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# IDENTITIES AND LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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A thesis submitted to the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

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# ABSTRACT

This study has been conducted in order to ascertain the ways in which learning English may impact the identities of Saudi Arabian learners. Few studies have concentrated on identity in English language learning by Arabic-speaking students and learners living in an Arabic-speaking country. The study addressed this gap by considering how Arabic-speaking native learners learning English view and construct their identities. It employed Norton's (2000, 2013) sociocultural view of identity as fluid and evolving over time. The study also used Taylor's (2010) quadripolar model of selves.

The research is based on a qualitative case study approach. The data were gathered via two online interviews and two narrative texts from three male participants and two narrative writing texts from two female participants. Data triangulation was ensured to attain trustworthiness. The data provided interesting results, showing that my participants presented shifting and bicultural identities. Furthermore, the study showed how some of my participants fell into Taylor's (2010) model and shifted between selves. It indicated that my participants' identities were not static, but instead evolved based on the situations they found themselves in. The study also revealed my participants' positive and negative experiences when learning English; and how they stayed motivated owing to their high level of investment and agency in learning English.

The limitations of the study were the short time period for data collection as well as the constraints of the Covid-19 lock-down. I also had to conduct all interviews on Zoom and correspond with my participants via WhatsApp. In addition, owing to restrictions placed by the participants' school, I could not conduct any video interviews, or record the interviews.

The chief recommendation derived from the study is that teachers should foster an inclusive learning environment in which students feel free to express their identities and interests. In addition, gender dynamics in a classroom should be considered, as should the dimension of affect in language learning in a Saudi Arabian context.

This area of research would benefit from further research exploring and ascertaining whether online affinity groups could be included in curricula in a Saudi Arabian English-learning context.

# DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.



25 July 2023

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of tables ..... viii
CHAPTER ONE ..... 1
CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE ..... 1
1.1 Background to the problem ..... 2
1.2 Aims and rationale ..... 3
1.3 The Saudi Arabian context ..... 5
1.4 Women in Saudi Arabia ..... 5
1.5 Language as communication and a carrier of culture ..... 9
1.6 Second language versus foreign language ..... 13
1.7 The tension between English and Islam ..... 14
1.8 English education in Saudi Arabia and abroad ..... 15
1.9 English at university level ..... 19
1.10 Structure outline ..... 21
1.11 Conclusion ..... 23
CHAPTER TWO ..... 24
LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 24
2.1 Defining language identity and investment ..... 25
2.2 Power relations and the right to speak ..... 29
2.3 Relationship between voice, identity and language ..... 32
2.4 Second-language investment and agency ..... 35
2.5 Gender and religious identity in language learning ..... 38
2.6 The quadripolar model of identity in foreign language learning ..... 42
2.6.1 The possible self ..... 43
2.6.2 The ideal self ..... 43
2.6.3 The imposed self ..... 44
2.6.4 The actual self ..... 45
2.6.5 The private self ..... 46
2.6.6 The public self ..... 46
2.7 Self-system types ..... 47
2.7.1 The submissive self-system ..... 47
2.7.2 The duplicitous self-system ..... 48
2.7.3 The rebellious self-system ..... 48
2.7.4 The harmonious self-system ..... 49
2.8 Communicative language teaching and language competency ..... 50
2.9 Conclusion ..... 55
CHAPTER THREE ..... 57

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN ..... 57
3.1 A qualitative approach ..... 57
3.2 Use of the case study approach ..... 58
3.3 Data-collection methods ..... 59
3.3.1 Sample choice and size ..... 59
3.3.2 Participants' background ..... 60
3.3.3 Salim ..... 62
3.3.4 Sayed ..... 62
3.3.5 Shaheed ..... 63
3.3.6 Nurah ..... 63
3.3.7 Asma ..... 64
3.3.8 Interviews ..... 64
3.3.9 Writing activity – a narrative enquiry ..... 65
3.3.10 Data-collection procedure ..... 67
3.3.11 Ethical considerations ..... 70
3.3.12 Data transcription and analysis ..... 70
3.3.13 Trustworthiness ..... 73
3.3.14 Obstacles to the study ..... 74
3.4 Conclusion ..... 75
CHAPTER FOUR ..... 77
IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE LEARNING ..... 77
4.1 Investment and future career choices ..... 78
4.2 Language learning inside the classroom ..... 80
4.2.1 The right to speak (positive experiences) ..... 80
4.2.2 A feeling of despair (negative experiences) ..... 88
4.3 Language learning outside the classroom ..... 93
4.4 Conclusion ..... 97
CHAPTER FIVE ..... 99
IDENTITY AND GROUP MEMBERSHIP ..... 99
5.1 Inclusion in group membership ..... 99
5.2 Gender, English and exclusion from group membership ..... 107
5.3 Conclusion ..... 110
CHAPTER SIX ..... 112
CONCLUSION ..... 112
6.1 In what ways, if any, has the learning of English impacted the identities of Saudi Arabian learners? ..... 113

6.1.1 What linguistic and emotional conflicts and effects have learners encountered by transitioning into a new language community as EFL learners? ..... 115
6.1.2 How have these experiences constructed or impacted participants' present and future identities? ..... 116
6.1.3 How have these experiences shaped participants' learning and their view of English? ..... 117
6.2 Limitations of the study ..... 119
6.3 Implications for language learning ..... 119
6.4 Recommendations for further research ..... 121
6.5 Conclusion ..... 123
APPENDICES ..... 124
Appendix A: First Interview used in the main study ..... 124
Interview guide 1 ..... 124
Appendix B: Second interview used in the main study ..... 125
Interview guide 2 ..... 125
Appendix C: First narrative writing guide ..... 126
Narrative writing – Task 1 ..... 126
Appendix D: Second narrative writing guide ..... 128
Narrative writing – Task 2 ..... 128
Appendix E: Ethics clearance certificate ..... 130
REFERENCES ..... 131

# List of tables

Table 1.1 Statistics for Saudi Arabian male and female graduates studying for STEM bachelor's degrees, 2018 ..... 7
Table 1.2 Saudi women in higher education, in Saudi Arabia and abroad, 2015. ..... 8
Table 1.3 Government-funded Saudi Arabian students furthering their higher education abroad, 1997–2017..... 166
1Table 2.1 Elements of possible and actual selves in Taylor's quadripolar model of identity…….43
Table 3.1 Participant profiles by gender, age and nationality..... 611
Table 3.2 Braun and Clark's six phases of thematic analysis..... 7171

# CHAPTER ONE

# CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE

Learning new languages can be a daunting experience. Various researchers (see Brown, 1994; Burkart, 1998; Richards, 2008) have written extensively on the drawbacks students and learners encounter when learning a foreign language. Bailey (2006) states that even the most motivated and talented students and learners still experience difficulty when learning foreign languages. As an English as a second language (ESL) instructor and based on my own experiences gained while learning other languages, I have come to realise that my role is not simply to teach foreign students a new language; it extends beyond that. As a guide and facilitator in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (hereafter referred to as Saudi Arabia), in a class made up of different individuals with different motives, aspirations and future desires, I should also consider the following: their complex histories, their social interactions, their previous language-learning experiences, their motives and their aspirations. This led me to wonder how learning English impacts on their identities.

In this chapter, I discuss the background to the problem. Education via the medium of English is contested, and the various issues students face when learning English are discussed, such as the structure of English being different from that of Arabic. Next, I discuss the aims and rationale for the study as well as my research question and my three sub-questions. I then discuss the context of Saudi Arabia and women in Saudi Arabia. Following this, I discuss language as a carrier of culture and explain how monocultural and bicultural members adapt their identities to various situations. I then discuss the difference between a second language and a foreign language, and provide reasons why English in Saudi Arabia is viewed as a foreign language. In addition, I discuss the tensions between English and Islam in Saudi Arabia, and I provide statistics for students studying English locally in Saudi Arabia and abroad. Finally, I discuss English at university level in Saudi Arabia and provide an outline of the structure of the study.

## 1.1 Background to the problem

Following the establishment of the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia in 1923, English was first introduced as the primary second language into the Saudi Arabian educational system in 1928. At university level, English is a compulsory subject, and excelling in English is necessary for many streams of study, such as Engineering, Information Technology (IT), Accounting and Medicine (Al-Ghamdi, 2019). This prompted Saudi Arabia to employ numerous qualified native English speakers from countries such as England, the United States, Canada, Australia and South Africa to teach English as a second language. However, even though Saudi Arabia employed these instructors and adopted English as the primary second language taught in schools, native Arabic-speaking students still find difficulty in learning English. According to Ansari (2012), this difficulty stems from their social, cultural and first-language backgrounds. Furthermore, Saudi Arabian researchers (see Al-Jarf, 2008; Donn & Al-Manthri, 2010) have voiced their displeasure at the integration of English into mainstream learning, for fear of it being detrimental to the Saudi Arabians' faith, and their religious and cultural identities. These scholars are also of the opinion that English language and education should not compete with the Arabic language (in style and grammar), the strong identities of Arabs. Nor do they see it to be of any benefit to the Saudi Arabian culture (Al-Jarf, 2008; Al-Hazmi, 2003, 2017). Some researchers are also of the opinion that English as a medium of instruction in tertiary institutions interferes with education owing to the fact that some students and learners lack proficiency in English (Al-Shehri, 2010). Al-Shehri (2010) also believes that learning through the medium of English divorces students and learners from their native language and distances them from their culture. He argues that learning through the medium of English hinders students and learners from thinking critically in their mother tongue at an important academic phase of their lives. He deems, further, that the Arab culture, along with its Islamic heritage, is proof that learning via Arabic as the medium is effective in learning. In addition, he believes that the emphasis on English being needed for employment has, to a certain degree, been exaggerated.

Research (see Al-Jarf 2008; Habbash & Troudi, 2015) has shown that students and learners preferred instructions in Arabic, including for examinations, written assignments and continuous assessment. Al-Jarf (2008) suggests that Arabic

translations, references and terminology be used at university level to safeguard the Arabic language from extinction. In support of Al-Jarf (2008), other Saudi academics maintain the view that English is a threat to the identity and culture of Saudi Arabians (Habbash & Troudi, 2015).

English is particularly foreign to Arabic-speaking students, since the entire set of characteristics of the language, such as pronunciation and writing, add to the difficulty of learning English. Also, Arabic is written from right to left, whereas English is written from left to right (Ansari, 2012). As illustrated in the literature review (Chapter Two), there is a wealth of research (Block, 2003; Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Norton, 1997, 2000, 2006) that explores the relationship between identity, culture and second language learning. However, most of the research (Norton, 2000, 2010; Taylor, 2010, 2013) concentrate on participants in English-speaking countries. This made me curious to find out if there were any connections between the identities of Saudi Arabian learners and learning English in the Saudi Arabian context.

## 1.2 Aims and rationale

My aim is to investigate how my participants view themselves (in the past and the present) in their social, religious and cultural contexts; how learning English impacts these various elements of their identities; and the feelings and affect associated with these transitions now that they are learning English as a foreign language in an English-medium setting for the first time. Further to this, I aim to explore how EFL teaching using the communicative approach affects the learning and identities of Saudi-Arabian-national, Arabic-speaking, high-school learners in their final year.

As an EFL instructor, I have come to notice that different learners respond and adapt differently to my teaching. After speaking with them, I discovered that some learners had been taught English through the medium of Arabic at high school (or even since primary school), while others had been taught English in the target language by Native Arabic-speaking teachers. In addition to this, some students who were religiously inclined viewed English as a language for non-Muslims, as the Muslim scriptures are in Arabic. Those students who viewed English as a non-Muslim

language led me to the realisation that there is an underlying issue associated with students' identities and their views of the English language.

As covered in Chapter Two, scholars have argued that we need to comprehend the intricate connections between language students and learners, and the context in which they use the language (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995; Taylor, 2013). Even with the shift in attention in second language research, there are few studies that focus on language learning as it relates to Saudi-Arabian-native, Arabic-speaking students (Elyas & Badawood, 2016). Many previous studies concentrated on immigrant groups in English-speaking countries where participants had to learn English to interact with native English speakers in everyday-life activities. However, very few studies – such as those of Hopkyns and Zoghbor (2022) – concentrate on the learning of English by Arabic-speaking students living in Arabic-speaking countries.

This study addresses this gap, by considering how native Arabic-speaking learners and students learning English view and construct their identities. It explores the factors that play a major role in the construction of their identities. The research is also intended to provide pertinent information about how Arab students construct their identity in a society where English is not needed or not important in day-to-day life. In addition, aims to shed light on the range of ways in which students invest in their English language learning, considering that English is not needed for daily life. For example, English in Saudi Arabia is not easily accessible in social settings among Saudi Arabians. Saudi Arabian students of the language have no opportunities to practise English outside the classroom. At the same time, even though Saudi Arabians do not require English for their social lives in Saudi Arabia, English has become a really important language for Saudi Arabians in their studies for future careers. Most universities in Saudi Arabia, as well as many employment opportunities in Saudi Arabia, now require English (this is further discussed in Sections 1.8 and 1.9).

My main research question is:

> In what ways, if any, has the learning of English impacted the identities of Saudi Arabian learners?

My sub-questions are:

1. What linguistic and emotional conflicts and effects have students encountered by transitioning into a new language community as EFL learners?
2. How have these experiences impacted their present and future identities?
3. How have these experiences shaped their learning and their view of English?

The word ‘experiences’ in sub-questions 2 and 3 refers to both positive and negative experiences related to the emotional effects and conflicts my participants experienced during their language-learning journey.

## 1.3 The Saudi Arabian context

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, commonly referred to as Saudi Arabia, was founded in 1932 and ruled by the Al Saud tribe. With Riyadh as its capital city, Saudi Arabia shares borders with Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait in the north; Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in the east; Oman in the south-east; and Yemen in the south. It “occupies four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula” and is the “largest country in the Middle East” (Al-Saraj, 2011, p.14), with a population of nearly 35 million. Saudi Arabia’s political system is built upon a monarchy and governed by Islamic law derived from the Islamic religious book, the Quran (see Al-Rasheed, 2010; Al-Saraj, 2011). According to Ramady (2010), the early Saudi Arabian economy was dependent mainly on camel exporting, date trading, pilgrimage dues and pearl fishing. However, all that changed in 1938, when the first oil field was discovered. Oil brought Saudi Arabia immense wealth and prompted the country to become the number one exporter of oil and natural gas. It propelled Saudi Arabia into one of the richest countries in the Middle East and allowed it to invest a substantial amount into educating its people (Ramady, 2010).

## 1.4 Women in Saudi Arabia

Doumato and Posusney (2003) explain that gender perception in Saudi Arabia is more restrictive than in most countries in the Middle East. Women are kept away from men they are not related to. This means that women are allowed to interact only with their fathers, brothers, paternal and maternal uncles, and with their milk brothers (men from different mothers and fathers but breastfed by the same woman). Even

though this tradition is gradually changing, women are still segregated from men they are not related to in most public places, schools, universities, restaurants and workplaces (Doumato & Posusney, 2003).

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 (applying since 2016) and a number of earlier measures have nevertheless resulted in gradual changes to many of the restrictions on women (Arab News, 2020; Doumato & Posusney, 2003). In 2001, women were granted permission to have their own identity card, but only if their guardians consented. Before that, their identity was featured on their fathers' or husbands' cards as they were under the sponsorship, or dependants, of their fathers or husbands (Akeel, 2006). For a long time, women were not allowed to drive vehicles (a rule that changed in 2018), and were also not allowed to travel without a legal guardian no matter what their age was (Van Sant, 2018). However, since 2019, women over the age of 21 have been able to travel without the permission of their guardian (Rashad & Kalin, 2019). This proviso fell away in 2006.

Local education (including public schools and universities) in Saudi Arabia is free of charge. Men and woman students studying locally are afforded the same funds for their studies (although women students are still restricted in terms of access to some fields of study). Locally, until 1956 (Alsuwaida, 2016), and abroad until 1997 (Arafeh, 2020), women were not always afforded the luxury of education. In addition, the select few who were afforded the opportunity to study abroad had to do so with the permission of their fathers, and to be accompanied by either a brother or a husband (Doumato & Posusney, 2003). Although things have improved and as I will show in Table 1.3 (Section 1.8), there remains a massive difference and imbalance in the government's funding of men and women studying abroad.

