home country and this interfered with understanding it in university here. Asem lacked the knowledge of the American society in his educational background to do well in his Public Speaking course here. Suzan believed that Saudi students were challenged in reading and writing compared to other Muslim students because their educational background did not include enough reading and writing assignments other than religious texts to study in the United States. Suzan also shared how Saudi female students did not participate in the conversation class which she thought was due to the gender segregated educational system in Saudi Arabia.

Limited English proficiency was the third theme among different participants. Due to his weak English, Mohamed did not understand exam instructions, and was not ready to write the required paragraph when taking a placement test in a language institute. He also did not benefit from the language institute because he did not practice his English outside class. Mohamed was further challenged in a photography course by his lack of the required vocabulary to describe pictures. Fahed was challenged in a class because his English ability interfered with



understanding material when presented at a fast pace. This interfered in another class by limiting him asking questions. Samir had a problem with technical terms in one of his courses when trying to explain them in writing. He also could not take down notes fast enough in one of his classes where the professor lectured without supplementing with additional written material. Sami's English level limited his understanding and participating in group discussions in his humanities classes.

A fourth pattern I found in the data was relationship with advisors. Samir had a positive relationship with his academic advisor when his advisor guided his choosing pre-requisite courses in a way that would help raise his GPA. However, other participants shared negative experiences with their advisors. Sami was confused about the role of his advisor in selecting elective courses and did not go to his advisor to clarify misunderstandings about prerequisites. Fahed mentioned that he did not think his scholarship advisor cared about him registering courses. He only contacted this advisor to send his grades and make sure he did not take any of the restricted courses specified by the scholarship. Fahed also complained that another advisor was responsible of him registering a course he did not need. Last, Asem believed that his academic advisor was responsible for him being put under probation.

The overall academic performance of participants was the fifth pattern revealed in the data. Samir mentioned that most of his grades were "As". For Ali and Amin, it can be inferred that their academic performances were high since they felt that the courses they took in the United States were easier or the same as the courses they took in their home countries. However, Sami mentioned that he was put on probation because his grades were low, and he dropped several courses. Asem was also on probation until he finished two required courses to join his department, but this was more a requirement thing and not academic performance. Sally

mentioned that the Saudi undergraduate students were the most problematic group concerning academic performance. They dropped and disappeared from their classes more than others. Suzan mentioned that the Saudi male undergraduate students had ethical problems with cheating on exams, lying, negotiating their grades, making many excuses for being absent from their classes, and did not do well academically.

To end this summary I make a note on a finding related to the above theme that is discussed further in Chapter Five. This finding is related to the academic performance of the Saudi female students that Sally and Suzan talked about. Sally reported that the Saudi female students were disciplined and serious about their education. However, Suzan mentioned that these students were not as advanced as their male counterparts in listening and speaking skills. She also reported that these students tended to miss classes. The reason for this absence, according to her, was that these students' husbands made them stay at home and not enabling them to attend classes. The Saudi female students had also to take the permission from their husbands to participate in the extra-curricular activities; and if the husbands refused, they would not be able to participate. Another issue raised by Sally and Suzan that I felt is worth mentioning relates to Saudi female students wearing *niqab*. Although my study does not have Saudi female participants, I will discuss this finding in the following chapter as a potential for future research.

### **Documents Analysis**

This section is divided into two parts. The first part is concerned with the analysis of the NCATE report to check the numbers of enrollment of international Muslim students and their rates of graduation and success. The second part focuses on the analysis of the university catalog. These two documents were included in the data collection procedures to check how far the

university, where the participants I interviewed studied, adopts policies of diversity and inclusion with respect to international Muslim students.

The NCATE is an independent accrediting body in teacher education. The College of Education (COE) at the southwest university where I conducted my interviews sought to obtain accreditation from NCATE which issued a report revealing that the COE met standards for accreditation. I used several key words to help me find topics related to international Muslim students in the NCATE report. These key words and phrases were: *international, religion, Muslim, Islam, international students*. This search did not reveal any results since the content of the report was not directly related to the topic of this dissertation. Also, the report deals only with COE and not the rest of the university which limits the scope of this dissertation since I included participants from different engineering departments and human resources.

The university catalog online for 2017-2018 academic year is divided into several pages such as undergraduate program and graduate program. In my search I used key words and phrases. These were: *international, religion, Muslim, Islam, international students*. The results revealed the following list: a degree given by international studies institute, Office for International Students, introduction to Islam course, intellectual history of Islam, Muslim Student Association, Religious studies, and courses on global diversity and inclusion. I conclude from this search that the university has policies to include international students and international Muslim students in particular in the general fabric of the university. The university also aims to raise awareness of local students of different cultures, faiths, and countries. These university's policies impact international students' social and academic experiences, the challenges they face and ways of handling such challenges.

In conclusion, in order to answer the three research questions for this study, I presented the data collected from interviews, a discussion board, NCATE report, and university catalog. The focus was on the social and academic experiences international Muslim students encountered during their studies in the United States. From the perspective of seven students and two administrative staff, I extracted patterns (i.e. themes) from the data that I discuss further and compare with past research in chapter five.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary, Findings, and Recommendations**

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter is to compare the findings of this study to the previous literature and the theoretical framework in answer to the research questions, I give in section one an overview of the study's background, purpose, and research questions. Section two summarizes the research design. Section three focuses on the findings of the study in relation to previous research and theoretical framework used. This section is divided into two parts. In the first part, the social experiences, I link the findings reported in chapter four of the four aspects of the social part of the three research questions of my study: their positive, and challenging (i.e., negative experiences) experiences international Muslim students faced, their perceived reasons for any challenges, and the ways they negotiated (i.e., coped with) these challenges to previous studies. The second part of the third section of this chapter focuses on the academic experiences of international Muslim students. I use the same four aspects that I used for social experiences: academic positive, and challenging experiences they faced during their study years, perceived reasons for these challenges, and ways of overcoming of the challenges to link the findings to previous studies. The four aspects of academic experiences are the academic part of the three research questions in this study. Section four is the limitations of the study followed by section five which is concerned with conclusions and recommendations for future research.