Al-Saraj (2011) explains that women's education has undergone significant changes in the last five decades. In past times, conservative men especially did not view the education of women as a necessity. They were of the belief that women were better off at home and doing 'wifely' duties (Al-Saraj, 2011). These wifely duties included staying home and caring for the children. For a very long time it was not deemed necessary for a woman to receive an education in Saudi Arabia.

Hamdan (2005) explains that only in the late 1970s did the government, after many deliberations with the Islamic bodies in Saudi Arabia, open the first women's campus. However, subjects offered for study were limited, and women were not afforded the opportunity to study what they wished as certain fields were restricted. Smith and Abouammoh (2013) reveal that since the integration of women into the academic sphere, the number of women graduates has exceeded the number of men graduates. Al-Saraj (2011) also found that women in private colleges, universities and institutions had higher ambitions, which he attributes to the western curricula through which women can study subjects such as architecture and electrical engineering. In public universities, women are still not afforded the luxury of studying many fields available to men. For example, women cannot study engineering or architecture. These fields are still deemed inappropriate for women to study. Moreover, even though there are women who have graduated from private institutions where they could study such subjects, they still find it hard to get employment in Saudi Arabia (El-Sherbeeny & Alsharari, 2018). Table 1.1 below compares the total number of men and women bachelor's degree graduates from among STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) majors. It also shows the significant gap between men and women as a result of the fields that women are not allowed to study.

Table 1.1 Statistics for Saudi Arabian male and female graduates studying for STEM bachelor's degrees, 2018

| **Subject** | **Men** | | **Women** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Communication & IT | 21.9% | | 34.1% |
| Physics/Science | 15.3% | | 30.7% |
| Biological & Related Sciences | 9.6% | | 18.9% |
| Mathematics & Statistics | 10.4% | | 13.3% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Architecture, Construction, & Engineering | 40.5% | | 2.7% |
| Other | 2.2% | | 0.3% |
| TOTAL | 99.9 % | | 100.00% |

Compiled from: General Authority for Statistics, Saudi Arabia. (2020). Saudi women: The partner of success. Retrieved December 6, 2022, from https://stats.gov.sa/sites/default/files/woman_international_day_2020EN.pdf

From the 37 600 students to graduate in 2018 (STEM majors), 58% were women. Table 1.1 above shows that the percentages of woman graduates were significantly higher in most career fields. However, only 2.7% of women graduated in architecture, construction and engineering, whereas those were the preferred careers for men.

Over the years, the number of women students has increased. Table 1.2 provides statistics for 2015 for the numbers of Saudi women in higher education locally and abroad.

Table 1.2 Saudi women in higher education, in Saudi Arabia and abroad, 2015

| | |
|---|---|
| Total number of Saudi women at universities | 551,000 |
| Women studying at Master's level | 16,221 |
| Women studying at PhD level | 1,744 |
| Saudi women studying in the US | 18,221 |
| Saudi women studying in Europe | 6,754 |
| Saudi women studying in Canada | 2,923 |
| Saudi women studying in Australia and New Zealand | 1,445 |
| Saudi women studying in East Asia | 812 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Saudi women studying in South Africa and Kenya | 13 |
| Saudi women faculty members | 15,032 |
| Saudi women professors | 132 |
| Saudi women associate professors | 631 |
| Saudi women assistant professors | 2,174 |

Compiled from information supplied by *Saudi Gazette*, 27 May 2015.

## 1.5 Language as communication and a carrier of culture

The official language of communication in Saudi Arabia is Arabic. Although Saudi Arabia has implemented English as the official second language (see Section 1.7), Arabic is still the predominant language (Ansari, 2012). The Arabic Language belongs to the Semitic group of languages that includes Hebrew and Aramaic. It is a branch of the Afro-Asiatic Languages family that originated in the Middle East. The Arabic language is a rich language consisting of more than 12 million words. Owens (2007) explains that "Arabic is one of the world's largest languages"; and is also "by a large margin the largest language in Africa" (p. 2).

Palmer (2007) highlights that the varieties of colloquial "Arabic differ more and more significantly from each other the further away one goes from one's place of origin" (p.113). The Arabic language is viewed among Arabic-speaking Muslims as a religious language (because the Quran is in Arabic), while non-Muslim speakers view it more as a cultural language. Arabic has various dialects, depending on geographical location. It is characterised by diglossia, meaning that it consists of at least two varieties, one the higher variety or Fus-; and the other the lower variety known as 'Āmmiyya or colloquial dialect' (Ferguson, 1956; Walters, 2003).

According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Ngũgĩ) (1986), language has a dual function: as a means of communication and as a carrier of culture. He explains that, as a carrier of culture, language is powerful. Ngũgĩ (1986) recounts his experiences of how his own native language, Kikuyu, was used to narrate stories in the social environment he

grew up in. He also gives an account of how, in school, he was forced to learn in English. This created a linguistic hierarchy in which, no matter how smart learners were, they could not excel if they were not good at English, regardless of how proficient they were in their native languages. This led Ngũgĩ (1986) to categorise language as communication into three categories. The first category, Ngũgĩ (1986) says, is the language of real life. It covers the simple dealings concerning labour and co-operation that form community. The second category of language as communication is that of speech, which is an imitation of real-life language and serves as a series of vocal signposts. The third category is writing. This imitates spoken language, and is an illustration of sounds through visual symbols. Ngũgĩ (1986) further explains that, in society, the language of home and school ought to be harmonious and to form the foundation of a progressive culture.

Ngũgĩ (1986, p. 15) argues that, as a carrier of culture, language is "the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history." As he did with language as communication, Ngũgĩ (1986) categorises language as a carrier of culture into three categories. The first category covers language as the product of a particular people's history. By this is meant that any language reveals the historic struggle its users have undergone to create their wealth and their control of it. The second category, Ngũgĩ (1986) says, is the image of culture as formed in the mind of a child. Such child-created images of culture define people on the whole and may relate to their lived reality. For example, the images may reveal the struggles of nature and nurture that led to their production in the child's mind in the first place. The third category, Ngũgĩ (1986) explains, is that of culture as mediator between written and spoken language. For example, culture transmits the images of the struggles of nature and nurture through a specific language. This indicates that culture is not relayed by language in its generalisation. Instead, a specific culture will employ a specific language to convey its images of history.

Taking all the above into consideration, it is to be understood that, although communication and culture are diverse concepts, they are nevertheless interrelated. This is because language is an expression of culture. Communication is the way in which individuals relay their concepts to others; and culture is learnt and acted upon to conform to relationships and groups. Culture is communicated by language and is thus a by-product of communication by societies. This shows that culture is not

necessarily created with the express intent of creating a culture, but is a natural occurrence of social interaction. Specific culture is taught to individuals through language.

In the context of Saudi Arabia and my research participants, this is an important aspect of language learning as Arabic is embedded in strong cultural and religious significance. Hence the ambivalence regarding English among some of my participants and the scholars cited above. Kuo and Lai (2006) explain that language and culture are intertwined, and that language impacts culture directly. At the same time, learning a language will impart some form of culture as well. Kuo and Lai (2006) further say that second-language learning is culture learning also. For example, Kuo and Lai (2006) express the opinion that “students cannot truly master new language until they have mastered the cultural context in which the new language occurs” (p. 6). By this is meant that successful language acquisition depends on understanding the culture of the second language being learnt. Ladson-Billings (2014) calls for teachers to acknowledge pedagogy that is culturally relevant. His 1995 study suggests that teachers teaching through culturally relevant pedagogy should allow students to progress academically; and should “nurture and support cultural competence” (p. 483). This means that it is important for teachers to recognise and work with the cultural and social practices that students bring to the language-learning classroom.

Research has shown that there is an array of ways in which an individual could identify with numerous cultures and also switch cultures (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007, 2010; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). This indicates that individuals can be bicultural or multicultural, identifying with and shifting between cultures at various times. Generally speaking, people are seen as bicultural if they are bilingual and support both cultures' traditions. Bilingual individuals are likely bicultural, even though they may not necessarily be fluent in both languages. Whether bicultural identification entails merging and combining two cultures into a new, distinct cultural identity that is not immediately reducible to either source culture, has been the topic of some debate among scholars (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007, 2010; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). Exposure to other cultures can help people build their intercultural competence, which is the capacity to perform well and appropriately in environments with a variety of cultural influences. Multicultural individuals have the

capacity to extend their identities across several cultures by integrating various cultural components. Based on the notion that a person may successfully carry two or more cultural identities, speak two or more languages, and operate in two or more cultures, we refer to them as being ‘multicultural’.

Furthermore, Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2007) state that acculturation is dependent on the strength of an individual’s identification with different cultures. They explain that individuals who identify equally with the heritage culture and the host culture are more likely to integrate elements of both cultures into their identities. Additionally, bicultural individuals may be able to retain strong identification with both cultures because they have a strong support network in both cultures. Luna, Ringberg and Peracchio (2008) explain how speakers of two languages adopt different cultures:

> Bicultural bilingual individuals have incorporated two cultures within themselves and speak the languages of those cultures. When cued by a particular language, these individuals activate distinct sets of culture-specific concepts, or mental frames, which include aspects of their identities (p. 279).

Taking the above into consideration, it is safe to say that bicultural and multicultural members will be exposed to diverse cultural values and will have choices as a result, with the ability to construct shifting identities (unlike the monocultural members who whose identity construction is based on one culture only). This allows multicultural members to tap into various fragments of the several cultures they integrated with. This means that bilingual and multilingual learners might be multicultural students and learners and speak the languages of those cultures. This is also an indication that second language learning is culture learning and that it enables a learner to draw on elements of the target language culture. However, according to Arnett (2002), in some instances, bicultural or multicultural individuals are more likely to develop hybrid identities. He argues that, much as local cultures become less important as a result of globalisation, so too do local identities. For this reason, Arnett (2002) argues that hybrid identities are more likely to develop because, rather than living within one particular culture, people find themselves merging with various cultures.

Thus, in the development of a human being, language plays an important role in the social and educational aspects of life. It is through language that individuals understand what society and humanity expect from them. Ngũgĩ (1986) points out that the reason hierarchies in language exist is because some languages are more powerful and more respected than others. As a result, language is not neutral, and the languages people speak can have an impact on how they are seen. Learning a new language, especially one with a worldwide influence such as English, reshapes learners' identities in complicated ways that usually cause them to feel conflicted. This will be unpacked in the data-analysis chapters (Chapters 4 and 5).

## 1.6 Second language versus foreign language

Before I discuss English education in Saudi Arabia, for the purposes of this study, seeing that it is conducted in Saudi Arabia, it is important to establish if English in Saudi Arabia is considered a second language or a foreign language.

Troike (2006) defines a second language as the language an individual learns after the initial language “even though it may actually be the third, fourth, or tenth to be acquired” (p. 2). She adds that it is referred to as the “target language” and that it is “any language that is the aim or goal of learning” (Troike, 2006, p. 2). Baker (1995) argues that the term “second language” could refer to any language (acquired after the first) even if it is learnt as the second, third or fourth language. In addition, there is no distinction between formal and informal learning of the second, third or fourth languages, as long as this is not the main language of the individual.

Richards and Schmidt (2002) define a foreign language as a language that is not the native language of the vast majority in a specific country or region. They add that it is not used as the medium of communication, or as the language of teaching and learning, but is generally taught as a subject in schools. They further provide a definition of a foreign language by explaining that “the term refers more narrowly to a language that plays a major role in a particular country or region though it may not be the first language of many people who use it” (p. 472). Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997) propose that a language studied after the first language can be distinguished as a second language and that societal conditions can influence the learning of

various languages. This could result in the individual becoming bilingual or multilingual even if the second language is in fact the third or fourth language learnt.

Robinson (1996) defines a ‘foreign’ language based on the level of exposure to the language. He deems that the language learnt would be foreign to the learner; and that little to no contact with native speakers of the language would occur outside a classroom. For this reason, English in Saudi Arabia is often referred to as a foreign language because it is not a language that is the mother tongue of an individual and it is not often used. Payne and Almansour (2014) highlight that Arabic is the official language and English is classified as a foreign language because a learner will not have direct access to the language in Saudi Arabian communities and social gatherings. Payne and Almansour (2014) further show that in Saudi Arabia, English is the only foreign language included in the educational curricula, but social interaction with English is rare.

Thus, based on the above research, for the purpose of this study, my view is that there is a significant difference between the terminologies relating to a second language and a foreign language. In addition, based on the definitions presented, I am of the opinion that English in Saudi Arabia is considered a foreign language. This is because English in Saudi Arabia is rarely spoken, and Saudi Arabians rarely get the opportunity to interact in English, unless they are placed in environments such as a classroom or an English-speaking workplace.

## 1.7 The tension between English and Islam

The ongoing and controversial debate among Muslim researchers in Saudi Arabia (Al-Hazmi, 2017; Elyas, 2008) on learning the English language and Islam relates to issues of compatibility, effects, value and importance. Karmani (2005a, 2005b, 2005c) explains that since the terrorist attacks on the USA on 9 September 2001, external pressure from different authorities in various countries (the USA, England) was put on Saudi Arabia to re-evaluate its curricula in schools, institutions and universities. The pressures called for a change where curricula had less Islamic content and endorsed the usage of English in education (see Section 1.8). This prompted Saudi Arabia to introduce English and adapt its curricula to conform to the requirements of the USA and other countries. This encouraged Karmani’s (2005a,

2005b, 2005c) belief that English was introduced into the education system as a propaganda tool to introduce Western values. Karmani (2005a, 2005b, 2005c) has argued that this was implemented in order to oppose the ideologies, cultures and language of the Saudi Arabians and to impose a Western identity on them.

However, Kabel (2007) disagrees with Karmani and argues that English can bridge the communication gap between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world. Kabel (2007) also points out that English and Arabic should not be compared in terms of value as both are valuable, and learning English can lead to globalised knowledge and economic empowerment. In Islam, importance is given to seeking knowledge, and Muslim academics have emphasised the need to master foreign languages to acquire knowledge (Mohd-Asraf, 2005). According to Mahboob and Elyas (2014), the Islamic scriptures acknowledge and welcome variances in languages and cultures. In addition, Alrabai (2018) emphasises the need for Saudi Arabians to incorporate English into their lives as Muslims because "non-Muslims cannot be invited to practise Islam unless Muslims master the languages of the people of other nations" (p. 111).

## 1.8 English education in Saudi Arabia and abroad

Donn and Al-Manthri (2010) explain that one of the strategic developments in the Saudi Arabian education system was to allow the youth of Saudi Arabia to study abroad in countries such as the USA, England, Australia and Canada. This was suggested in order to encourage Saudi Arabia's youth to further their higher education and to participate in the development of the economy. In addition, they would gain valuable international experience and would be able to play a role in improving international relations. Saudi Arabia did not have the adequate skills or the universities to educate its population. The first university in Saudi Arabia, King Saud University, was not built until 1957; and the new universities that were established concentrated on teaching theological subjects under Islam. By the 1970s, to ensure that its vision would be implemented, the Saudi Arabian government started to issue scholarships to a select few students to study abroad. Although the first set of students sent abroad (in 1927) to acquire higher education amounted to only six students, the numbers have increased tremendously since then. One of the reasons for this has been the lack of specialised fields in Saudi Arabia, which caused many

Saudi Arabians to head abroad to further their higher education. Moreover, the fact that English was not regarded as a popular language and was not readily available in schools and universities in Saudi Arabia opened the doors for Saudi Arabians to study abroad in fields not offered in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian government was encouraged to plan to increase the number of students studying abroad by the desire to have skilled teachers return and fill the gaps in the education field in their own country (Donn & Al-Manthri, 2010). The scholarship programme was formalised in 2005, and received a substantial multimillion-dollar boost when it prepared to send 50 000 students abroad. This was to ensure that the programme was successful and fulfilled the aim of training and developing Saudi Arabians abroad to become competitive in scientific research. It was believed that the graduates would provide key support to Saudi Arabian universities and pave the way for these universities to offer various fields of study.

Table 1.3 shows how the number of Saudi Arabian students studying broad increased over a 20-year period, from the 1996/1997 academic year to the 2016/2017 academic year.

Table 1. 3 Government-funded Saudi Arabian students furthering their higher education abroad, 1997–2017

| | **Students in 1996/1997** | | **Students in 2016/2017** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| | 4,462 | 1,528 | 82,426 | 33,936 |
| Total students | 5,990 | | 116,362 | |

Own compilation from: Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education, 1997, 2017.

With the realisation of the demand for and the status of the English language in modern times, and owing particularly to the need to prepare students to study in English abroad, in 2011 teaching English as a second language became mandatory in all schools in Saudi Arabia, from Grade 4 onwards (*Saudi Gazette*, 2011). Donn and Al-Manthri (2010) explain that the Middle East was going through educational

reform to equip its citizens with English language skills in order to propel the local economy by having proficient English-speaking citizens in the workforce so that Saudi employees could communicate with their foreign colleagues and with global companies. Donn and Al-Manthri (2010) further explain that Saudi Arabia was in need of this change (implementing English as a foreign language from Grade 4, which has now changed to Grade 1 in schools) especially because it was the slowest country in the Middle East to modify its curricula and pedagogy to align with the much-needed educational reform (equipping its citizens to be proficient in English on the international stage) (Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education, 2021). Donn and Al-Manthri (2010) further state that Saudi Arabia invited institutions from English-speaking countries – such as Lincoln College, Australian Aviation, Wall Street English, and Direct English – to assist with the reform. According to Donn and Al-Manthri (2010), satellite campuses of these institutions (still running today) were set up across Saudi Arabia and adapted the previous Saudi Arabian curricula to culturally acceptable (in line with the Saudi Arabian religion and culture) English language curricula. These satellite institutions act as vocational colleges and offer various fields of study for both men and women. For these authors, the conclusion is that Saudi Arabia has inevitably

> accepted the demands of internationally driven definitions of quality, standards, benchmarks, and appraisal but, nevertheless, they have little control, other than as purchaser and consumer, over the language or artefacts. (Donn & Al-Manthri, 2010, p. 23).

Donn and Al-Manthri (2010) explain that even though Saudi Arabia has implemented these changes and invited these institutions to proceed with the educational reform needed, the main reason for the slow reform is that “teachers are poorly trained, sometimes unqualified and their performance is rarely evaluated” (p. 39). To add to the findings of Donn and Al-Manthri (2010), Fareh (2010) conducted a study on why English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programmes struggled in Saudi Arabia and hindered the intended reform. His findings were that while most teachers held degrees at bachelor’s and master’s levels, “most of them have no teaching certificates that qualify them for teaching. Most of them did not take any courses in teaching English as a foreign language” (Fareh, 2010, p. 3602). He further found that many classes were run in Arabic and were teacher-led rather than student-centred.

Fareh (2010) suggests that “only qualified teachers should be allowed to teach” (p. 3604). By this it is understood that all teachers should possess an English as a Foreign Language teaching certificate such as Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), the Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA), or the Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults (DELTA). Having one of these qualifications is now a requirement for teaching English in Saudi Arabia, and this has been the case since the first half of the 2010s. This would equip teachers with the theory and adequate teaching strategies (such as communicative language teaching as highlighted in Section 1.9). As Fareh says, “EFL teachers, due to their inadequate pedagogical preparation, still believe that language can be better taught as a number of discrete or disconnected rather than integrated skills” (Fareh, 2010, p. 3603).

In addition, as Al-Shlowiy (2014) explained, there are factors over and above the qualifications of the lecturers. Besides not being equipped with EFL certificates, teachers did not understand the culture of Saudi Arabians and did not have adequate experience in teaching in Arabic-speaking countries. Added to this, Al-Shlowiy (2014) showed, many of the teachers had previously taught in countries where English was the native language speaking (teaching English in England, for example), which was not the same as teaching English in Saudi Arabia.

According to Donn and Al-Manthri (2010), another main obstacle to the educational reform was that Saudi Arabians viewed English as a tool for communication but not as part of their culture. Saudi Arabians feared that, with the introduction of English into mainstream curricula, Saudi Arabian youth would drift away from their culture, and identity with and adopt the identity and culture of English-speaking countries. In addition, Saudi Arabians feared that they would be supporting cultural assimilation, believing that the introduction of English would lead Saudi Arabians to consider views contradicting Saudi Arabian culture as well as religion, which is the cornerstone of the Saudi Arabian monarchy. Another factor for the slow pace of educational reform, therefore, was that many scholars deemed the call for reform to be a direct attack on the religion of Islam (as discussed in Section 1.7). (See also Karmani, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Gobert, 2015; Prokop, 2003).

However, Donn and Al-Manthri (2010) argue that even though the Middle East adopted the educational system (curricula) of the West to include less Islamic content, this has not had a significant impact on Saudi Arabian culture. For example, until today, men and women students are segregated, with each group having its own universities, campuses, facilities and administration structures. In addition, no men students or teachers are allowed into the women's schools, colleges or universities – and vice versa. If the need for a male lecturer arises, then teaching is conducted via closed-circuit television systems. Moreover, to keep in line with the religious and cultural beliefs and practices of Saudi Arabian culture, many themes and topics are strictly restricted in classrooms. This means that teachers have to adhere to the guidelines, which do not allow for students to freely engage in many modern themes (see Section 3.3.1).

## 1.9 English at university level

In Saudi Arabia's higher-education sector, a paradigm shift has occurred from traditional teaching to a curriculum system that is learner-centered – which policy makers believe encourages students and learners to be creative and think critically to solve problems. According to Fareh (2010), researchers are of the opinion that teachers should include activities in the classroom that promote student interaction and communication in English. This has led to the current preferred method of teaching English in Saudi Arabia being communicative language teaching (CLT). This is because researchers (Al-Harbi 2020; Fareh 2010) believe that teachers should be "maximizing the students' exposure to English in class by increasing the student talking time and adopting interactive communicative teaching activities" (Fareh, 2010, p. 3604). Despite this shift to CLT at policy level, some researchers (Hameed, 2020; Hatim, 2020) that, in school systems, the grammar translation method is still rife.

Al-Harbi (2020), in his study of the intentions of the Department of Education in Saudi Arabia when revising the curriculum, says that,

> it has a new focus on helping students to communicate in everyday situations, which is a core aspect of CLT, as well as aiming to facilitate students in acquiring language skills that are suitable for them in a range of future jobs, to make the students aware of how significant English is and that English is becoming the language of the world (p. 97).

I discuss the communicative approach in Section 2.8 and show its limitations, but it is evident that the communicative approach is highly favoured in Saudi Arabia (Hameed, 2020). Hatim (2020) investigated students' and teachers' views on the communicative approach. His study found that, "overall, students think that communication is an important skill and teachers have faith in CLT as a perfect approach enhancing students' communication skills" (Hatim, 2020, p. 1). In addition, he (Hatim, 2020) recommends that "teachers had better employ CLT approach to enhance communication and that students had better make communication the main objective for learning a new language" (p. 13).

English has become the most important subject in the preparatory year for undergraduate studies at universities, and has also become the medium of instruction in many disciplines such as medicine, information technology, science and mathematics (Al-Hawsawi, 2013). At King Saud University, the largest university in the public sector, all subjects are taught in English, except for Islamic studies and Arabic (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Al-Shehri (2010) deems that the implementation of the English language as the medium for teaching and learning has caused several disputes, based on the belief that English is a possible threat to the quality of learning. Al-Shehri (2010) himself is of the opinion that English-medium education will lower the quality of education in Saudi Arabia, because it could lead to the students and learners becoming isolated from the Arabic language. In turn, this will hamper their learning and mastery of a subject because they are not learning in their main language (Al-Shehri, 2010). Despite this belief among some scholars, in recent years the government has introduced many activities in the education industry to elevate the status of the English language. In fact, as seen in Table 1.3, the King Abdullah Scholarship programme has financed well over 100 000 Saudi Arabians' education at various international universities (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013).

In 2009, the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology was established to offer further education in English to overseas students (Donn & Al-Manthri, 2010). This allows students the opportunity to come from other countries on full scholarships and to study subjects taught exclusively in English in Saudi Arabian universities. The establishment of the satellite campuses and the focus on higher education are aimed at promoting Saudi Arabian universities as top-class institutions in research and teaching, thereby enabling Saudi Arabian students and graduates to

partake in the competitive global market (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Learning through the medium of English is an essential prerequisite for Saudi Arabian students and learners if they want to be part of the private-sector economy. If these students cannot afford to study at private universities, generous funding is available through the Ministry of Higher Education for students to pursue their studies in different fields (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Even though Islamic values are taught in Arabic and Islamic studies, which are compulsory subjects, the aim of a general higher education through the medium of English is to equip graduates with skills of logic, and encourage them to utilise their own critical and creative thinking, as well as logical and analytical approaches to problem-solving, in their future careers (Al-Saraj, 2011). Thus, most career paths in Saudi Arabia are taught in the English language. I showed earlier in this section that the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia revised the curriculum so that students could acquire "language skills that are suitable for them in a range of future jobs" (Al-Harbi, 2020, p. 97).

As pointed out previously in this section, academic policy makers and researchers in Saudi Arabia prefer CLT as the ideal way to teach English. Furthermore, Alrabai (2018) makes a distinct call to phase out the grammar translation method and encourages all teachers of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia to "adopt the undeniably superior communicative language teaching approach" (p. 113). CLT is further discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.8). Taking account of the issues discussed in this chapter, I investigate, in the dissertation's data-analysis chapters, how my participants view themselves in past and present social, religious and cultural situations. Additionally, I investigate whether English has any impact on their identities now that they are learning English as a foreign language in an English-medium setting.

## 1.10 Structure outline

This study consists of the following six chapters:

- **Chapter One – Context and structure**

In this chapter, I provide a brief background of Saudi Arabia and a discussion of its population, together with an overview of English education in the country.

- **Chapter Two – Literature review**

In Chapter Two, I review the key theoretical concepts related to the research topic and highlight the framework chosen for the research. I also establish the reasons for basing my framework on the concepts of Norton (2000, 2013) and Taylor (2010). I then define the concept of 'identity' to provide an understanding of why my research shifted from the aspect of motivation to that of identity construction in language learning, while also looking at the notions of power relations and the right to speak. In addition, I look into the relationship between identity and language while focusing on voice and affinity groups. Next I look at second language investment and agency, then explore what the literature says on gender and religious identity. I also discuss Taylor's (2010) quadripolar model of identity in foreign language learning. I end off the chapter with a discussion of CLT, explaining its drawbacks based on currently available research.

- **Chapter Three – Research methodology and design**

In Chapter Three, I present the empirical research I carried out. I also discuss the measuring devices I utilised for this study; and provide the rationale for choosing these measuring devices. I then discuss the overall methodology used for the empirical investigation and also highlight the obstacles faced during this study.

- **Chapter Four – Research findings – first narrative**

In Chapter Four, I present the data derived from my participants with the intention of answering my main research question: In what ways, if any, has the learning of English impacted the identities of Saudi Arabian learners? Furthermore, in Chapter Four, I provide the data with the intention of answering the following two sub-questions: 1: What linguistic and emotional conflicts and effects have learners encountered when transitioning into a new language community as EFL learners? and 2: How have these experiences shaped their learning and their view of English?

The data provided in Chapter Four highlights themes related to the above questions. These themes include the investment and future career choices my participants mentioned in their responses, as well as learning inside the classroom and the right

to speak. In addition, a feeling of despair and language learning outside the classroom were themes that were extracted from the data.

- **Chapter Five – Research findings - second narrative**

In Chapter Five, I present the data with the aim of understanding the extent to which English has impacted the identity of my participants. In addition, Chapter Five answers my sub-question 3, where I ascertain the extent to which learning English has impacted their current and future identities. Additionally, the data presented in Chapter Five highlights the two themes, inclusion into group membership and exclusion from group membership.

- **Chapter Six – Conclusion**

Chapter Six summarises the key findings and draws the conclusions to be derived from the study. As a last step, I give recommendations on the way forward and on further research.

## 1.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I gave my aims and rationale for the study. I highlighted my research question and my three sub-questions. I discussed the context of Saudi Arabia and women and education in Saudi Arabia. In addition, I highlighted the tensions between Islam and English and provided explanations as to why some Saudi scholars feel that English does not add to learning in Saudi Arabia. I pointed out that scholars in Saudi Arabia argue that CLT is the preferred method of teaching in Saudi Arabian English classrooms.

In Chapter Two I discuss the literature my study encompasses, and highlight why there was a need to shift from individual psychological approaches to a view that identity is not static, but evolving. Furthermore, I explain that I established my framework for the study based on the work of Norton (2000, 2013) and Taylor (2010).

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Initially, I started this project wanting to explore English language learning and anxiety in a Saudi Arabian context. However, it is evident from the current literature that there has been a shift in focus from individual anxiety in language learning to the broader socio-cultural relationship between language learning, identity and investment. This led me to change the focus of my study. Norton's (2000, 2013) work, along with the work of Taylor (2010), is the thinking I adopted, in the main, to build the framework for this study. I use Norton's work to show that identity is not static but is always evolving, and that language learning engagement is intricately connected to identity (re)construction. Furthermore, I adopt Norton's (2013) and Taylor's (2010) notions of imagined futures to illustrate the link between language learning, identity and investment. Students invest in language learning when they perceive that it will give them access to economic, social, personal and educational opportunities. I also draw on Taylor's (2010) quadripolar system to highlight the link between my participants' language learning, culture and future imagined identities. There are mutual influences among identity, imagined futures and language learning. In the process of language learning, students construct new imagined identities that are aligned with their hopes for the future.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the context and structure of this study and gave an explanation as to the background to the problem. I also provided the aims and rationale where I stated my research question as well as my three sub-questions.

In this chapter, I discuss the literature that my study encompasses and I show why there was a need to shift from previous research on individual, psychological approaches to language learning (such as individual anxiety and motivation) towards a socio-cultural view of language learning that foregrounds identity and investment. I do this by defining identity and the relationship between identity and language. I provide a discussion on voice and affinity groups. I then move on to second-language investment and agency and discuss the literature on gender and religious identity. I also discuss Taylor's (2010) quadripolar model of identity in foreign-language learning before ending off the chapter with a discussion on CLT, explaining the latter's drawbacks based on currently available research. The reason I discuss

the above-mentioned in this section is to establish key concepts emerging from the literature, in order to connect my research within the framework of Norton (2000, 2013) and Taylor (2010). I further make use of Norton's (2000, 2013) and Taylor's (2010) work to illustrate why a number of researchers had come to believe that there was a gap in the literature on second-language acquisition.

## 2.1 Defining language identity and investment

As early as the 1960s, numerous scholars, including Curran (1961), Clement, Major, Gardner and Smythe (1977), and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) began to write extensively on "anxiety, language learning and language teaching" (Al-Saraj, 2011, p. 41). Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) concluded that anxiety in foreign-language learning was one of the main reasons why students changed majors at various levels; and, at times, left foreign-language learning altogether. For this reason, at the time, researchers focused on understanding anxiety surrounding the learning of foreign languages. The goal was to ascertain the factors that caused anxiety in foreign-language learning and, in turn, to try to eliminate them. By eliminating these obstacles to learning English, researchers argued, learners would be afforded an environment more conducive to foreign-language learning (Al-Saraj, 2011).

Huang (2012) reveals that, for the previous three decades or so, researchers such as Norton Peirce (1995), Block (2003, 2007), and Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), had been emphasising the need to think in a more integrated way about the second-language learner; the processes students undertake in learning a second language; and the identities of second-language learners. Huang (2012) explains that studies shifted from language-learning anxiety and motivation to language identity; and to what Block (2003) refers to as 'the social turn'. According to Block (2003), there was a need for "more socially aware approaches to language-related challenges" (p. 867) to replace the consideration of language learning merely as a cognitive activity. Block (2003, p. 864) also stated that the 'general push to open up SLA beyond its roots in linguistics and cognitive psychology' was an important factor in more recent studies linking identity and language. Block (2003) begins to analyse the available materials in second-language acquisition and starts to establish new ideas and definitions. This was a process Block (2007) strikingly describes as the formulation of new thinking while engaging the "fuzzy and unclear social, cultural, historical,

political and economic aspects … rather than sweeping them to the side as interesting but not relevant" (Block, 2007, p. 97).

Although researchers touched on language learning and identity in the 1970s and 1980s (see Norton, 2006), Ortega (2009) explains that no real focus was given to language-learning identity as a complete concept until Norton completed her study in 1993. This research focuses on five immigrant women who, despite having little to no English language proficiency, had to endure power struggles and identity changes in order to thrive in Canada.