#### **Overview of the Study**

The constant movement of trade, capital, people, and ideologies has resulted in social transformations and growth, complex network of interactions, political and cultural

rearrangement. Such a movement has expanded to include higher education. Study abroad opportunities for campuses worldwide that are affordable and attractive have been offered in an increasing amount by marketers and recruiters. Consequently, students mostly migrated to the West as a result of the promotion by institutions to western ways of thinking as unbiased knowledge.

The experiences of international Muslim students when studying abroad have been documented by previous literature. However, the literature lacked the depth needed to uncover and understand the problems and obstacles that face Muslims while studying in the U.S. Issues such as students' perception of reasons behind these difficulties, Muslims' perception of their courses, and how Muslim students perceive the interactions between non-Muslim teachers and non-Muslim students should be focused on. In addition, religious discrimination requires researchers' immediate attention.

Based on the three research questions of this study, there are three purposes of this study. The first is to explore social and academic experiences of international Muslim students during their studies in United States. The second is to critically examine the perceived reasons these students give for any social and academic challenges they meet. The third is to explore how these students handle any challenges they face during their stay in the United States. Hopefully, the results of this study will attract the attention of policy makers and campus administrators to the needs of international Muslim students and to expand the literature on international Muslim students.

## **Research Design**

I used a Case study qualitative method for the current study. I obtained an in-depth description and analysis using a bounded system which used a small group of international Muslim students in a southwest university in the United States. I explored this group's social and academic experiences using several sources of data collection: interviews, online discussion board, and university documents.

## **Findings**

This section is divided into two sub-sections. The first sub-section is concerned with summarizing the themes found in social experience data and linking them with previous studies reported in the literature review. These themes are reported according to the four aspects of the three research questions of my study: their positive, and challenges (i.e., negative) experiences they faced (research question one), their perceived reasons for the challenges (research question two), and the ways they negotiated (i.e., coped with) these challenges (research question three). Similarly, the second sub-section summarizes and links the themes of the academic experiences to previous research using the same four aspects.

### **Social Experiences of International Muslim Students**

To answer the three research questions, I first summarize the social experiences of the social themes related to the first half of research question one. This is divided into positive experiences, challenging experiences, the perceived reasons given, and the solutions provided.

Religion was one theme that emerged from the data. Many of the participants shared how Islam plays an important role in various aspects of their social lives. It varied from creating positive social opportunities for interaction with non-Muslim students and professors to causing several social challenges that participants handled differently. In positive ways, Islamic events

helped answer questions about Islam, and learn about other religions. In addition, support by professors and students against the negative rhetoric on Muslims by then-candidate Trump was helpful. This last finding is in line with the study by Peek (2003) that reported how professors and universities supported Muslim students after 9/11.

The theme of religion and its role in the social lives of many participants is broadly compatible with Brown (2009) and Chien (2016) which found that faith emerged as an important factor in the lives of Muslim students. Based on the above, the results of my study are in harmony with previous research displaying the significance of the role that religion plays in the social experiences of international Muslim students.

However, the student participants in my study also faced challenges due to their religious beliefs. First, dating was a challenge. The reason given was dating is viewed in Islam as a means to marriage not simple entertainment like it is in the West. The solution one student gave to this problem was to refer back to the mosque to find a future wife. The second challenge was rejection by peers for certain practices such as women not driving cars, not drinking alcohol, and eating ham. The reason given was because of religious beliefs in Islam. No solution to this problem was given. Third, noticing stereotypes of Muslim men being oppressive to women. The reason given was the role media plays in promoting such stereotypes. The solution given was changing the ways media portrays Muslim men. This last challenge is broadly similar to the findings of other studies (Marzouk, 2012; Poyting & Noble, 2004) in which participants blamed media as a main source of negative Muslim portrayals. The fourth challenge was not being allowed time for prayers during classes. No reasons or solutions were given. The fifth was faculty offending Muslim students in class by playing such things as videos against Islam. No



reason was given but one student coped with the challenge by confronting an instructor asking her about the reason for her choices of such videos.

Another theme that I drew from the data was the positive social experiences facilitated by the role that local, international, and same-country peers played among the participants of this study. These social experiences took place in dormitories, on and off campus events, and sports events.

The above findings contradict those of Erichsen and Bolliger (2011) in which graduate international students were isolated socially. In my opinion, there are several reasons for this conflicting finding. First, Erichsen and Bolliger's study started with the assumption of isolation based on previous research. Whereas in my study, I explored the type of social experiences international Muslim students had without any previous assumptions. Second, they reported that at least 70% of the participants felt that they had friends that they could rely on and did not feel isolated. However, when they interviewed only 8 participants from the 54 of those who participated in the questionnaire, Erichsen and Bolliger concluded that their participants generally suffered from social isolation, which might be true only to a small number of the participants and not to the majority of them.

This theme of the positive role played by local, international, and same-country peers also contrasts with the findings of Wright and Schartner (2013) that reported international students suffering from sociocultural isolation and not taking advantage of opportunities to interact with local students due to sociocultural distance. The reason for such difference in findings with those of my study might be due to the location where the study was conducted. The above study was carried out in UK whereas the current study was carried out in the United

States. The cultural and social differences between the UK and the United States might be responsible for the conflicting findings.

The above positive relations that my participants had with American students in particular, are consistent with Klomegah's study (2006) in which American students were welcoming to international students. However, these findings run counter to Charles-Toussaint and Crowson (2010) in which American students were reported to be prejudice against international students because of their desire of having power and superiority over international students. A possible reason for this contradictory finding between the current study and Charles-Toussaint and Crowson (2010) study were only American students, whereas the current study included international Muslim students from different Arab countries.

The third theme I noticed in the data was that events organized by groups like OIS, MSA, LGBTQ, IREX, and the Arabic Club created opportunities for international Muslim students to socialize, make friends, exchange information about different cultures and know about campus culture. For example, different events were held for international students. The MSA was provided with a location and different translations of the Quran. The Islamic Awareness Week was held to bridge the gap between Islam and the West. An event was held and attended by the participants to raise the awareness of the rights of the LGBTQ people on and off campus. Other events were held for middle school students in which students from different Arab and predominantly Islamic countries gave presentations about their home countries where cultural exchange took place. Some participants volunteered with the OIS and the Arabic club to socialize with new students, help with orientation sessions, and welcome them to campus. The positive role of such organizations and clubs is not mentioned in previous research on

international Muslim students. However, it is apparent from the following that problems can also exist regarding the role such organizations can play.