Since Norton's pivotal book on identity and language learning in 2000, many researchers have written extensively on the subject matter and identified language identity as a key component in second- language acquisition.

The notion of identity as defined in the works of Norton Peirce (1995) and Norton (2000) is used in the current study as the framework for understanding the experiences participants encountered when learning and using the English language while in the classroom as well as outside of it. There are multiple conceptualisations of identity in the social sciences. For example, I mentioned in Section 1.5 that language together with culture shapes and reshapes identities. Norton Peirce (1995) highlights the lack of "a comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context" (p. 12). In earlier conceptualisations of language learning, identity was viewed as a single, static, "fixed and measurable phenomenon, clearly relatable to successful or unsuccessful language learning experiences" (Block, 2007, p. 72). However, from a poststructuralist point of view, identity is fluid, multiple, diverse and a mix of agency and social influences. This is clear in the example of Norton's (2000) participant, Martina, who had several identities, including those of immigrant, mother, wife, language learner and worker.

Many researchers have defined the concept of "identity'' in language learning. Norton's (2000) view is that identity is based upon "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how that person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). Gee (2000) views it as "being recognised as a kind of person in a given context" (p. 99). Swann, Deumert, Lillis and Mesthrie (2004) define identity as "an individual's or a

groups sense of who they are, as defined by them and [/] or others" (p. 140). This includes power relations and the right to speak, which I discuss in Section 2.2. Johnson (2003) sees identity as a multidimensional paradigm which is "relational, constructed and altered by how I see others and how they see me in our shared experiences and negotiated interactions" (p. 788). Block (2009) explains that the concept of identity is multifaceted and defines it as the "relationship between one's sense of self and different means of communication, understood in terms of language, a dialect or sociolect, as well as multimodality" (p. 43). Additionally, Richards and Schmidt (2010) define identity as:

> a person's sense of themselves as a discrete separate individual, including their self-image and their awareness of self, and an important concept in sociocultural theory. People's sense of identity influences how they view themselves both as an individual and in relation to other people. (p. 492)

The concept of motivation arose as part of the study of social psychology, and is perceived by many researchers as playing a significant role in language learning. Motivation is the will to learn (Seven, 2020). Schug and Torea's (2023) study highlights the impact language-learning motivation (LLM) has on students during e-tandems – which are online, virtual exchanges between students enabling them to practise their skills with native speakers. Their study comprises two universities consisting of ten pairs of students, with each pair consisting of one student from the USA and one student from France. Participants took turns in speaking in the target language of English and French. Schug and Torea's (2023, p.11) results indicate that the participants' LLM fluctuated because though some of the "activities were good in theory, in practice, they interrupted the spontaneity of the more open discussions". Furthermore, their results show that e-tandem spaces allow for language learning. These findings could be linked to my participants, who showed that online groups (Chapters 4 and 5) increased their motivation and agency. For example, this is seen in Section 4.1 when Nurah joins an online group and feels more confident interacting in the English language and exchanging cooking recipes.

Wang (2023) looked at LLM from a humanistic viewpoint, with Chinese participants who were studying Japanese while simultaneously studying English. According to Ushioda (2009) and Wang (2023), the humanistic view of motivation has become a

crucial component of understanding motivation in language learning. In defining the humanistic view of motivation, Ushioda, (2009, p. 220) explains that it entails understanding the learner as a "thinking and feeling human being with an identity, a personality, a unique background and history". Wang's (2023) study shows that teachers were able to boost students' LLM by allowing the students to self-reflect on their language-learning journey. The self-reflection stages by Wang's participants showed that their motivation increased, allowing them to see progress in their language-learning journeys. Furthermore, Wang's (2023) study indicates that language involvement goes above and beyond the L2 learning experience as it is primarily described in formal educational settings. For example, Wang (2023, p. 99) verifies that "language learning also takes place outside the classroom in a learner's day-to-day life and learner engagement with Japanese-mediated cultural products outside formal education can fuel motivation". Similarly, my participants (Section 4.3) took control of their language learning outside the classroom to achieve agency and this enabled them to excel in their language-learning journeys. Wang (2023, p. 103) concludes his study by saying that his findings "not only echo the call for a more humanistic view of motivation, but also shed light on the motivational power of transformative language engagement".

Investment is the sociological recognition that language learning is a social practice and is embedded in societal power relations. Learners invest in a language because it helps them attain social standing and power. Norton (2000) argues that investment is the ability by the students and learners to commit to the goals they set in learning a language while continually exchanging diverse ideas with language users. Thus, in Norton's (2000) view, learners may be highly motivated to learn a language but not necessarily invested. This could be because the learner deems that the classroom practices are inadequate and unworthy owing to a negative and unsafe classroom environment (Norton, 2013). Norton (2013) states that a "learner's motivation is mediated by other investments that may conflict with the desire to speak" (p. 120). This means that it is "intimately connected to the on-going production of the learner's identities and their desires for the future" (Norton, 2013, p. 120).

Norton (2010) argues that identity is closely linked to investment. With research focused on motivation, Norton (2000) shows that motivation did not explain why learners with high motivation, which is the will to learn, resisted opportunities to

speak (Seven, 2020). In Darvin and Norton (2016), “Norton argued that the psychological construct of motivation did not suffice in explaining how a learner may be highly motivated, but may resist opportunities to speak in contexts where he or she is positioned in unequal ways” (p. 20). Norton Peirce (1995) explains that “the concept of motivation was underpinned in the 1990s SLA literature by conceptualisations of the language learner as having a unified, coherent identity” (p. 19). However, Norton Peirce (1995) has argued that identity is more complex than this; and that even though students are highly motivated, the power dynamics in the classroom and the broader social context may hold them back from expressing their views. This led Norton (2000) to explore investment, as a concept that explains the societal and historical association between learners and their language learning. Norton (2013) explains that investment is impacted by the imbalanced relations of power between the social, historical and contextual nature of language learners and language use. Furthermore, Norton (2013) emphasises that investment is the means to achieving the goals learners wish to reach in language, education and career paths. In addition, investment sheds light on the reasons why – and the ways in which – power relations limit learners in terms of acquiring and speaking the target language. Thus, Norton (2013) shows, investment – like identity – is not unitary: it is fluid, multifaceted and at times, conflicted and unstable. Although Norton's investment model does not explicitly engage with affect, my data-analysis chapters will demonstrate that choosing to invest in language acquisition has a significant affective component.

Norton (2006) considers the sociocultural theory of identity in terms of five characteristics of identity: a) it is not static but is always evolving; b) it is complex, changes, is multifaceted and interlinked; c) it is formed by language; d) it is constructed through an understanding of social power and can be either coercive or collaborative; and e) it is linked to classroom practice.

## 2.2 Power relations and the right to speak

To understand how students construct their identities inside and outside the classroom, it is imperative to look at the power relations between language learners and their teachers, as well as the societies in which they live. Students and learners face numerous challenges when learning a foreign language. Additionally, the way in

which students' identities are created is impacted by social, economic, physical, cultural and religious aspects, as well as other variables such as the right to speak and inherent power relations.

For the definition of power, I adopt Norton's (2013) view that power is the "socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic and material resources in a society are provided, distributed and validated" (p. 47). Hence, investment in language learning is strongly driven by the desire for access to what Bourdieu (1986) calls 'cultural capital'.

Over the years, English has become a language that has developed "a special role that is recognized in every country" (Crystal, 2003, p. 3). For example, English is the global language used in trade, scientific research, and diplomacy. Crystal (2003) makes the point that, historically, many languages (such as Greek, Latin, Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese) have had the opportunity to become the dominant language or the 'international language' owing to increased power. A language claims dominance internationally based on the power of its military and its economy. Greek claimed international dominance owing to the army and might of Alexander the Great. Latin gained its dominance thanks to the Roman Empire, and Arabic as a result of the spread of Islam and its military power. Similarly, Spanish, French and Portuguese gained international influence owing to the colonisation of numerous countries by Spain, France and Portugal.

Ngũgĩ (1986) argues that one of the aspects of colonisation was the control of colonised peoples through the imposition of the ideologies of the colonising powers. Ngũgĩ (1986) states that language played a pivotal role in 'colonising the mind' of colonised nations and communities. He explains that "the real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth: what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed; to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life" (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p. 16).

Anderson (1991) defines the relationship between language and power by stating that past communities excelled through power linked to language. However, this power link was "distinct from the imagined communities of modern nations" (Anderson, 1991, p. 13). This is because past communities held a firm belief in the

dominance of their language and the social inclusion it provided. The theory of power (see Anderson, 1991) specifies that language is an indication of power based on social hierarchies. By this it is understood that individuals with power would use language as a coercive tool, which in turn would fashion a constrained set of identities to which society must adhere. These people would impose their version of identity (based on language and culture) while maintaining that all other possibilities are undesirable.

Bourdieu (1986) analyses class ranks within society and describes the valued goods, such as wealth or status, individuals desire and make every effort to achieve as capital. Bourdieu (1986) shows that the more valued goods we have as capital, the more our status increases within social circles. Thus, according to Bourdieu (1986), the more capital we have, the more power we have. Bourdieu (1986) separates capital into four categories: economic, symbolic, social and cultural. Economic capital refers to an individual's possessions, money and property. Symbolic capital refers to the means through which an individual's prestige is presented. Social capital refers to the social status an individual receives from joining social networks and groups. Cultural capital encompasses the social skills, the cultural skills, the educational skills as well as the linguistic skills an individual attains within a societal class.

The term "the right to speak" stems from the fact that "those who listen regard those who speak as worthy to speak" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 648). In addition, Bourdieu, (1977) says that "speech always owes a major part of its value to the value of the person who utters it" (p. 652). This signifies that the speaker is not speaking only to be listened to, but is also speaking because s/he wants to be "believed, obeyed, respected [and] distinguished" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 648).

Norton (2000) argues that students and learners can claim the right to speak inside and outside a classroom. Moreover, Norton (2000) expresses that teachers need to understand the complex identities and experiences of students and learners and set up the appropriate classroom environment in order to fully allow students and learners to claim the right to speak within the classroom and outside the classroom. Norton (2000) gives multiple examples of her participants claiming their right to speak outside the classroom. For example, her participant Eva explained how a

customer asked her if she was faking an accent to receive more tips. Eva decided to speak out instead of being ashamed. Her response was “I wish I did not have this accent because then I would not have to listen to such comments” (Norton, 2000, p. 129). Here Eva shows how she claimed her right to speak as a legitimate speaker of the language.

## 2.3 Relationship between voice, identity and language

Bakhtin (1986) argues that a speaker’s utterances are “shaped and developed within a certain generic form” (p. 78). Bakhtin (1986) also says that words and phrases are influenced by the speech of others. Bakhtin (1981) points out the significance of heteroglossia. He defines heteroglossia by saying that texts do not have a singular meaning – they have multiple meanings. This means that statements will have unique meanings based on an understanding of the social and global contexts in which they are made. Bakhtin points out that the uniqueness of heteroglossia is not only the ability to speak more than one language, but also encompasses the social tensions that accompany it. Social and political tensions reside in a language, and these tensions shape the way language is, even if the speaker is not aware of them. Language is not a neutral set of systematically structured utterances, but instead encompasses a flow of social relationships and struggles. His view, then, is that language is alive and occurs in social contexts that are not neutral. Hence, resistance to language learning could impact identity construction and reconstruction (Norton, 2000). In Saudi Arabian culture, gender and religion could all hamper learners’ progress and in turn affect their identity structure and restructure.

Voice and identity has been a topic of discussion by many scholars (see, for example, Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Bourdieu, 1991). Voice has different layers, as it is connected to the nature of language and speech. For example, individuals draw on the voice layers of their past, their current and their imagined futures. In this context, Hall, Vitanova and Marchenkova (2005) explain that voice is the “dynamic tension between the past and the present that gives shape to one’s individual voice” (p. 3). Thus, voice encompasses the perspectives of the speakers and the way they view and understand their own social and global position. According to Bourdieu (1991), the voices of individuals are projections of the power that shapes and maintains their positions in society. Voice is also how the individuals understand the world around

them, and the way in which this position allows them to speak, write and be heard by others. Furthermore, as Bourdieu (1991) explains, individuals' voices extend beyond speaking or writing as individuals use language as a way to establish themselves within social and cultural spheres. In addition, Bakhtin (1981) affirms, the conscious mind, identity and experiences of individuals are expressed by their voices.

Bakhtin (1981) also shows that individuals in certain situations can 'revoice' themselves (as discussed below), in order to conform to or challenge their societal and contextual situations. Therefore, it is understood that a variety of situations promotes the cultivation of diverse social voices and identities among individuals (Bakhtin, 1981; Bourdieu, 1991).

Studies on dialogue and conversation (see Fairclough, 1992; Luk & Lin, 2007) confirm the close link between language and identity in a sociocultural aspect. For instance, Foucault (1984) and Gee (2004) express the position that discourse is influenced by the individual using language to gesture towards their social positioning. Gee (2004) further says that speech is basically "a way of using language so as to enact a particular socially situated identity" (p. 20). Additionally, Gee (2005) points out that in order to learn a new language, interaction with the world is needed and not just learning grammar and vocabulary. This means, Gee (2005) expands, that learners of a language will be "acting – interacting – thinking – valuing – talking – (sometimes reading – writing)" (p. 26) in order to learn the language. This means, therefore, that learning happens in a social context leading to identity construction or reconstruction (Gee, 2005; Luk & Lin 2007). From the above, it is safe to say that there is a relationship between language learning, voice and identity – since language learning is a socialising process that constructs the identities of learners; and since it has also been shown that learners can revoice themselves to challenge dominant discourses.

Research on identity in language learning also reveals the importance of affinity grouping and the ways in which groups bring out a shared voice (Gee, 2004; Wilson, 2013). Affinity grouping refers to spaces in which individuals can come together and belong to a group while sharing a common identity and voice. Gee (2004) explains that affinity groups are the spaces in which informal learning takes place. These

spaces may be virtual or physical, as long as their members share the same interests

According to Wilson (2013), affinity grouping may enable students and learners to identify where their ideal interests lie. This entails students and learners grouping and communicating with others who share similar interests in a target language, for example on the internet or via book clubs. One of the reasons for joining affinity groups is the desire for inclusion. Research by Gee (2004) and Wilson (2013) demonstrates that individuals join affinity groups because they are provided with the ideal spaces and opportunities to participate in a shared identity. This is because members of affinity groups are allowed to express their shared interests and to act upon these interests.

Affinity grouping is a common aspect of English language learning in Saudi Arabia. This is because students and learners do not get many opportunities to practise English outside the classroom. As a result, they may have to resort to online groups on social media or online gaming to better their English. In addition, these online affinity groups provide spaces in which members may more freely express their identities than when they are interacting face to face. The data of this study has shown (see Chapters 4 and 5) that, owing to many obstacles such as gender identity and affect, my participants did not find ideal spaces in the classroom in which to freely express their identities. They had to resort to online affinity groups, not only to better themselves but also to gain confidence and understand who they were. For example, Nurah's data showed how she resorted to an online cooking group to express herself with confidence. Similarly, Shaheed expressed the ways in which he interacted differently when speaking in English and Arabic while online (as opposed to face to face).

The anonymity aspect of being online may remove the initial concerns around Bourdieu's (1977) right to speak as non-natives and allow members to confidently reclaim their right to speak. This is especially relevant in a Saudi Arabian context, where there is debate as to how effective English learning is in the lives of Saudi Arabians (as covered in Section 1.7). In addition, the female participants used the anonymity of being online as a way to break free from the traditional views of how women ideally behave in Saudi Arabia (see Section 2.5). An example of this would

be Shaheed (Section 5.1), who shared that he expressed himself differently online as opposed to face to face thanks to the anonymity of being online. Another example is the women (Section 5.1), who could enjoy the anonymity of the internet and push back against Saudi Arabian culture's ideas and norms in relation to gender.