Although many international Muslim students had successful social experiences with the various organizations on campus, others did not benefit to the same degree from organizations such as the OIS, and MSA. Saudi male undergraduate students ignored communicating with the OIS to do official paper work and learn about visa issues and immigration laws. This finding is surprising in view of Hanassab and Tidwell's (2002) study in which they surveyed the needs of international students. Their results revealed that international students' most important needs were their knowledge of immigration regulations followed by academic and career needs. However, two staff members in the current study revealed that Saudi students avoided communicating with the OIS and did not pay attention to immigration rules and paperwork. A possible reason for this contradictory finding is that international students' experiences and challenges differ among different groups of students. It is possible that Saudi students behave differently from other groups of international students. Hanassab and Tidwell's study (2002) did not include Saudi students. They included students from Asia, Europe, the Americas, South East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Oceania, and Canada. Also, their study included a big number of international students where individual differences could be hidden. However, the current study included only two staff members from the OIS and seven international students, five of which were Saudis whose social experiences and challenges were explored in depth through two interviews.

In addition, according to the administrators I interviewed, Saudi and Bangladeshi students' spouses did not participate in the international couple's program organized by the OIS. No reason was given for their avoidance of taking part in activities. Another student mentioned

that he did not benefit from the MSA on campus. He criticized the MSA for focusing only on religious events and ignoring cultural events that might attract more students. Another student reported that he did not benefit from the OIS program that aimed at pairing international students with American students. The reason given was that he was ignored by one of the American students. He felt not respected and marginalized. Consequently, this student stopped participating in the OIS activities. These findings are in line with Marzouk's study (2012) where the participants mentioned that the events on campus were ineffective in bridging the gap between Islam and western culture.

The contradictory findings of the role of organizations and clubs in the social experiences among the participants in this study in the previous two paragraphs can possibly be explained by the fact that social experiences among the participants might be country specific and individual specific. In other words, it is possible that international Muslim students coming from a specific country share similar experiences and challenges that might be unique to them. For example, Iranian students were viewed by staff members in this study as modern, cosmopolitan, and active students, whereas Saudi male undergraduate students were less active and ignored the OIS and communication with staff. It is also possible that each international Muslim student has his/her own unique experiences and challenges that are uncommon to other international Muslim students. For example, Asem and Samir, the two Saudi participants, had two different personalities that governed the way they see things and how they reacted to their experiences in the United States. Asem was highly critical of the educational environment on campus, while Samir was positive toward his learning experiences. This means that further research needs to be done on nationality and individual differences with respect to international Muslim students' social experiences.

Another important theme that emerged from the data collected was interacting with the opposite sex. Several participants were challenged by not finding a suitable woman to marry, not knowing how to deal with opposite sex, and make friends with female students on campus. This theme adds a new dimension to the previous research on international Muslim students.

Physical appearance was the fifth theme for the social experiences of some participants in the study. Students who look physically different (e.g. wearing head scarf or having a dark skin color) were socially challenged as they felt unsafe. This theme is in line with Brown and Jones's study (2013) in which they reported that the physically distinctive, non-white, non-European majority of their participants suggested that they were more vulnerable to abuse than others.

The sixth theme found in the data was the role of English proficiency level played in limiting social interaction. Simple things like asking questions to find directions or holding complete conversations with Americans was a challenge. There were no solutions given to this challenge. Communication with advisors was a problem. The reason behind this challenge was not mentioned by the participants but apparently is due to limited English proficiency. To solve this problem, a staff member interfered and talked to administrators in students' departments as a way of solving this communication problem. The problem of weak English interfering with socialization is consistent with the findings of Peacock and Harrison (2009) who reported that language proficiency determined the extent of socialization of international students in their host country. My study also found that the lack of knowledge of American slang contributed to this communication breakdown and to feelings of isolation. This finding supports the study by Coles and Swami (2012) in which the participants found it difficult to communicate with native speakers because of their use of slang. My finding is also in line with Wright and Schartner's study (2013) in which they reported that slang played a role in breaking interaction and created

feelings of isolation. From the above, the results of my study contribute to previous research showing the importance of the role that the English proficiency plays in either sustaining or breaking social experiences of international Muslim students. This finding also shows how important it is for international Muslim students to improve their English language to be able to socialize and interact when they travel to the United States for studying.

The seventh theme that emerged from the data collected was Islamophobia. A group of Iranian students revealed how their professor passed negative comments on their home country. When another participant asked about joining the American army he was mocked by the ROTC. A teacher in the language institute played a video against Islam during class time and another teacher passed negative jokes on Arabs. An American man accused a participant of being a terrorist in a restaurant after hearing him speaking Arabic and asking him where he is from. Another participant was not allowed a few minutes for praying at the beginning of the class time, while another participant was cut off by his Swiss peers because of cultural background differences. Most of these incidents of Islamophobia were handled by the participants with silence and avoidance. Only one participant faced his teacher in a language institute and complained about how the video against Islam was from a racist TV channel. The above incidents of Islamophobia were consistent with the study carried out by Poynting and Noble (2004). They reported how Arabs and Muslims experienced racism more than others in universities and colleges, at work, on the street and public transportation. They also reported that they felt religion was the main source of this racism. This finding in my study is also consistent with the study by Brown (2009) where international Muslim students perceived the host environment as hostile and threatening. It is also consistent with the study by Lee and Rice (2007) in which they reported that international students in general were ignored, insulted and

received verbal insults, and negatively confronted. They also mentioned that western English-speaking students experience less discrimination than those students coming from other countries. The researchers concluded that discrimination in the host country might be responsible for the problems some international students face. The theme of Islamophobia is also in line with the findings of Brown and Jones's study (2013) in which participants reported that they experienced racism in the host country. Most of their students came from non-white and non-European countries and their physical distinctiveness from people in the host country might have been one of the factors behind their suffering verbal abuse.

The eight theme revealed from the data was how student participants believed that mass media played a role in creating stereotypes about westerners and easterners. One participant stressed how the media in his country plays a negative role in shaping public opinion about foreign cultures in general and forming negative opinions about the United States before coming. However, this finding is new and was not mentioned before in previous research on international students. On the other hand, another participant shared how mass media in the West perpetuates negative stereotypes about Muslim men. This finding is consistent with Brown, Brown and Richards' study (2016) in which they reported how mass media represents Muslims as terrorists, strict, conservative, backward, dirty, and uneducated. Also, Marzouk (2012) reported that participants in his study blamed media as a main source of negative Muslim portrayals that created barriers between Muslims and others. In addition, Poynting and Noble's (2004) study reported that mass media is the main source of racism and discrimination and that they reinforce negative beliefs and stereotypes of Muslims.

The role of cultural differences and background was the ninth pattern found among several participants. One participant suggested using cultural events to promote the MSA to the

community on campus. Another participant mentioned how the social challenges he faced might be due to the differences between collective and individualistic cultures. One staff member mentioned that a possible reason for why Saudi male undergraduate students ignored the OIS and avoided communication with it could be cultural background and the way they were raised. Another staff member stressed that the high social and communication skills that Saudi students have and used when socializing with their teacher are because of their cultural background. This theme is consistent partially with the finding of Asmar (2005) in which it was reported that campus culture was the reason accounting for the Muslim students' alienation and isolation.

There is one topic that was mentioned by one participant which I think is important but did not show a pattern. He complained about the logistics of shopping and how stores were spread out in a way that required a car since public transportation was not reliable. This finding is not found in previous studies.

### **Academic Experiences of International Muslim Students**

To answer the second half of the three research questions, I first summarize the academic experiences of the academic themes related to the second half of research question one. This consists of positive experiences followed by challenging experiences. Under challenging experiences, I state the reasons given and the solutions provided, which addresses research questions two and three respectively.

The first theme is concerned with faculty/student interaction. On the positive side, participants appreciated professors' support, and availability. One participant mentioned that he benefited from the projects that his professor provided him with. For example, he worked on a project with fellow international students from all over the world. He also benefited from the



funding opportunities his professor gave him and was able to carry out research because of such funding. Another participant mentioned that his professor supported and trusted his academic skills by referring his peers to him when they needed extra help with their studies. A third participant talked about how professors in his department cared about their students and their futures and how they were available during office hours. These positive academic experiences were not reported in previous studies I reviewed on international Muslim students.

Although several participants had positive academic experiences with their professors, other participants were challenged by the way their professors carried out their classes, interacted with the students, and their unavailability when needed. One participant reported how his professor moving to another university negatively affected his funded research and studies. Several participants reported they were not given enough feedback on their projects. Several complaints were reported by participants about how their professors conducted classes. One reported that students' questions were not answered by his professor. Other participants reported that they were challenged by the unbalanced focus between theory and practice. One professor focused on the theoretical part of the course but prevented students from putting the theoretical part into practice. However, another participant had the opposite problem because he thought that the professor did not provide adequate explanations for topics and only focused on applications and did not give enough explanation of concepts. Another participant found a class boring because students were not asked to participate, while the professor kept lecturing for a long time. A staff member reported how a female Saudi student wearing hijab complained to her about how her professor was not open minded about discussing alternative definitions of Islamic words like Jihad. This negative aspect of professors' ways of conducting their classes were not

mentioned in previous studies I reviewed on international Muslim students' experiences and international students in general.

The role of students' previous educational background was a second pattern that I noticed among several participants. One participant mentioned that the courses he took in his home country were similar to the courses in the United States or even easier. Another participant expressed that the courses he took in his country for his Bachelor's degree were even equivalent to the courses he took in his graduate studies in the United States. Both participants felt that their educational background prepared them well for their studies in the United States. On the contrary, several participants felt that they lacked the needed educational background to prepare them for their success in the United States. One participant was challenged when having to choose elective courses due to his educational background not allowing a student to choose elective courses. Another participant was challenged in a chemistry course due to his previous negative educational experience in his home country. A third participant did not do well in his public speaking course in the United States because he lacked the knowledge of American society in his educational background. A staff member believed that the educational background of Saudi students was restricted to religious texts, and lacked reading and writing assignments on a wider range of topics. Another staff member shared how the gender segregated education system in Saudi Arabia did not allow Saudi female students to participate in more open conversations. The role educational background plays in the academic experiences of international Muslim students was not discussed in the studies I reviewed.

The third theme that the data revealed was the challenge presented by limited English proficiency. One participant was unable to understand exam instructions, and when taking a placement test in a language institute, he was not ready to do the writing section of the exam due

to his weak proficiency level in English. Another participant lacked the required English ability to describe pictures in his photography course. Another participant's limited English ability interfered with understanding material when presented at a fast pace in one of his classes and limited his asking questions. A third participant had a problem when trying to explain technical terms in writing in one of his courses and not being able to take down notes fast enough. Another participant's English level restricted his understanding and participating in group discussions.

Though the role that English proficiency plays in participants' academic experiences was not explored in the studies I reviewed on international Muslim students, it was investigated in a study by Morita (2004) on Japanese female graduate students studying in Canada. Morita (2004) reported that the Japanese participants had difficulties in understanding reading material, lectures, class discussions, and not being able to contribute to class discussions.

A fourth finding was the relationship students have with advisors. This might be included under the first theme related to interaction with professors and teachers. However, I decided to put the relationship with professors under a different theme because of the academic nature students had with their professors. This academic nature of the relationship is different from the administrative nature of the relationship with advisors. One participant had a positive relationship with his academic advisor who guided him choosing pre-requisite courses which helped him raise his GPA. However, other participants were challenged in their relationships with their advisors. One participant was confused about his prerequisites and the role of his advisor in selecting elective courses. Another mentioned that his scholarship advisor was not concerned with registering courses. He was only contacted to receive the participant's grades and check whether the participant took any restricted courses related to his scholarship. A third

participant blamed his advisor for registering a course he did not need. Last, another participant believed that he was put under probation because of his academic advisor.

The theme of relationships with advisors was not discussed in the studies on international Muslim students. However, it is consistent with the finding of the study carried out by Evans and Stevenson (2011) in which international graduate students found it difficult to maintain good relationships with their supervisors because of differences in expectations of student/supervisor relationship and in approaches to supervision.