## 2.4 Second-language investment and agency

Norton (2013) shows that, sometimes, second-language speakers lack the confidence and ability to excel when using their target language. However, the concept of 'agency' (see Section 2.1) has gained popularity in recent times only (see Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2013; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Dewaele (2009) explains that agency applies when the second-language learner is an active participant in learning. This means that agency allows the student and the learner to take ownership of the content learnt. It also allows students and learners to assimilate into the social world and cement a place there. Duff (2012) defines agency as a person's aptitude to make choices that allow them to take charge of their situations and pursue their goals to achieve personal and or social transformation. For Ahearn (2001), agency is the ability to act in a social sense. With this in mind, agency is "constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual" (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 148). The underlying point made by and through the researchers mentioned above is that agency is the ability allowing students to learn what is relevant to them and is sometimes, with or without guidance, self-initiated. It allows students to have a choice and a voice in how they learn and what they learn.

Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) are of the view that language learning can be heavily restricted or constrained by classroom practices. They say that second-language learning consists, first, of the individual learning the language; and, second, of the society the individual interacts with. This view emphasises social learning as an important aspect of language learning. As I pointed out earlier in this section, learners learn actively in societies in which they participate. This participation reflects the dynamics of the classroom and the broader society, and the learner's position in both.

An example of this would be Norton's (2000) participant, Eva. She had come to Canada with the idea of bettering her life in an affluent country. However, she did not at first have much opportunity to practise English and she felt that her co-workers disrespected her:

> I think because when I didn't talk to them, and they didn't ask me, maybe they think I'm just like – because I had to do the worst type of work there. It's normal… When I started to work there, I was on ice-cream and I had to clear out the garbage and nobody wants to do that (Norton, 2000, p. 62).

Eva also believed that she was incompetent when opportunities to converse with her co-workers arose. She felt that her "vocabulary was too poor to talk to somebody or to start a conversation" (Norton, 2000, p. 63). She thought of herself as an illegitimate speaker not worthy of speaking the language to native speakers. However, Eva took control of her situation and created opportunities to converse. She began to feel that she was a legitimate speaker; and started to believe that her accent and the way she spoke were intricate parts of her identity and who she was as a person. When asked about her opportunities to practise the English language, she said: "… I have more practice. I feel more comfortable there [at work] when I speak. And I'm not that scared anymore to say something" (Norton, 2000, p.71). Here Eva showed that she was an active contributor in the shaping of her learning process. Her investment and agency ensured that she obtained the necessary language abilities to participate and communicate actively with society.

One participant from Vitanova's (2005) study illustrated similar experiences. Vitanova's study focuses on European immigrants to the US. It aimed to discover how "invisible social structures … lock subjects into social positions" (Vitanova, 2005, p. 166), and to ascertain whether her participants could "transcend their subject positions" (Vitanova, 2005, p. 166). One of them, Vera, had started to learn English in her new country. While still a journalist in Russia, she had begun to learn English grammar in the hope of bettering her English. Soon she realised that what she was learning from the books was not helping her with what she needed from the language to "re-create her lived world" (Vitanova, 2005, p. 162). Once Vera launched her own catering business, she found that people respected her and that she had more opportunities to practise English (Vitanova, 2005). Vitanova's (2005) study shows that her participants, when thrust into speaking situations at the beginning,

became uncomfortable because they lacked the language proficiency they needed. However, by investing in the language and creating daily situations to speak, they gained satisfaction when communicating with others (Vitanova, 2005). Many other successful stories (see Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2000; Vitanova, 2005) show the importance of agency in encouraging individuals to enhance their language learning to the point of gaining control or claiming the power to surpass limitations. Darvin and Norton (2017) explain that

> Learners exercise agency by choosing what they perceive as beneficial to their existing or imagined identities, by consenting to or resisting hegemonic practices and by investing or divesting from the language and literacy practices of particular classrooms and communities (p. 7).

It can be seen, from the above, that language learning can be boosted or enhanced when the students' and learners' identity is recognised. This allows students and learners to exercise agency by being able to relate their current or future identities to what is being taught in a classroom. In addition, Kanno and Norton (2003), and Murphey, Jin and Li-Chi (2005), believe that socially creating an imagined identity usually promotes healthy language learning and enhancement. For example, in Norton Peirce's (1995) study, Martina invested in English and in the idea that she would "claim the right to speak" (p. 23) for her children. Her investment stemmed from her desire to pave the path to her children's future in Canadian society.

Investment is deeply personal to the learner and understanding this is important for teachers of ESL or EFL. For instance, in Kinginger's (2004) study, a participant who was a university student learning French invested in her learning because she envisaged the French community in France to be "populated with refined, interesting, cultured people who are in turn interested in her" (p. 228).

At the same time, language learning can be heavily restricted or constrained (see Norton, 2000; Norton, 2001; Norton Peirce, Harper & Burnaby, 1993) based on the way students are positioned in the language classroom. Negative positioning of the student's and learner's identity can cause the student and the learner to withdraw in class, and possibly even withdraw totally from learning the target language. Norton's (2001) study shows that two of her participants withdrew from classes because they felt that the teacher devalued the identities they desired or hoped to achieve.

In later studies (Norton, 2006; Norton, 2010), Norton demonstrated that in certain instances a student's or a learner's identity may change owing to interaction in society (instead of being unitary and static); and that resistance from language learners is evident when their imagined identities are forsaken.

Another important aspect of language learning is that of affect. Stevick (1980) explains how affect relates to a classroom when he says that "success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom" (p. 4). This indicates that the success of students and learners is less dependent on what is being taught than on the atmosphere within the classroom. Stevick (1980) emphasises the internal world of the individual (affect, self-esteem, confidence, investment and agency) as well as the social dimension, which covers the interaction within a classroom (between students and learners and their classmates; and between students and learners and the teacher).

Also to be considered is the link between the individual, the target language and the social context. Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) explain that:

> in a 'good' group, the L2 classroom can turn out to be such a pleasant and inspiring environment that the time spent there is a constant source of success and satisfaction for teachers and learners alike. And even if someone's commitment should flag, his or her peers are likely to 'pull the person along' by providing the necessary motivation to persist (pp. 3–4).

Based on the above, therefore, it is safe to say that success depends less on content taught and more on the people involved in the learning. Positive affect enhances language learning, just as negative affect hampers or prevents learning.

## 2.5 Gender and religious identity in language learning

In Saudi Arabia, women and men are allocated different gender roles. Saudi Arabian society positions women as domestic queens and men as providers and protectors. This means that women's gender identity in Saudi Arabia is situated in the private domain and men's gender identity in the public domain (Widodo & Elyas, 2020).

Gender identity refers to conformity to social understandings of the constructed definitions of femininity and masculinity, along with notions of sexuality and their attributes.

Gramsci's (1971) view of cultural hegemony is that the majority of individuals in society adhere to particular ideological principles. They do this because it seems normal for their society and is a benefit to the cultural standing and the power of the nation. For example, in Saudi Arabia, which follows a patriarchal system, the status of men is still elevated over that of women. This causes obstacles in language learning, as becomes clear in Chapter Five.

Numerous studies (see McMahill, 1997, 2001; Norton, 2000; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004) discuss the role of language in patriarchal societies. In these societies, gender resistance by individuals learning English is an important factor in determining identity and success in the language. For example, McMahill's (1997, 2001) studies of Japanese speakers learning English as a foreign language indicate that women participants felt that English was a more appropriate language than Japanese through which to express their critical views and emotions in respect of gender traditions and practices. The reason given for this is the "English directness and specificity as a way to resist or even escape" the cultural norms placed upon women (McMahill, 2001, p. 311). This also surfaced in the data in this study and shows to what extent gender identity plays a role (see Section 5.2). Another example can be seen in Norton's (2000) description of Mai, one of her study participants. Norton (2000) explains how the situations and experiences she describes constructed Mai's gendered identity in English-language learning.

A Vietnamese woman who emigrated to Canada, Mai lived with her brother. He viewed her as a little girl who should not be indulging in any studies but should be getting married instead, and she struggled with his patriarchal views. Mai acted as the language filler in her family, by speaking up to three different languages when family members mingled. She would speak Vietnamese or Cantonese with her sister-in-law and her parents (her parents could not speak English and her sister-in-law's English was limited); and English with her nephews and her brother. However, Mai was determined to practise and improve her English, and she made the most of her opportunities as a seamstress. Norton (2000) explains that Mai had no issues

practising English and would be the one to initiate conversations, as otherwise “the jobs make me sleepy if we don’t speak. We just listen to the sound of the machine” (p. 82). However, Mai felt perturbed when she found out that other women had been laid off from work but she had been kept on because “she didn’t have a man” (Norton, 2000, p. 84). She was disconcerted to discover that she was viewed as a woman who needed to keep her job because she was single and did not have a man to provide for her. Mai eventually married, and was ‘saved’ from the patriarchal environment of her brother’s home. Although her husband did not want her to work outside the home, he was considering allowing her to study.

Religious identity is understood as having a twofold purpose. It is used as a tool that unites people and helps to construct people’s social and cultural relationships (Duderija, 2008). This means that religion contributes to group solidity and as a means of interconnection among members who share a common ideology. Penning (2009) found that Americans assess other people in different countries more positively when they share a common religion, race, or ethnicity.

Yamani (2000) describes how, before Saudi Arabia’s founder, King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, unified the country in 1932, communities in Saudi Arabia identified themselves based on different tribes that implemented their political identity based on the regions they occupied. Religion in Saudi Arabia is based on the ‘Wahabi’ ideology, which called for a cleansing and purification of the religion in order for Muslims to connect with and practise the Islamic religion of the past. The term ‘Wahabi’ (although not accepted by Saudi Arabians who prefer the term ‘Ahlus Salaf’, which refers to the first three generations of Muslims) stems from the Islamic reformist, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahab. It was based on the vision and coalition of King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, who oversaw the political running of the country, and Muhamad Ibn Abdul Wahab, who was in charge of merging the political aspect with the religious aspect, that Saudi Arabia was founded. Muhamad ibn Abdul Wahab was tasked with ensuring that Saudi Arabia’s political aspects were in line with Islamic teachings. This led to the leaders of Saudi Arabia adopting a very Islamic, strict and conservative rule over their people.

However, Yamani (2000) states, it was not until the 1950s that it “became possible to speak of the emergence of a Saudi identity” (p. 6). This was only made possible

once institutions, schools and universities and the media came into existence. The Saudi Arabian identity is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and educational curricula consisted mainly of Islamic teachings. The main task of Muhamad ibn Abdul Wahab was to ensure that Saudi Arabian citizens and Muslim expats living in Saudi Arabia conformed to the ideal Saudi Arabian identity. Saudi Arabian policy makers felt that, by ensuring a constrained version of possible identities, there was no other option but to adapt to the conforming, approved Saudi Arabian identity (Gobert, 2015; Yamani, 2000). This identity derives from Islamic religion and Arab culture. According to Yamani (2000), this was the step taken in building a shared culture and religion, giving birth to traditional Saudi Arabian culture and identity.

The 'ideal' Saudi Arabian identity outlined above poses a problem for women in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, through its cultural understanding coupled with its religious ideology, moulds women into what society believes is the 'ideal Muslim woman'. For example, men marry at an older age and women at a younger age. One of the reasons for this is that it allows women to give birth to many children. Moreover, most marriages are still arranged. Saudi Arabian society enforces the notion that the ideal woman marries at a young age and stays home. In addition, the ideal woman is dutiful to her husband and raises the children while ensuring that they grow up knowing and embracing what the ideal Saudi Arabian identity consists of. This preserves the traditional understanding and culture of the Saudi Arabians so that their traditions are carried on. Women in Saudi Arabia are still deemed as dependents of men and this is used by Saudi Arabian society as another reason why women should regard education as a secondary need (Giladi, 2022).

However, I have shown in Section 1.4 that more women are now attending universities; are entering courses in STEM subjects; and have a higher graduation rate than men. Alsuwaida (2016) explains that the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (covered in Section 1.9) had a huge influence in promoting women to pursue higher education, in what is known as the "Woman's Golden Era". Alsuwaida (2016) advises that "in the Women's Golden Era, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz established 24 public universities, 8 private universities, and a total of 494 colleges in 76 cities within Saudi Arabia" (p. 113). The King Abdullah Scholarship Program ensured that equal educational opportunities were afforded to men and women living

in Saudi Arabia. This is also a reason why there are many more women graduating from universities than men, as seen in Table 1.1.

The correlation between religion and language in an educational context has been explored by various researchers, including Jule (2005) and Foye (2014). Jule investigated the impacts of religious belief on the language usage of women studying at a Christian college in Canada. The results indicated that the women in the study were displaying restricted language usage. Jule attributed this to the belief that the women should be subservient to and supportive of men; and highlighted the results as a typical instance of women showing restrictive language learning and usage owing to gender identity shaped by religion. Foye (2014) conducted a study of 277 teachers and curriculum developers of various religions in 44 countries. The first question Foye asked was intended to ascertain the opinions of the participants as to whether they felt that religion ought to be totally removed from discussions in English lessons. Some 60% of participants said they thought that religion should continue to be part of English lessons. However, Foye found that "teachers based in the Middle East were nearly 50% more likely than respondents in general to feel … that religion should be avoided in class" (p. 6).

## 2.6 The quadripolar model of identity in foreign language learning

Taylor's (2010, 2014) quadripolar model of identity theorises identity as "an aggregate of a multitude of private and public selves associated with one individual" (Taylor, 2014, p. 94). Taylor uses a diachronic–synchronic approach towards identity in order to show that an individual's self has multiplicity and relativity across diverse social situations and time intervals.

In the process of following the research on second-language identity, Taylor (2010) noticed that there were "several under-researched areas of the literature on identity in foreign language learning" (p. 79). This prompted her to suggest a quadripolar model, in which four elements of the self are interlinked.

Table 2.1 Elements of possible and actual selves in Taylor's quadripolar model of identity

| Self-dimension | Internal | External |
|---|---|---|
| Possible | Ideal | Imposed |
| Actual | Private | Public |

Source: Taylor, F. (2010). A quadripolar model of identity in adolescent foreign language learner. [PhD dissertation]. University of Nottingham, p. 80.

As shown in Table 2.1, Taylor (2010) proposes that both the possible self and the actual self are acted upon by internal and external influences. The possible and actual selves thus contain two elements each. The possible self contains the ideal self and the imposed self, while the actual self contains the private self and the public self.

## 2.6.1 The possible self

Like Norton's (2013) imagined future, Taylor's (2010) possible selves incorporate an individual's "desired future states that originate in the individual and outside the individual, respectively" (p. 81). Possible selves are how learners view their future states. Thinking about the possible self allows learners to restructure their goals in order to achieve what they want in their future life. Taylor (2010) shows that even though this state exists in an individual in terms of what is desired, it may conflict with external expectations and may affect the individual's construction of a possible and a future self.

## 2.6.2 The ideal self

The ideal self refers to the prospective situation the individual feels would be best for them; and to the individual's ideal future in life, regardless of others' hopes. This means that the ideal self reflects the individuals' self-identity inclusive of their hopes and wishes for their present and their future. The ideal self, therefore, may act as a form of motivator driving individuals to attain their desires. The ideal self also

includes the individual's ideal situations in life, as they relate to finances, friendships, marriage, families and status, among other things.

Taylor's (2010) summary and explanation of the ideal self also foregrounds a key dynamic dimension to the notion of a person's ideal self:

> In the Quadripolar Model of Identity, the Ideal Self is understood to mean a personal representation of what somebody would like to be in the future, irrespective of other people's desires and expectations. Rather than suggesting a restrictive and inaccessible end state, the term "ideal" is taken to represent the best possible combination of attributes that a person would like to have in the future from a strictly subjective point of view. As these attributes are attained and incorporated into the Private Self, new desired characteristics will replace them in one's Ideal Self, ensuring a motivational continuum (p. 81).

In Taylor's view, then, the ideal self is not static but evolves or gets renewed as the individual achieves certain goals set previously. Taylor (2010) also clearly explains that "the Ideal Self would be differentiated from sheer fantasy by the existence and implementation of a strategy for the attainment of the given desired self" (p. 82). Thus, Taylor (2010) points out that if the learner has a desire to speak a target language fluently, it is imperative that they practise it attentively. In addition, the learner should be looking for opportunities to practise the target language. Taylor (2000, 2013) adds that if the learner has the desire to speak fluently but does not seek out the opportunities to invest in fulfilment of the desire by practising the new language, then learning the language, for that learner, is more of a dream than a sought-after future state. I provided an example of this in Section 2.4, with Norton's (2000) participant, Eva. In a country where she could not speak the target language and felt inferior by thinking she did not have the right to speak, she created opportunities for herself and ensured that she took them.