Overall academic performance illustrated in grades was the fifth pattern revealed in the data. One participant mentioned that most of his grades were high. However, other participants from Saudi Arabia and Oman were challenged academically. For example, one participant mentioned that he was put on probation because his low grades, and he dropped several courses. A staff member mentioned that the most problematic group with respect to academic performance was the Saudi undergraduate students. These students dropped and disappeared from their classes more than others. Another staff member said that ethical problems such as cheating on exams, lying, negotiating their grades, making many excuses for being absent from their classes, and not doing well academically were all problems common among Saudi students but not others. The finding of academic performance was not mentioned whether in the studies on international students in general or studies on international Muslim students I reviewed.

Two staff members mentioned the academic performance of Saudi female students. One reported that Saudi female students were disciplined and serious about their education. However, another staff member mentioned that these students were not as advanced as their male counterparts in listening and speaking skills. She also reported that these students tended to miss classes because their husbands made them stay at home and not enabling them to attend classes.

In addition, these students could not participate in extra-curricular activities without taking their husbands' permission. Another issue raised by one of the staff members was how the *niqaab* worn by one of the Saudi students prevented her from communicating properly with her classmates. Her peers had a problem with hearing her when she spoke or participated in the class. Although my study does not have Saudi female participants, there is a need to include female Muslim students in future research to explore their experiences and challenges when studying in the United States.

How does all this relate to Neo-orientalism that I mentioned earlier in chapter one? According to Samiei (2010), Neo-orientalism was generated by three key elements: globalization, escalating political global changes, and interconnectedness. In the themes above there are several examples of these key elements. For example, globalization is evident in the movement of eastern Muslim students from their home countries to western universities (Bayat, 2015). The growing presence of Muslim students in western universities has challenged the stereotypes that Orientalists developed of Muslims previously exposed by Said (Samiei, 2010) and the Neo-orientalism of today. This is illustrated in the theme of the role clubs and organizations play, on and off campus, such as IREX which is sponsored by several Arab oil countries among other countries. They provided opportunities for Muslim students to talk about their home countries in western countries and also enabled students to travel to do cultural exchange with other countries. These activities enable Muslim students to challenge the stereotypes about Muslims as terrorists and predominantly Islamic countries as backward, uneducated, and dirty which has been perpetuated by mass media (Brown, Brown, & Richards, 2016).

However, the presence of Muslim students in western universities might also support the negative views about Muslims. Under the theme of overall academic performance, Saudi students could have made a positive impact on their institution and its understanding of Muslims. However, they were not successful in doing so by having ethical issues and ignoring the messages from OIS and the immigration paperwork required of them. Such a negative impression is an opportunity to revisit the component of globalization and how the presence of Muslim students might not be enough to challenge the stereotypes on Muslims. Unlike Samiei's (2010) views on the benefits of the presence of Muslim students and scholars as a result of globalization in western universities, such presence when combined by negative behavior and ethical issues might reinforce the negative stereotypes on Muslims, i.e. Islamophobia. Consequently, there is a need to revisit the results of globalization on Muslims and the necessary conditions needed to produce a favorable effect on them.

Another key element that enhanced Neo-orientalism has been the political changes that have taken place after the terrorist attack of 9/11 and the retaliation that has taken place and labeled "War on Terror." According to Altwaiji (2014), this War on Terror divided the East and West to "us" and "them" and the labeling of every Muslim including Christian Arabs as terrorists became prevalent. This is evident under the social theme above referred to as Islamophobia. Many examples listed under this theme reflect incidents of hatred and fear toward Islam and Muslims.

The third key component that augmented Neo-orientalism is interconnectedness. As mentioned in chapter one, interconnectedness refers to the role played by technology and mass media in accessing information, connecting people in different parts of the world, and creating mutual understanding (Samiei, 2010). This results in turning the world into a small village and

changing the concept of space. However, the social experiences of the participants in this study revealed a theme concerning how mass media can play a negative role in creating stereotypes about both westerners and easterners. Unlike Samiei's views (2010) on the advantages of mass media and technology on connecting the world together, reinforcing Islamophobia is a possibility as a result of interconnectedness. Consequently, there is a need to examine critically the role played by mass media and technology in creating negative stereotypes on Arabs, Muslims, and westerners.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are five major limitations to this study. First, the results of the study cannot be generalized to all international Muslim students in the United States due to the small number of the participants in the study. Second, the participants in the study did not represent the many Muslim countries around the world. Third, the participants in the study were disproportionate: most of them were from Saudi Arabia. Fourth, the study lacked female participants. Fifth, the study did not include Muslims from western countries.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

After reviewing the themes found for the social and academic experiences of the participants, I found several concluding points to highlight. First, the positive role that local, international, same country peers played in facilitating socialization for international Muslim students is an important finding in depicting a positive image of international Muslim students' social experiences.

However, many participants were challenged socially and academically. These challenges might be due to culture and educational background - two other themes the data

revealed - that played an important role in the success/failure of participants whether socially or academically.

Second, international Muslim students suffered many incidents of discrimination based on faith, racism and culture racism. These incidents were on campus from peers and professors. There were also incidents off campus in restaurants and cafes. The different physical appearance from locals contributed to the social challenges several participants faced.

Third, the role played by organizations and clubs on and off campus was controversial. Some students benefited from it, while others faced challenges. These different experiences of Muslim students might be country specific or due to individual differences.

Fourth, the English proficiency theme, the only common theme between the two types of experiences (social and academic) plays an important role to the success or challenges of Muslim students in the United States whether socially or academically. Limited English proficiency was the main cause of many academic challenges that several participants experienced. It was also responsible for limited social interaction. Fifth, the relationship of the participants with advisors and faculty were debatable. Some participants had positive relationships with faculty and advisors and benefitted from these relationships, while others were challenged.

### **Recommendations for Policy Makers**

Based on the limited data presented and the conclusions above, I have several suggestions for policy makers in American universities and universities in different Arab and predominantly Islamic countries. First, they should to examine their policies ensuring that Muslim students are treated by their professors and peers in an unbiased respectable way. For example, they might want to make training and workshops for professors and advisors on how to teach and interact



with international students mandatory. Also, providing workshops and training sessions for American students to raise their awareness on how having international students could be beneficial to their campuses. Having core courses for freshmen on diversity, ethnicity, globalization, and international education might also help in raising the awareness of American students about other cultures and ways of appreciating them. On the other hand, policy makers in Arab and predominantly Islamic countries could develop policies that would ensure giving students who intend to study in the United States strong academic courses to prepare them for studying abroad. These universities should also have policies for orienting their students in order to enhance students' knowledge of western cultures and how western universities differ from what they are used to. Finally, a policy to ensure high English proficiency level of students before coming to the United States should be put in place.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While recognizing the limitations of the current study, I have several recommendations for future research. The data of the current study revealed several social and academic themes that were not discussed in previous studies on international Muslim students and their experiences in the United States. With respect to social experiences, several themes need to be investigated further. First, the role of various organizations and clubs on and off campus in creating opportunities to socialize was controversial. Previous studies did not discuss this theme in depth and only focused on the negative side. Whereas, this study found that such organizations and clubs play a positive role in the social lives of Muslim students. Further research needs to be done to examine why there are differences.

Second, the theme of international Muslim students interacting with the opposite sex in the United States was revealed in the data. However, it was not discussed in the previous studies

I reviewed on international Muslim students. Therefore, there is a need to further investigate this theme with a larger number of participants and across other institutions.

As for academic experiences of international Muslim students, there were three themes that need further exploration. First, the theme of faculty/student interaction contained conflicting data. Some students had positive relations with their faculty and they benefited from their professors, while others had challenges with them specifically with professors' ways of conducting their classes. This theme with its positive and negative sides was not mentioned in previous studies I reviewed. Further exploration with other groups of students and professors need to be done to clarify the picture.

The second, previous educational background played an important role in the academic experiences of the participants. This leads us to the question, what previous educational experiences best prepare students for studying in the United States. Since this theme was not mentioned in previous research, there is a need to conduct further research to address this question.

Finally, the relationship of students with advisors was not discussed in the previous studies and should be further explored in future research. It was found in this study to play an important role in the academic experiences of Muslim students.

Based on the qualitative methods of data collection I used, I plan to use the findings of this study as the basis for designing a questionnaire and give it to a larger number of international Muslim students across a number of higher educational institutions. In addition, the participants of the current study were all males. In future research, I plan to include female students to shed light on their experiences whether socially or academically. Finally, I plan to

interview faculty about international Muslim students' social and academic experiences and challenges which should add another dimension on the topic of international Muslim students studying in the United States. Finally, I plan to investigate differences between Muslim students across various countries and regions.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Letter of Invitation to participants**

My name is Noha M. Ghaly. I am a doctorate candidate in Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies at the University of New Mexico. In order to complete my degree, I need International Muslim students at the University of New Mexico willing to discuss their experiences and challenges and answer questions regarding the topic of my dissertation: International Muslim Students within a Globalized Educational Context.

Know that all participants' names and identity will be anonymous. Also, you do not have to discuss any topics with which you are not comfortable.

I am looking for international Muslims who reside in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I cannot promise much in return except for my eternal gratitude in your contribution to the completion of my degree. If you agree to be contacted, this letter will be considered as an initial consent form for your participation and meeting in the near future to discuss details related to the study

Please contact Noha at:

Cell: (505) 615-8854

-or- E-mail: [nghaly@unm.edu](mailto:nghaly@unm.edu)

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol**

How do you see yourself, who you are?

Complete this sentence: I am a-----

How do your colleagues see you as an international Muslim student?

How do your professors see you as an international Muslim student?

What is your relationship with your peers/professors?

Describe to me your academic experience in the classes you have taken so far?

Describe to me the academic challenges you have been facing so far in your classes?

Describe to me what you do when you face these challenges?

How well is the university supporting international Muslim students, in your opinion?

Do you have friends from your classes?

Describe to me your interactions with your peers inside and outside your classes?

Describe to me your social life on campus as an international Muslim students

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Questions for the Office of International Students Employees**

What is the nature of your position here?

How often do you meet with international Muslim students?

What are the reasons that bring them to your office?

Can you speak to the academic and social experiences of international Muslim students on campus?

Describe to me how international Muslim students negotiate the challenges they face?

Describe to me the role of the institution in supporting international Muslim students.

**Appendix D**  
**The University of New Mexico**  
**Consent to Participate in Research**

2015

**Introduction**

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation study that is being done by Noha Mohamed Ghaly, who is guided by Principal Investigator Holbrook Mahn, Professor from the Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies. This research is studying the social and academic experiences of international Muslim students in a globalized educational context. The goal of this research is to bring the voices of international Muslim students to policy makers and administrators for them to be able to use their resources in an efficient way towards international Muslim students.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an international Muslim student in the University of New Mexico. Ten people will take part in this study at the University of New Mexico.

This form will explain the research study and will also explain the possible risks as well as the possible benefits to you. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. If you have any questions, please ask one of the study investigators.

**What will happen if I decide to participate?**



If you agree to participate, the following things will happen: you will participate in two interviews for approximately one hour each (one main interview and one follow-up interview). The interviews will be audio recorded and carried out in a private study room in Zimmerman library on UNM main campus.

Participants then spend approximately two hours over a period of two weeks writing on a completely private discussion board. The participants will be using pseudonyms to protect their identities online through creating private accounts. The participants will be introduced to each other through their pseudonyms via the discussion board.

### **How long will I be in this study?**

Participation in this study will take a total of 4 hours over a period of 30 days in the form of individual interviews and participation on a discussion board. There will be two interviews each will last for an hour. The two interviews will be carried out over two weeks. In addition, the discussion board will last for two hours in total over two weeks.

### **What are the risks of being in this study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you might experience:

- You might feel uncomfortable when you answer the questions
- There are risks of stress, emotional distress and inconvenience associated with participating in a research study.

**What are the benefits to being in this study?**

There are no direct benefits in this study. However, there are indirect benefits. The overall theme of this study is exploring the experiences and challenges of international Muslim students and bringing the voices of international Muslim students to policy makers, educators and administrators. This might raise the awareness of institutions of the challenges that international Muslim students face and might lead them to use their resources in a way that would better serve the population of the study.