### 2.6.3 The imposed self

According to Taylor (2010), the imposed self refers to the aspirations others have for the individual. These aspirations are not those of the student or the learner, but may be those of society in general or of influential individuals such as parents, partners, friends and relatives. For example, Taylor (2010) proposes, a learner might be influenced by peers who do not consider lack of progress in the target language to be problematic. These peers might impose on the learner their belief that lack of

effort in learning the language is acceptable, resulting in the learner being forced to "reconcile the expectation to be submissive and hard-working" (Taylor, 2010, p. 84). The learner might then feel the need to withdraw from the teacher's expectations of hard work; and to resort to the expectations of their peers, which are "to avoid involvement, to procrastinate, to withdraw effort and to feel proud" (Taylor, 2010, p. 84).

As is clear, the learner's need to feel accepted by peers may take precedence. Taylor (2010) further explains the influence of aspects of the learning environment in these words:

> Depending on the teacher's attitude, the classmates' behaviour, the general classroom atmosphere and many other factors, a student will form an understanding of what is expected of him/her in that circumstance and decide whether or not to meet the given expectations, which will determine his/her future behaviour (p. 84).

Taylor (2010) elaborates that it is possible for the imposed self and the ideal self to be in conflict with each other. For example, learners who feel that learning English might open doors for them could be battling the influence of parents who are very traditionally inclined culturally and who believe that learning English is going to encourage their child to adopt a different outlook and become distanced from their home culture. This is a common aspect in Saudi Arabia, as I showed in Section 1.7, where I stated that Saudi Arabians feared that their children would forsake their culture and language by learning English.

### 2.6.4 The actual self

Actual selves, Taylor (2010) points out, are different from possible selves. Possible selves encompass potential future identity whereas actual selves incorporate "the dynamics of one's present-day identity" (Taylor, 2010, p. 85). This then indicates that the actual selves of individuals reflect the current state of learners and the ways the learners are perceived. For example, in learners who view themselves as diligent and eager to learn as students, those traits are part of their actual selves. However, actual selves share characteristics with possible selves (see Section 2.6.1), as both have internal and external components.

### 2.6.5 The private self

Taylor (2010) states that the private self is "understood to mean a person's intimate representation of his/her present attributes, which may or may not transpire socially" (p. 85). She explains that individuals evaluate their abilities based on past experiences. These experiences shape the current self, as individuals use them as building blocks for their own character. For example, students with high ambitions to further their postgraduate studies at a desired university will most likely work extra hard so that they meet that university's requirements. However, they may lose focus and give up halfway when they realise that their family cannot afford the financial burden university education brings. This will then lead the learner to transform from his or her current actual and possible selves into different actual and possible selves, based on external material constraints and not because of a struggle with learning.

A learner with an unhealthy private self will see no use in trying to improve. Such a learner may also adopt disruptive behaviour of some kind and display it through the public self. Learners with a healthy private self, on the other hand, will view their past failures as possibilities for learning, fix the mistakes they have made and strive to reach the ultimate goals they set themselves.

### 2.6.6 The public self

The public self, similarly to the imposed self, may have many facets and is to be viewed in relation to the individual's environment. Taylor (2010) describes public selves as "the various social presentations that a person may display depending on the relational context and audience" (p. 86). This indicates that the individual may not want to perform a particular task or act in a particular way but nevertheless does so in order to conform to expectations. For example, Taylor (2010) points out that individuals may do what is requested by their parents at home, but may not participate in English lessons for fear of being thought 'soft', a 'nerd' and/or the 'teacher's pet'. Taylor's (2010) example in the quotation below sheds light on conflicting public selves; and also foregrounds the influence of others on that self:

> If I am with my family and I know that my parents expect me to be a dutiful daughter, I may choose to play that part submissively, but later complain to my group of friends and blame my parents for being, say, old-fashioned – an attitude very much appreciated by my peers. What I actually do is juggle with two different public selves,

> displaying an image that I feel is expected of me in the circle I find myself in at a given moment (p. 87).

Thus, similarly to imposed selves, public selves can be in conflict. Public selves share other traits with imposed selves, depending on what the individual does to please the group. This is the case in Saudi Arabia as well, especially for women. The religious, cultural and gender ideologies in Saudi Arabia have the potential to create conflicts for women between their public selves and their private and imagined possible selves.

## 2.7 Self-system types

Taylor (2010) explains that the types of selves covered in Sections 2.6.1 to 2.6.6 may, however, cause an individual to face conformity or conflict while shifting from their actual self to their possible self. This is because these six types of selves are continuously interlinked with each other.

### 2.7.1 The submissive self-system

Taylor (2010) points out that "a strong Imposed Self generates responses against the Ideal Self" (p. 91). This may result in situations where learners start out insincerely abiding by the desires of outside influences but then gradually accept these desires as their future goals. For example, Taylor (2010) points out that a student may be totally lacking interest in English, but may comply with the teacher's requests once made aware of the possibilities and the advantages of learning English. Taylor (2010) provides the following vignette as a means of explaining the submissive individual:

> They know very well what sort of person I am. What they would like me to do in life is different from what I would like to do, so that's why I prefer to give up my intentions and do what they think is better for me. What they want me to do in life is more important than what I'd have liked, so I'll do what they say (p. 93).

Here Taylor (2010) explains that her participant shows that even though she has something else in mind, she enters the submissive state to go along with what the teacher or society feels is best for her. However, this could also be seen as something positive. For example, in the case of disinterested language learners, this could be the reason the learners find that what is being taught is actually beneficial

to them on a personal level and interest may arise in learning the language (Taylor, 2010).

### 2.7.2 The duplicitous self-system

Taylor (2010) defines the duplicitous system as one in which "a different Ideal Self and Imposed Self generate parallel responses" (p. 91). She explains that an individual may secretly work towards reducing the gap between the private self and the ideal self while giving the impression of working towards the public self and the imposed self. Taylor (2010) goes on to comment that this learning and teacher situation could be extremely complicated, for instance in a classroom where an individual may not view speaking English as part of their ideal self but still adheres to the teacher's imposed desires. Taylor (2010) provides the following vignette as an example of a duplicitous system:

> They don't really know what sort of person I really am, and it's not important for me that they do. They would like me to do something else in life than I would, and that's why I'll pursue my own dreams without letting them know. At the same time, I'll give them the impression that I do what they ask me to, even though I'm actually seeing about my own business. I know better (p. 95).

The reason Taylor (2010) deems this to be a complex situation is that the teacher "has no direct means of assessing whether such students' activity in class expresses genuine learning involvement or strategic impression management" (pp. 94–95). The learner is giving the impression that goals are shared, whereas in reality the goals of the learner and of the teacher or society differ.

### 2.7.3 The rebellious self-system

Taylor (2010) explains that the rebellious self-system occurs where "a strong Ideal Self generates responses against the Imposed Self" (p. 91). For Taylor (2010), the learner in this self-system will willingly disobey the teacher's requests because these do not directly adhere to the individual's Ideal Self. This could be caused by the Imposed Self in the form of peer pressure from classmates. The peer pressure could then cause the learner to rebel willingly against the teacher's desire. This would happen because, although initially learning English was part of the individual's self-desires, the individual now views it as an imposed desire coming from the teacher.

Taylor (2010) offers the following vignette as an example of a rebellious self-system:

> What they would like me to do in life is different from what I would like to do, so that's why I'll pursue my own dreams even if I have to rebel against them. They know me well, I haven't got anything to hide, and if they want to force me into doing something, I am likely to refuse it openly. What they want me to do is less important than what I want (p. 96).

Here it is clear that the learner rebels against the norms of the teacher and society in order to pursue their ideal imagined future. This is something that would impact many language learners in Saudi Arabia, where society likes people to conform to a single established, customary system of thought.

### 2.7.4 The harmonious self-system

The harmonious self-system refers to a situation where "equivalent Ideal and Imposed Selves generate congruent responses" (Taylor, 2010, p. 91). This means that the individual's future-oriented desires and wants are very similar to the desires and wants of others. Taylor (2010) further explains that an individual who is exposed to a harmonious self-system will naturally "feel valued and appreciated in the classroom, in their family, in their peer group or in their other social circles for what they really are …" (p. 97).

The following vignette is offered by Taylor (2010) as an example of a harmonious self-system:

> They know me very well and appreciate me for what I am. My dreams for the future are very similar to what they'd like me to do in life. They don't want to impose anything on me, but give me the total liberty to choose, and they always appreciate my decisions about my future. They help me feel really fulfilled (p. 98).

In the harmonious self-system, the goals of the teacher and society line up with the goals of the learner. This also creates a harmonious classroom environment and enables the learner to achieve goals and feel self-satisfied. In a harmonious self-system, therefore, excelling in learning English is a goal shared by both the teacher and the student.

## 2.8 Communicative language teaching and language competency

Because this study reflects on the identity of students at an international school where all subjects are taught in English, it is important to highlight the history of communicative language teaching (CLT), the most frequently used method of teaching English in Saudi Arabia; and to reflect on the extent to which it CLT creates spaces for students' identities.

From the 1880s to the 1980s, researchers forged numerous theories concerning the most appropriate teaching and learning methodologies (Brown, 1994). This resulted in the rise and fall of many theories and methodologies (Brown, 1994). For example, the grammar-translation method became the prime method for teaching and learning a foreign language. Given that there was no real research on second-language acquisition and teaching at the time, the focus was not on learning a language for oral communication, but rather for "being scholarly or, in some instances, for gaining a reading proficiency in a foreign language" (Brown, 1994, p. 18). With the grammar-translation method underperforming and coming under immense criticism, an alternate method was proposed. Instead of using the student's or the teacher's native tongue (as was done in the grammar-translation method), this direct method proposed learning and teaching a new language via the direct identification of words and phrases with objects and activities (Celce-Murcia, 2014).

According to Brown (1994) and Celce-Mercia (2014), Anthony (1963) was the first linguist to define the terms "approach", "method" and "technique". He defined an "approach" as the "theoretical model or research paradigm" that "provides a broad philosophical perspective on language teaching" (Anthony, 1963, cited in Celce-Murcia, 2014, p. 2). Anthony (1963) then defined a "method" as a set of systematically structured procedures that is based upon a selected manner of teaching steps. A technique, on the other hand, he defined as a specific activity within a classroom that is consistent with, coincides with, and supplements a method (Brown, 1994, p. 14).

Richards (2006) explains that in the 1960s, linguists were looking for new ways to incorporate a communicative aspect in teaching English as a second language. Wilkins (1976) revisited his 1972 document and expanded on the need to include a communicative aspect to teaching. Because of Wilkins' influence and the great need

for something more efficient in language teaching, Wilkins' (1976) writings were quickly accepted by authors of second-language materials, giving rise to the CLT approach. Canale and Swain (1980) felt that language should have elements of "unpredictability and creativity", and that success in a language should be judged upon "the basis of behavioral outcomes" (p. 29), views that aligned with the CLT framework. The need for a communicative approach to language learning also stemmed from the need to have language competence, a term coined by Hymes (1966). Hymes (1971) then distinguished between linguistic competence and communicative competence. This led to the call for a better communicative approach to language teaching in order to gain language competency.

Hymes (1971) bases his classification of linguistic and communicative competence on Chomsky's (1965) take on language competency and performance, which he deemed flawed. Hymes (1971) challenges Chomsky's (1965) view of speakers as a homogeneous community, by arguing that a speech community cannot not be homogeneous when it consists of both native and non-native speakers of a language.

Hymes (1966) defines language competence as knowing what to say and when to say it. Canale and Swain (1980) provide a similar definition, stating that language is the "relationship between linguistic competence (rules and grammar) and socio-linguistics competence (rules for use)" (p. 6). Canale and Swain (1980) also opine that the CLT approach has to "respond to the learner's communication needs" (p. 27). In addition, they highlight that it is important for the CLT approach to be based on the "varieties of the second language that the learner is mostly to be in contact [with" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 27).

As stated in Section 1.9, CLT is the favoured approach to teaching English in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, pragmatic language learning objectives in the era of globalisation place a higher priority on integrated and dynamic multi-skilled teaching methods with a focus on meaningful communication and the development of learners' communicative competence. These matters thus require a more detailed look.

The CLT approach is considered to be more of a teaching approach than a teaching method (see Brown, 1994; Celce-Murcia, 2014; Richards, 2006) and focuses on

language use (function) and meaning instead of form (internal grammatical structures). This approach has been praised (see Brown, 1994; Celce-Murcia, 2014; Richards, 2006) for its student-centred approach and for providing authentic materials based on an analysis of student needs. In the CLT classroom, the teacher is the facilitator and the students and learners are the negotiators. Lessons encourage students to partake in activities and make it interesting for students by acting out scenes from real-life situations, such as visiting the doctor, ordering a meal and filling out forms.

Integrated teaching forms the basis of language learning in CLT classrooms. An integrated approach in the context of language instruction refers to the teaching of reading, writing, listening and speaking abilities concurrently, such as when activities are used in a class to link speaking and listening to reading and writing (Richards et al.,1985). Kecira and Shilaku (2014) explain that in typical perspectives on contemporary language curricula, the teaching of reading is frequently linked to instruction in writing and vocabulary. In addition, teachers frequently believe that it is easy to transition from teaching reading and grammar to teaching writing; and a straightforward matter to connect the teaching of speaking skills to the teaching of listening, pronunciation and cross-cultural pragmatics.

However, in practice, in some CLT classes, discrete and isolated language teaching practices are frequently a mainstay of English language learning classrooms (Hinkel, 2010). For example, Hinkel (2010) explains that teachers focus on a single or discrete aspect of the language such as speaking, or writing and once the teachers feel that students have mastered enough of the skill; the teacher integrates that skill into what is deemed as meaningful interaction and communication.

Discrete learning, which concentrates on an atomised or single language ability or element, is the opposite of integrated learning. Hinkel (2010) argues that discrete teaching may benefit learners to master a certain skill in advance of the teacher switching to integrated teaching. Aponte-de-Hanna (2015), however, explains that discrete teaching fails to develop communicative skills. A discrete method is ineffective in an adult ESL setting where the goal is to facilitate learning through student engagement with authentic texts and experiences. Students must possess a vast array of vocabulary in order to study and grasp the rules of grammar or the

structure of sentences if both discrete learning and integrated learning are occur. Moreover, they must comprehend both word meanings and sentence structures when reading. In order to talk and write, students must have a wide vocabulary; be able to pronounce terms well; and understand how to stress words.

To sum up, integrated learning allows students to learn English skills concurrently whereas discrete learning enables students to master a single language skill or component. Discrete learning does not enable students to apply what they have learnt in the real world (Aponte-de-Hanna, 2015).

For all the benefits of the CLT approach to be realised, it has to be used correctly. In practice, EFL teachers frequently focus more on the structural memorising of sentences and structured dialogue than on meaning – which is something that fails to equip students for meaningful language use in real-life communicative scenarios with native speakers.

Despite its strengths, there are also inherent drawbacks to the CLT approach in an EFL context, a main one being that students are interacting with peers rather than the teacher. This leads to a focus on fluency rather than accuracy. Errors by students may go unnoticed by the teacher; and corrections from peers may be inadequate or non-existent (Didenko & Pichugova, 2016; Wallace, 2003). In addition, students with a low level of proficiency may find it difficult to participate in speaking activities and may consequently lose confidence. The approach has also been criticised for its lack of creativity (see Brown, 1994; Celce-Murcia, 2014; Richards, 2006). Moreover, although it is student-centred, a language institution's curricula may demand that students use the language specified by the course books. In a case such as this, most students and learners will not learn the language according to their specific needs; and teaching the target language becomes a set procedure instead (Didenko & Pichugova, 2016). An example of this would be students having simulated, memorised conversations and responses without any original and/or natural exchanges or meaning (Brown, 1994; Celce-Murcia, 2014; Richards, 2006). Another critique of the CLT approach is its focus on learner acquisition of the target language culture and the limited opportunities created for learners to draw on their own cultural and personal resources in the classroom. This would then mean that

learners are not given the opportunity to express their own identities within language learning (Wallace, 2003).