Also, this study would help me complete earn my doctorate degree.

**What other choices do I have if I do not want to be in this study?**

You have the option not to take part in this study or you may leave the study at any time.

There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

**How will my information be kept confidential?**

We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data. Information contained in your study records will be used by study staff. The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human subject research and/or other entities may be permitted to access your records.

There may be times when we are required by law to share your information. Your name will not be used in any published reports about this study.

Data collected as part of the study will be coded and analyzed with your pseudonym; Data (without your name) will be entered and stored into a computer with a password that is known only to the Principal Investigator, Dr. Holbrook Mahn, who will have access to your study information. Data will be stored for 3 years and then it will be destroyed.

Finally, you should understand that the investigator is required to take steps, including reporting to authorities, to prevent serious harm of yourself or others.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this study?**

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

**Can I stop being in the study once I begin?**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw up until the interviews have been reviewed for accuracy by March 30, 2016.

**Whom can I call with questions or complaints about this study?**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints at any time about the research study, contact the investigator student at 505-615-8854 or the PI at 505-277-5887.

If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team, you may call the UNM Office of the IRB at (505) 277-2644.

**Whom can I call with questions about my rights as a research participant?**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may call the UNM Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (505) 277-2644. The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human participants. For more information, you may also access the OIRB website at <http://irb.unm.edu>.

**CONSENT**

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you read the information provided. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

---

Name of Adult Subject (print)

---

Signature of Adult Subject

Date

**INVESTIGATOR SIGNATURE**

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

---

Name of Investigator/ Study Team Member (print)

---

Signature of Investigator/ Study Team Member

Date

**Appendix E**  
**The University of New Mexico**  
**Consent to Participate in Research**

2015

**Introduction**

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation study that is being done by Noha Mohamed Ghaly, who is guided by Principal Investigator Holbrook Mahn, Professor from the Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies at UNM. This research is studying the social and academic experiences of international Muslim students in a globalized educational context. The goal of this research is to bring the voices of international Muslim students to policy makers and administrators for them to be able to use their resources in an efficient way towards international Muslim students.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an employee in the Global Education Office in the University of New Mexico. Ten people will take part in this study at the University of New Mexico.

This form will explain the research study and will also explain the possible risks as well as the possible benefits to you. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. If you have any questions, please ask one of the study investigators.

**What will happen if I decide to participate?**

If you agree to participate, the following things will happen: you will participate in two interviews of approximately two hours each (one main in interview and one follow-up interview). The interviews will be audio recorded and carried out in your office on UNM main campus.

**How long will I be in this study?**

Participation in this study will take a total of 2 hours over a period of two weeks. You will be required to participate in two individual interviews. Each interview will last for an hour.

**What are the risks of being in this study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you might experience:

- You might feel uncomfortable when you answer the questions
- There are risks of stress, emotional distress and inconvenience associated with participating in a research study.

**What are the benefits to being in this study?**

There are no direct benefits to this study. However, there are several indirect ones. The overall theme of this study is exploring the experiences and challenges of international Muslim students and bringing the voices of international Muslim students to policy makers, educators and

administrators. This might raise the awareness of institutions of the challenges that international Muslim students face and might lead them to use their resources in a way that would better serve the population of the study. Also, this study would help me complete earn my doctorate degree.

**What other choices do I have if I do not want to be in this study?**

You have the option not to take part in this study or you may leave the study at any time. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

**How will my information be kept confidential?**

We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data. Information contained in your study records is used by study staff. The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human subject research and/or other entities may be permitted to access your records. There may be times when we are required by law to share your information. Your name will not be used in any published reports about this study.

Data collected as part of the study will be coded and analyzed with your pseudonym;

Data (without your name) will be entered and stored into a computer with a password that is known only to the Principal Investigator Dr. Holbrook Mahn, who will have access to your study information. Data will be stored for 3 of years and then will be destroyed.



Finally, you should understand that the investigator is not required to take steps, including reporting to authorities, to prevent serious harm of yourself or others.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this study?**

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

**Can I stop being in the study once I begin?**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw up until the interviews have been reviewed for accuracy by March 30, 2016.

**Whom can I call with questions or complaints about this study?**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints at any time about the research study, contact the investigator student at 505-615-8854 or the PI at 505-277-5887.

If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team, you may call the UNM Office of the IRB at (505) 277-2644.

**Whom can I call with questions about my rights as a research participant?**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may call the UNM Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (505) 277-2644. The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human participants. For more information, you may also access the OIRB website at <http://irb.unm.edu>.

## **CONSENT**

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you read the information provided. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

---

Name of Adult Subject (print)

---

Signature of Adult Subject

---

Date

## INVESTIGATOR SIGNATURE

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

---

Name of Investigator/ Study Team Member (print)

---

Signature of Investigator/ Study Team Member

Date

## References

- Abramson, P. R. (1992). *A case for case studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Agger, B. (1991). Critical theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism: Their sociology reference. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17, 105-131.
- Ahmad, F. (2007). Muslim women's experiences of higher education in Britain. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 24(3), 46-69.
- Al-Quhen, KY. (2012). Cultural diversity in university requirements and among international students at Al-Bay university in Jordan. *European Journal of Social Science*, 28(4), 489-501.
- Altwaiji, M. (2014). Neo-Orientalism and the Neo-Imperialism Thesis: Post-9/11 US and Arab World Relationship. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 36(4), 313.  
doi:10.13169/arabstudquar.36.4.0313
- Asmar, C. (2005). Internationalising students: Reassessing diasporic and local student difference. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(3), 291-309.
- Bayat, A. (2015. September, 15). Asef Bayat: Neo-Orientalism. Message posted to <http://futureswewant.net/asef-bayat-neo-orientalism/>
- Bevis, T. B. (2002). At a glance: International students in the United States. *International Educator*, 11(3), 12-17.
- Bogden, R.C. & Biklen, S K. (2007). *Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Boston: Pearson.
- Brown, L. (2009). International Students in England: Finding Belonging through Islam. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 29(1), 57-67. doi:10.1080/13602000902726772
- Brown, L., Brown, J., & Richards, B. (2015). Media representations of Islam and

international Muslim student well-being. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 69, 50-58.

Brown, L., & Holloway, I. (2008). The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at an English university. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 7(2), 232-249.

Brown, L., & Jones, I. (2013). Encounters with racism and the international student experience. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(7), 1004-1019. doi:10.1080/03075079.2011.614940

Charles-Toussaint, G. C., & Crowson, H. M. (2010). Prejudice against International Students: The Role of Threat Perceptions and Authoritarian Dispositions in U.S. Students. *The Journal of Psychology*, 144(5), 413-428. doi:10.1080/00223980.2010.496643

Chien, Y. G. (2016). After six decades: Applying the U-curve hypothesis to the adjustment of international postgraduate students. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 15(1), 32-51.

Cole, D., & Ahmadi, S. (2003). Perspectives and experiences of Muslim women who veil on college campuses. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(1), 47-66.

Coles, R., & Swami, V. (2012). The sociocultural adjustment trajectory of international university students and the role of university structures: A qualitative investigation. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 11(1), 87-100.

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dunn, K., Klocker, N., & Salabay, T. (2007). Contemporary racism and islamaphobia in Australia: Racializing religion. *Ethnicities*, 7(4), 564-589.

Erichsen, E. A. & Bolliger, D. U. (2011). Towards understanding international graduate student. *Education Tech Research Development*, 59, 309-326.

Evans, C., & Stevenson, K. (2011). The experience of international nursing students studying for a PhD in the U.K: A qualitative study. *BMC Nursing*, 10(1). doi:10.1186/1472-6955-10-11.

Glass, C. R. (2012). Educational experiences associated with international students' learning, development, and positive perceptions of campus climate. *Journal of Studies on International Education*, 16(3), 228-251.

Hanassab, S. & Tidwell, R. (2002). International students in higher education: Identification of needs and implications for policy and practice. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 6(4), 305-322.

Harrison, P. (2002). Educational exchange for international understanding. *International Educator*, 11(4), 2-4.

Hechanova-Alampay, R., Beehr, T. A., Christiansen, N. D., & Horn, R. K. (2002). Adjustment and Strain among Domestic and International Student Sojourners. *School Psychology International*, 23(4), 458-474. doi:10.1177/0143034302234007

Hopkins, P. (2011). Towards critical geographies of university campus: Understanding the contested experiences of Muslim students. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographies*, 36 (1), 157-169.

Kerboua, S. (2016). From orientalism to neo-orientalism: Early and contemporary constructions of Islam and Muslim world. *Intellectual Discourses*, 24 (1), 7-34

Kincheloe, J. L. & Steinberg, S. R. (1997). *Changing multiculturalism*. London: Open University Press.

Klomegah, R. (2006). Social factors relating to alienation experienced by international students in the United States. *College Student Journal*, 40(2), 303-315.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2008). *InterViews: learning the craft of qualitative research*

*interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Lee, J. J. (2010). International students' experiences and attitudes at a US host institution: Self reports and future recommendations. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 9(1), 66-84.

Lee, J. & Rice, C. (2007). Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination. *Higher Education*, 53, 381-409.

Lillyman, S., & Bennett, C. (2014). Providing a positive learning experience for international students studying at UK universities: A literature review. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 13(1), 63-75.

Llewellyn-Smith, C., & McCabe, V. S. (2008). What is the attraction for exchange students: The host destination or host university? Empirical evidence from a study of an Australian university. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 10(6), 593-607. doi:10.1002/jtr.692

Marzouk, M. R. (2012). International muslim graduate students in the U.S. as cultural agents of peace: Experiences of alorihla, stereotypes, and cross-culture communication. *Cross-Culture Communication*, 8(1), 19-26.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Morita, N. (2004). Negotiating participation and identity in second language communities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(4), 573-603.

Peacock, N., & Harrison, N. (2009). "It's So Much Easier to Go with What's Easy". *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(4), 487-508.

Peek, L. (2003). Reactions and responses: Muslim students' experiences on New York City campuses post 9/11. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 23(2), 271-283.

Popkewitz, T. & Rizvi, F. (2010). Globalization and the study of Education: An introduction. In Popkewitz, T. & Rizvi, F. (Eds.) *Globalization and the study of education*. (7 – 21). Wiley-Blackwell.

Poynting, S. & Noble, G. (2004). Living with racism: The experience and reporting by Arab and Muslim Australians of discrimination, abuse and violence since 11 September 2001. *Journal of American Culture*, 1-20.

Reflection (n.d.). In *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved from [http://etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=Reflection&searchmode=none](http://etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=Reflection&searchmode=none)

Rhee, J. & Sagaria, M.A. (2004). Constructions of imperialism in the chronicle of higher education. *The Review of Higher Education*, 28 (1), 77-96.

Rossmann, G. & Rallis, S. (2012). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research*. London: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Samiei, M. (2010). Neo-Orientalism? The relationship between the West and Islam in our globalised world. *Third World Quarterly*, 31(7), 1145-1160.

Sanner, S., Wilson, A. H. & Samson, L. F. (2002). The experiences of international nursing students in a baccalaureate nursing program. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 18(4), 206-213.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: a guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Sheridan, L. P. (2006). Islamophobia pre- and post- September 11th, 2001. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 21(3), 317-336.



- Stake (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stonebanks, C. (2008). An Islamic perspective on knowledge, knowing and methodology. In Denzin, N. Lincoln, Y. Smith, L. (Eds.), *Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* (293- 313). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Wright, C., & Schartner, A. (2013). 'I can't ... I won't?' International students at the threshold of social interaction. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 12(2), 113-128.
- Ye, L., & Edwards, V. (2015). Chinese overseas doctoral student narratives of intercultural adaptation. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 14(3), 228-241.
- Zamani-Farahani, H., & Henderson, J. C. (2009). Islamic tourism and managing tourism development in Islamic societies: the cases of Iran and Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Tourism Research*. doi:10.1002/jtr.741
- Zhao, C., Kuh, G. D., & Carini, R. M. (2005). A Comparison of International Student and American Student Engagement in Effective Educational Practices. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(2), 209-231. doi:10.1353/jhe.2005.0018