Norton (2010) argues that even though the CLT approach allows for communication and has rules of implementation and scenarios for modelling everyday speaking encounters, these rules and scenarios are not necessarily what the learners need. The reason is that CLT does not allow the student freedom to have control over meaning-making or to take ownership of learning. In addition, Norton (2000, 2010) argues, what is considered meaningful by the teacher may not be meaningful for the student. For example, I explained above that CLT in an EFL context creates certain everyday-life scenarios for students to practise, such as that of visiting the doctor. Norton (2000), however, provides her participant Martina as an example of a learner who practised these CLT set scenarios and was dismayed when it became necessary to apply what had been taught in class to real life. Martina explained that "after the ESL course when I had the interview, they asked me very different questions, the ones that we didn't study in school and I was very surprised" (Norton, 2000, p. 136). Martina elaborated on this experience in the following words:

> Ya, I was there. I had interview about two hours long. They want to know everything about me. They asked different questions. I never heard these question. Some question was 'What I will do if the boss was shouting at me.' And I was very surprised. I thought 'My boss never, never shouted at me.' And I don't know, I said 'If I do something bad, I try to do better. And I will apologize.' But I don't know because never, never, I don't think about it (Norton, 2000, p. 136).

The above is an example of why Norton (2000) deems it necessary to move beyond the CLT approach as it stands. Essentially for Norton, this is because CLT does not "address relations of power between language learners and target language speakers" (p. 138).

Palmer (1968) advocates a third approach, the multiple line of approach, also known as the eclectic approach. He is of the opinion that by using this approach, a teacher will be able to adapt any method into a syllabus to provide learners with everything they need to achieve competency in all four language skills. Prabhu (1990, 1992) explains that there is no 'best' method to employ in language teaching. In fact, most EFL teachers accept that there is no best approach (Prabhu, 1990). In line with the eclectic approach in EFL, teachers pick and choose different steps from various approaches such as the grammar-translation method, the direct method and the CLT

approach, and tailor their lessons to the needs of the students (Palmer, 1968; Prabhu, 1990, 1992). Prabhu (1990, 1992) argues that there is some truth in every method of language teaching. At the same time, Prabhu (1990, 1992) warns, when certain aspects of the different methods are merged to form an eclectic approach in the hope that they will add up to something that is true and beneficial, the teacher may simply be advocating "an act of gambling or a hedging of bets" (Prabhu, 1990, p. 168). This means that teachers need to select elements from the various approaches carefully and sensitively, to ensure that they meet the needs of their students.

## 2.9 Conclusion

Based on the research provided in this chapter, it is evident why Norton (2000) suggests that researchers ought to start focusing on the relationship between students and their identities. The literature in this chapter argues that a learner's identity is not straightforward and fixed: it is complex, multifaceted and subject to change. Norton's (1997, 2000, 2006) studies highlight the importance of a learner's investment in progress in a second language. Taylor's (2010, 2013) studies introduce and place emphasis on the four elements termed 'the quadripolar model of identity'. The model shows how certain behaviours can be generated to create a channel between an actual self and a future self. Also covered is the manner in which identity can be broken up further, into the four branches of the self-system. These four branches have an impact on learners' and students' progress, based on the distinctive outlook that results from the unique manner in which they intertwine in every individual.

The literature discussed in this chapter also provides the reasons why Norton (2013) argues that "if learners have a sense of ownership over meaning-making, they can engage actively" (p. 92). Ownership over meaning-making allows students to participate actively in learning, and to do so in a positive, inclusive classroom environment. This follows Norton Peirce's (1995) assertion that language is not a neutral means of communication but has to be "understood with reference to its social meaning" (p. 13).

The classroom environment is an important aspect of learning. Students learn more efficiently when there is a sense of trust, of belonging, and of freedom to express one's thoughts (Dorman et al., 2006). The classroom environment also plays an important role in learner identity where learners are active participants in learning and in turn, they construct their identities (Van Lier, 2008). Norton (2013) further advises that as second-language instructors, we should be mindful of choosing the most appropriate pedagogical methods – ones that will eventually "help students develop the capacity for imagining a range of identities for the future" (p. 92).

In the next chapter (Chapter Three) I explain the research methodology used in this study; the reasons behind my data-collection strategies; and the sampling choices made.

# CHAPTER THREE

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the relevant current literature to place my study within the scope of language-learning identities in a Saudi Arabian context. In this chapter, I describe and put forward my reasoning for choosing a qualitative case study in order to answer my research question. I also describe the research participants, the sampling and data-collection tools used, and the data transcription and analysis. Finally, I discuss the trustworthiness and credibility of my study and the obstacles I faced in the course of conducting it.

I use italics when quoting directly from the data supplied by my participants.

## 3.1 A qualitative approach

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), Fraenkel et. al (2011), and Creswell (2009, 2013) argue that, to produce a study that offers a deeper understanding of the issue that is being examined, it is essential for researchers to choose the best approach for their investigations. Huang (2012) explains that researchers must place great emphasis on finding a link between the appropriate research method and the relevance of the study.

Creswell (2013) defines qualitative research in the social sciences as follows:

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes (p. 44).

A strong point of qualitative research is its interpretative nature, which means that at its core it "attempts to develop insights into the investigated phenomenon from the patterns emerging from the data observed by the researcher" (Huang, 2012, p. 36). Creswell (2009) explains that "qualitative research is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). In addition, Mouton (1996) highlights, the planned features of a study

using qualitative research are normally worked out and tweaked during the progression of the study. This means that the original planning and structure a researcher has in mind naturally changes as the data starts to suggest results different from those originally envisaged. With all of this in mind, and because this study consists of investigating learners with the objective of exploring their identities, feelings and fears, I applied the qualitative method.

## 3.2 Use of the case study approach

Owing to the questions to be investigated in my research, I felt that a case study would be the most appropriate type of investigation to use, especially since the research focuses on "the particular rather than the general" (Thomas, 2011, p. 3). (See below for more on this.)

Sturman (1997) states that a "case study is a general term for the exploration of an individual, group or phenomenon" (p. 61). Creswell (2009) explains that a case study involves the investigation of a confined system in order to observe a situation over a period of time. Merriam's (1998) definition of a case study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. xiii). Simons (2009) defines a case study as "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in … real life" (p. 21). Simons (2009) further emphasises that the ultimate goal of a case study is to "generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), programme, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice, and civil or community action" (p. 21). Because they focus on the "specific rather than the general" (Thomas, 2011, p. 3), case studies seek to provide a deeper understanding of the problem at hand. Case studies also give a researcher the opportunity to reach a deeper understanding of – and do justice to – the participants' perspectives, and to achieve clearer and more insightful interpretation of the data. In addition, case studies make it possible for the researcher to promote better life opportunities for people by putting forward recommendations following analysis and consideration of the data (Thomas, 2011).

## 3.3 Data-collection methods

An integral part in all research fields, data collection is one of the most vital aspects of research. Collecting data is a procedure whereby the researcher gathers and measures the information gained from selected participants of interest. Empirical research projects depend on data collection that enables the researcher to answer pertinent research questions, to test proposed, important hypotheses and to evaluate outcomes (Kabir, 2016).

### 3.3.1 Sample choice and size

For this research, I initially wanted to conduct the data collection at a university in Riyadh. However, I was informed that my application to collect data was being denied on the basis that the pertinent committee felt that I might misinterpret the responses of the candidates; and that the candidates might face discomfort regarding identity issues that might surface for them or concerning social issues within their respective communities. This is a common problem faced by researchers in Saudi Arabia. For example, Al-Asmrai (2016) describes how researchers are curbed – and how they need to constantly adapt their frameworks to agree with the religious and social aspects of educational research. In addition, Al-Asmrai (2016) explains how difficult it is for men to include women participants in their studies. Al-Asmrai (2016) also explains that if a research project goes against the religious, social or cultural fundamentals of Saudi Arabia, the study is stopped. Furthermore, there are many rules about taboo topics teachers are not allowed to discuss in class or during research. For example, I was rejected for data collection at the university in Riyadh unless I moved my focus of research outside my proposed topic of identity and language learning. This shows how topics that could bring to light a change in the identities of Saudi Arabians are stopped, so that research cannot continue. I then contacted various universities and international schools I had previously worked at, and was granted permission by an international school in Riyadh.

Purposive sampling was the method opted for in this research. Fifteen participants (ten men and five women) who met the criteria initially set out were chosen for the study. I looked out for participants who were from different cultures and had different experiences of learning English. During the data-collection stages, 10 students

withdrew (seven men and two women) owing to mid-terms and preparation for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The end of the data-collection period resulted in complete data collection (two interviews and two narrative writings for each man, and two narrative writings for each woman) from the five participants described below. I do not view this as an issue, since the nature of the research allows for small sample sizes: the emphasis is on providing in-depth information on the life choices and experiences of the participants (Bryman, 2012). Researchers over the years (see Baker & Edwards, 2012) have argued as to how many participants a researcher should consider as 'sufficient', with the answer coming down to 'it depends'. It comes down to various aspects, such as "the quality of data, the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the amount of useful information obtained from each participant, the use of shadowed data, and the qualitative method and study design used" (Morse, 2000, p. 1).

As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, it is difficult to include women in interviews for a study. Al-Asmrai (2016) says:

> The social constraints placed on women in the Saudi culture further act as a barrier to cross-gender communication in research, because cross-gender interaction outside of the immediate family is strictly forbidden in Saudi Arabia. This can be defined as gender segregation, in which a man and a woman cannot be alone with each other unless they are related. Specific rules also dictate that men cannot look women in the face, although women are allowed to look at men. This further limits effort to engage in any research that necessitates cross-gender communication, for example, interview-based research (p. 5).

Because of the current situation in Saudi Arabia (men are not allowed on women's campuses), the participants I selected for the interviews were exclusively men students. This meant that if I wanted to include women in my research project, I had to collect their data via narrative biographies. I was granted permission to have men and women participants for the narrative-writing component.

### 3.3.2 Participants' background

In this section, I give a brief introduction to each participant.

The three men live in Riyadh and the two women live in a small town outside Riyadh. Riyadh, pronounced Ar-Riyadh (literally meaning 'the Gardens'), is Saudi Arabia's capital city as well as its financial and economic hub. Sitting approximately 600m

above sea level, it is the largest city on the Arabian Peninsula. Its 7.6 million people make it the most populous city in Saudi Arabia (stats.gov.sa, 2017).

Table 3.1 gives the five participants' profiles. The participants were all born in Saudi Arabia and ranged from 17 to 21 years in age. The male participants consisted of Salim, who was 18 years old and Egyptian; Sayed, who was also 18 and had lived all his life in Saudi Arabia but had British citizenship; and Shaheed, who was 17 years old and Saudi Arabian. The women were two Saudi Arabian nationals: Nurah, who was 17 years old; and Asma, who was 21 years old.

Table 3.1 Participant profiles by gender, age and nationality

| **Pseudonym** | **Gender** | **Age** | **Nationality** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Salim | Male | 18 | Egyptian |
| Sayed | Male | 18 | British |
| Shaheed | Male | 17 | Saudi Arabian |
| Nurah | Female | 17 | Saudi Arabian |
| Asma | Female | 21 | Saudi Arabian |

Source: Own compilation from study data.

In the opening questions of the first interview with the male participants, which acted as an ice breaker, Salim, Sayed and Shaheed discussed their ages, likes, dislikes, hobbies and future aspirations. The second interview acted as a stepping stone for the second writing narrative, by encouraging the three participants to think critically and be more reflective. From the responses in both interviews, it was clear that while the male participants all acknowledged that English would play a huge role in their future studies, they were not yet aiming at any set career. In contrast, in their written narratives, the female participants clearly stated their aspirations in terms of future careers as well as the important role the English language would play in achieving those aspirations.

### 3.3.3 Salim

Salim was 18 years old. He was Egyptian by nationality, even though he had been born in Saudi Arabia and had lived there all his life. He had been attending an international school for 13 years and was in his final year. He described himself in these words: *a normal high-school student; there is nothing exceptional in my life*. He enjoyed TV shows that were *influential, with a lot of meaning*. He also enjoyed watching Anime (a style of Japanese animation) series and football, playing games and following influencers on social media. His only dislike was people being negative, so he tried to always be his true and natural self by being as positive as he could be. He took his studies seriously as he believed that the higher the grade he got, the more opportunities he would have applying to the best universities. However, like many other final-year students in Saudi Arabia (based on my personal experience teaching here in Saudi Arabia), he did not yet know what career path he wanted to pursue. He did, however, clarify that English was an important factor in his future career.

### 3.3.4 Sayed

Born and raised in Saudi Arabia, Sayed was a British citizen and his home language was English. His parents had come to Saudi Arabia to work and had been there for the past 20 years. He had been to England on a few occasions for a vacation, but the majority of his time had been spent in Saudi Arabia. He was 18 years old. His parents had initially enrolled him at an Arabic-language school since all his friends were Arabs and he was fluent in Arabic. However, he wanted to be in an English-speaking school, so was enrolled at an international school at the age of six. He had attended three different international schools in the past 12 years. Even though one of his hobbies was following football, the majority of his hobbies were academic. For example, they included mathematics and computer sciences because *it is such a broad subject, you can learn it completely by [your]self.* Like Salim, Sayed did not yet know what his career path would be. But he did know that he would return to England to begin university.

### 3.3.5 Shaheed

The only Saudi Arabian among the three men, 17-year-old Shaheed viewed himself as an ambitious yet simple person who enjoyed the small things in life. He tried to extract the best from bad situations, and was a determined student who was paving his way towards university studies. He used to be a shy person, but over the years had developed into a more confident speaker. He enjoyed gaming, music, chess and reading. He loved reading classical English literature, especially poetry, and had written a few poems himself. He did not have any particular dislikes, as he felt that all unlikeable things could be ignored.

### 3.3.6 Nurah

Nurah was a 17-year-old Saudi Arabian woman who liked to keep to herself. She lived outside Riyadh and described herself as coming from a very conservative family. Owing to her cultural background and her family, she said, she used to be a closed person who only spoke when spoken to. She would limit herself to short conversations and had very few friends. She only spoke to those she felt had similar interests to hers. She explained that people used to question her decision to study English and kept asking *why would she choose to learn something that contradicts with her personality and that does not suit her?* But since learning English, Nurah believed, she was friendlier, strong and could be patient in any situation.

Nurah's hobbies included cooking, gardening and photography. She also enjoyed watching movies, Anime, documentaries, listening to music, and following painters of oil paintings. She had overcome her fear of public speaking and said: *I have realised that the fear of talking to the public was just an illusion, something unreal. I was capable of doing that (speaking in public) and this ability was in me since the beginning, I just did not discover that until I learned English.* As a result of overcoming what she had felt had been lacking in her, she wanted to enrol in an English and translation department as she aspired to be an English teacher. She wanted to ensure that her students would not have the same negative experiences she had had with her teachers while learning English.

### 3.3.7 Asma

Asma was a 21-year-old married Saudi Arabian woman living in a small town outside Riyadh. She spoke four languages: Arabic, English, Urdu and Japanese. She could write only in Arabic and English, which she put down to the fact that she had learnt Urdu and Japanese from TV. She said that she used to be a shy child who kept to herself because she was too afraid and nervous to speak to anyone. But after learning English and getting compliments from others, she had gained the confidence to speak. She enjoyed drawing, and reading novels and history books. She loved volleyball, loud music and different types of tea. Her only dislikes were traditional music and traditional coffee. Asma believed that in order to enjoy life to the fullest and to achieve her dreams, she needed English. She aspired to be a nurse, and in Saudi Arabia the medical fields are taught exclusively in English.

### 3.3.8 Interviews

Dornyei (2007) says that in the field of linguistics, the research interview is the most frequently used method in qualitative research. This is because interviews "hold out the possibility of understanding the lived world from the perspective of the participants involved" (Richards, 2009, p. 187). Holstein and Gubrium (2003) advise researchers to make greater use of the interview as a research tool that allows focus to be placed both on what is said and on how it is said. By this they understand that researchers should not concentrate solely on interview content but should also make sure that they pay attention to "the interactional and narrative procedures" of interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 68). Many other researchers (Brink, 1993; Cohen et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2007) advocate for the researcher to be more interactional. In doing so, Wortham et al. (2011) point out:

> interviewers can sometimes learn about habitual positions that people take in everyday life, and this can yield useful information about research topics. Interviewees communicate two types of information, and interviewers should attend to both (p. 49).

Being interactional allows for a constant, joint learning experience between researcher and participant. This permits a researcher to focus on the outcome and notice if any new concepts or theories arise. In addition, this may help maintain the

integrity of the research project; and ensure that critical thinking is implemented in the analysis of the joint learning process.

With the above in mind, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the selected male participants and made use of an interview guide. The interviews were semi-structured, for two reasons: to allow the participants to be expressive instead of simply ticking the boxes to a set selection of answers; and not to “limit the depth and breadth of the respondent’s story” (Dornyei, 2007, p. 136). Creswell’s (2007) advice of “maximum variation” was followed so as to document “diverse variations and identify common patterns” (p. 127). Participants were interviewed on two separate occasions, one before the first writing activity and one after the second writing activity. I was unable to conduct in-person interviews because of the Covid-19 pandemic and was forced to communicate with participants over WhatsApp and Zoom. This meant that the first and second interviews as well as the first and seconds narrative writings were done completely online. The group work that led to the narrative writings was also done online. Furthermore, I was not given permission to utilise video calling or to video record the participants during the interviews.

### 3.3.9 Writing activity – a narrative enquiry

Over time, narratives have become an essential tool in identity research. This is because, as Riessman (2008) explains, storytelling constructs identity. This is seen in Bamberg (2012), where speakers develop and create their narrative practices by constructing change over time. Schiffrin (1996) demonstrates how people construct their different identities through the structure, the performance and – most importantly – the content of their narratives. Another source to note is De Fina and Perrino (2011), who say that participants are creating and giving readers insight to their identities in the form of storytelling.

According to Pavlenko (2007), narrative enquiries became a popular tool for gathering data in the field of linguistics in the decade or so prior to the publication of his book. This rise in popularity was caused, he said, by the fact that narrative enquiry offered three dimensions to research. As Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explain, this three-dimensional narrative inquiry space – which encompasses interaction, continuity and situation – involves storytellers in sharing their

experiences. Interaction allows the storytellers to reflect on their feelings and hopes. Continuity allows them to look at past experiences while connecting these experiences to current experiences. Situation involves the places storytellers find themselves in while having these experiences, which adds depth to their stories. Pavlenko (2007) elaborates that the three contributions autobiographical narrative provides are “insights to people’s private worlds [that] highlight new connections between various learning processes and phenomena ... [and] constitute a valuable information source for historic and diachronic sociolinguistic research in contexts" (pp. 164–165).

Narratives and storytelling are used in many aspects of daily life. Vásquez (2011) states that narratives, as an educational tool in teaching English as a foreign language, demonstrate how one’s identity and daily life can be integrated into the learning process. It allows students to draw on their lived experiences in self-reflective ways and to express their personal voices. In doing so, it allows them to merge their experiences with their learning.

In addition, Mendelowitz and Ferreira (2007) add, personal narratives are multifaceted and may allow students to assess, evaluate and reflect on their thoughts. Whereas storytelling in its simplest form entails speaking a story, reflective storytelling allows participants to sift through their experiences and come to the realisations of self-evaluation based on their various experiences. This may further result in the development of identity as well as linguistic and intellectual capabilities in students, while simultaneously promoting creativity, interaction and identification with new concepts. Mendelowitz and Ferreira (2007) further show that narratives also enable students to reflect on their past experiences and to identify the significance of their recollections in language learning. This means that, as students write their narratives, they consciously reflect on their experiences and learn the concepts of reflective storytelling.

Pavlenko (2007) further says that, with the increase in demand for autobiographical narratives, “novice researchers often do not know what to do” (p. 163) once the data has been collected. Pavlenko (2007) also points out that the collection of the data is not as simple as it seems. A participant’s second language may be at a low level, which could lead to the story being told in a way not intended by the participant. To

combat this, Pavlenko (2007) suggests that “in studies of subject and life reality where the speakers’ L2 proficiency is low and the L1 is shared with the researcher, the choice of L1 as the language of data collection is justified” (p. 172). Thus, if any of my participants had shown a weakness in English during their interviews, and since I speak Arabic, I would have allowed them to write their narratives in their native language. They would therefore have been able to express themselves in the intended manner. However, my participants showed a high level of proficiency in their second language (English). With this in mind, they were asked to write the narrative of their language biographies – and how they viewed their identities previously in relation to their current selves – in either language.

### 3.3.10 Data-collection procedure

In order to achieve maximum data collection, I implemented the following for the interviews and narratives:

***Interviews***

There were two Zoom audio interviews (see Appendices A and B for the interview schedules), for the men only. One was scheduled for the second week of attendance and the other was scheduled after the first narrative writing, which was in the fourth week of attendance. The interviews allowed me to gather first-hand data and, in turn, to understand how the students constructed their identities. The initial interview was intended to provide an idea of how students represented and viewed their identities in relation to Arabic and English learning. The final interview clarified points they had raised in the first narrative; and whether English had impacted their identities and culture. The second interview also acted as a way for participants to think critically in order to extract as much reflectivity as possible. I prompted them into thinking of ways to answer the second narrative, to ensure that they were not shy or afraid of any consequences and would provide a faithful reflection of their identities.

***Narratives***

There were two occasions on which the participants had to write their narratives (see Appendices C and D for the instructions to the narrative writing tasks). Students were given the narrative prompts listed below and completed their responses online

because I was not granted permission for any face-to-face interaction. The first narrative was written in the third week of attendance and consisted of their previous learning. It commenced after the first interview. Students were asked to write a narrative to the following question: What personal experiences (positive and negative) have you encountered on your English-language learning journey? They were given the following prompts as a guide to writing their narrative:

- The **positive** experiences you had and why they were positive.
- The **negative** experiences you had and why they were negative.
- You can tell me who was with you or caused you to have these experiences.
- **When** you encountered these experiences (age, stage in school, etc.)
- **Where** you encountered these experiences (home, school, abroad, etc.)
- How did these experiences make you feel? (Write as many adjectives as possible).

The way the participants structured their narratives gave me an understanding of what they believed were key aspects in influencing their learning of English and the identities they have constructed.

The second narrative was written in the sixth week of attendance and based on their current experiences of language learning. This allowed participants to get a feel for what they were going to write based on their experiences in learning through the medium of English. The question was: What impact do you feel learning English has had on your personal and educational life? They were given the following prompts as a guide to writing their narrative:

- How you viewed yourself before you studied English?
- The way you view yourself now that you study English.
- Do you think that learning English has shaped or changed your specific identity? If yes, how? If no, why not?

- Do you feel that your thinking about culture and modern life has changed now that you study English? If yes, how? If no, why not?

The second narrative writing allowed me to understand how their language learning had influenced their identities in terms of future plans for life; and how their identities had been reshaped by the learning experience (if at all). The aim of using interviews as well as narratives was to ensure triangulation of data. Triangulation allows a researcher to use multiple data collection methods to make sure that the data are thorough, enriched, robust and well-built (Patton, 1999). In addition, the aim of the first interview and narrative writing was for participants to describe their positive and negative experiences of learning English. The aim of the second interview and narrative writing was for my participants to give a more reflective and analytical account of their English-language learning experiences and how they felt it might have impacted their identities. Furthermore, using interviews and narrative writings for my data collection allowed me to gather spoken and written responses from my participants. This allowed my participants to express themselves in different ways, and enabled me to triangulate my data.

In addition, I initially planned to make use of code switching to allow my participants to bridge the gap if they could not properly express themselves in English at certain points. However, as stated above, my participants showed a high level of proficiency in English, so there was no need for code switching in their narratives. The reason it would have been allowed was previous research conducted by Poplack (2000), which shows the importance of permitting participants to express themselves freely in their mother tongue. Poplack (2001) explains that code switching is “the mixing, by bilinguals (or multilinguals), of two or more languages in discourse, often with no change of interlocutor or topic” (p. 2062). In a different definition, Myers-Scotton (1993) says that code switching is the “use of two or more languages in the same conversation, usually within the same conversational turn, or even within the same sentence of that turn” (p. 47). Another reason I would have allowed code switching is the research that has shown that participants use code switching to make use of certain phrases and words suited for a specific language. In addition, it allows participants to put emphasis on what they would like to convey as they may lack the specific terminology in the second language (Mabule, 2015). However, no participant

opted to use Arabic in their interviews or writings to convey meaning and ideas. They were completely confident that they could relay their thoughts and ideas, and express themselves the way they wanted to, in the English language.

I also had to ensure that my participants were not influenced by the group work taking place before the narrative writings. However, as was clear upon analysing the data, not only did my participants bring new information, but they also felt confident about English and also believed that they could express themselves better in the English language based on the nature of the research project.

### 3.3.11 Ethical considerations

Prior to embarking on the actual data-collection processes and procedures, an application clarifying the nature and scope of the study was submitted to the Ethics Committees of 1) Wits University (see Appendix E for that institution's clearance certificate) and 2) the research site – the aforementioned international high school in Riyadh. Data were collected only once I had been granted approval by both committees. I then proceeded to conduct the study, adhering to the instructions and procedures outlined by the Ethics Committees. In addition, as the researcher, I made it a point to ensure the participants were well informed and understood the nature and aim of the research. Moreover, I was fully aware that my duty was to ensure that I informed all participants that their participation was voluntary; and made sure that I obtained informed written consent. In addition, I made it clear to the participants that they had the right to terminate the research process at any time and without any repercussions. I reassured the participants that all data collected were confidential, and ensured that I obtained their permission for the audio interviews.

### 3.3.12 Data transcription and analysis

As highlighted earlier (see Section 3.3.8), I had two Zoom audio interviews for the men participants. The audios were then transcribed and saved in a Word document for easier analysis. This allowed me to familiarise myself with the participants' responses and get a feel for what codes and themes were arising. The reason I chose to transcribe my audio interviews was that this stage is "a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology" (Bird, 2005, p. 227).

Block (2013) explains that for narrative research, it is best to analyse data using the thematic approach. This is because the focus is on the content of the narratives and the meanings that can be extracted from this. With this in mind, I split each narrative writing task into three parts. For parts one and two, students brainstormed possible responses in groups. This was used as a springboard to the third part, so that students were familiar with the kind of content needed for the narrative writing.

With regard to analysing the data, I used Braun and Clark's (2006) six-phased framework for thematic analysis as my starting point. I then examined the comments of various scholars such as Creswell (2013) and Saldaña (2009) on the six phases of Braun and Clark (2006) and took their advice on board. The six steps in Braun and Clark (2006), as indicated in Table 3.2, and the commentary from various scholars, guided me onto the correct path to extract as much meaning as possible from the data.

Table 3.2 Braun and Clark's six phases of thematic analysis

| |
|---|
| Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the data |
| Phase 2: Generating initial codes |
| Phase 3: Identifying themes |
| Phase 4: Reviewing themes |
| Phase 5: Defining and naming themes |
| Phase 6: Producing the report |

Source: Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*, 77–101.

1. Once the audio was transcribed and the narratives were received, I used Creswell's (2013) advice to carry out an initial reading providing an overall sense of what my participants had said. This important stage allowed me to

familiarise myself with the responses of the participants, and this acted as a stepping stone for the coding process.

2. Saldaña (2009) gives a definition of a code as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Keeping this in mind, I thoroughly read and re-read the transcripts and narrative writings to identify key codes. I used a mixture of inductive and deductive coding. This meant that I had a theoretical framework in mind, and a set of codes and themes written down, based on my research questions, and that I looked for matching pieces of information. At the same time, I went through each line looking for new codes that would create new themes. I did this manually, using hard copies and markers of different colours to identify my set codes and themes (deductive coding) and a yellow marker for any new codes I came across (inductive coding) (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

3. Keeping Saldaña’s (2009) advice in mind, I bunched my codes together to form themes and sub-themes. Successfully extracting themes and sub-themes meant that the codes had been analysed and categorised into appropriate segments; and revealed the analytical stages of data analysis (Saldaña 2009). At this stage I also looked for key links between the data and key concepts from the literature review. This allowed me to see how my participants’ responses fitted in with the theoretical framework of the research.

4. In Phase 4, I ensured that I read and re-read my codes and themes, to determine whether the correct codes were grouped into the correct themes and sub-themes.

5. In Phase 5, I ensured that each theme and sub-theme was appropriately named and defined. I made sure that I knew what each theme entailed.

6. For the final stage, I reported on and discussed my findings on the themes and sub-themes the data provided.

Utilising these phases allowed me to establish an adequate database and enabled me to gather set themes and sub-themes. Furthermore, these phases ensured that I

had substantial knowledge of the data because, as Korhonen (2014) explains, “reading the narrative first as a whole and then identifying themes based on the content reflects the temporality of the narrative and offers cognitive evidence of the participants’ experiences of language learning” (p. 72).

### 3.3.13 Trustworthiness

Noble and Smith (2015) argue that “reliability” and “validity” are methods used in quantitative research and there is ongoing debate about applying and adding those terms to qualitative research. However, Noble and Smith (2015) point out that there are other terms that are used in qualitative research to ensure reliability and validity. With Noble and Smith (2015) in mind, I opted for trustworthiness, as this concept comprises transparency, credibility, transferability and triangulation.

Webster and Mertova (2007) and Bryman (2012) suggest that trustworthiness is an essential part of qualitative research. Because the data collection took place in a more “reserved” culture, I had to guarantee that what my participants said would not put them in a bad light in society. Establishing this with my participants allowed them to engage freely in group discussions and to express themselves without fear of any backlash. As previously mentioned in Section 3.3.1, I had initially intended to conduct my study at a university in Riyadh, but my application was rejected on the basis that the committee felt I could misinterpret the responses of the candidates and, at the same time, that the participants might face social issues within their respective communities. This means that the committee was concerned that the responses of my participants could lead them to being ostracised by their social circles based on their responses. With this in mind, I had to tread carefully to extract as much information as possible, but at the same time adhere to the culture and ways of the Saudi Arabian people. Owing to this, I ensured that steps 1 to 4 listed below were implemented, so that my research would be authentic and accurate; and would fall under the parameter of trustworthiness.

1. Transparency: I made sure that the research aims and goals were transparent to every participant. This was done by providing each participant with detailed information sheets explaining the nature of the study and the steps taken to collect the data. I also provided each participant with consent sheets for the

interviews and narrative writings. In addition, I explained to each participant that they were allowed to withdraw at any stage of the study.

2. Credibility: I cross-checked the data and findings with participants, to ensure that what I had them saying was what they had meant to say. This was because there were occasions when I was not entirely sure of the meaning a participant wanted to convey. I expressed my interpreted meanings to the participants and altered them as necessary. In addition, participants had the opportunity to read my data-collection chapters to ensure they were accurately represented.
3. Transferability: This refers to the extent to which the results could be transferred to other contexts with other participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Owing to the nature of the tasks (group sessions) undertaken prior to the narrative writings, I considered how truthful their responses were and whether their responses might have been influenced by the procedures of the brainstorming sessions. The writings showed that their responses to the questions differed, although there were some underlying similarities in the conveyed meaning.
4. Triangulation: Patton (1999) highlights the importance of methods of triangulation. This is because these methods aim to provide a deep understanding of the content analysed. Patton (1999) explains that triangulation is the use of various data-collection methods in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research project. I used interviews and narrative writing to ensure that triangulation of data was achieved. This made it possible for me to get spoken and written responses – and for my participants to express themselves in different ways.

### 3.3.14 Obstacles to the study

The biggest obstacle was time. The times set out (by me, and based on the schedule of the teaching semester) meant that the data were collected in a little more than two months. It would have been much better if I had been able to conduct the research and data collection over a longer period since – as we saw in the literature review (Section 2.1) – identities are constructed over time and undergo constant change. In addition, I was able to interview only the male participants. Because of the Covid-19

pandemic, I was not granted permission to conduct face-to-face interviews and had to have all correspondence with participants via WhatsApp and Zoom. In addition, I was not granted permission to use video calling during the interviews or to video record the participants. I feel that this denied me the opportunity to pick up any nuances my participants may have presented. I feel that another obstacle to my study was Saudi Arabian culture, as I was not granted permission to interview the women participants and had to rely on gathering data from their narrative writings only. Furthermore, owing to the above obstacles, I could not conduct a pilot study. I struggled to get a research site approved for my data collection, and when I finally found a research site, I started with 15 participants and ended with five. In addition, Covid-19 made it harder to conduct a pilot study as almost all schools were delivering classes online. However, I do not view the omission of a pilot study as an issue because I became confident that I could achieve the trustworthiness my study needed through my triangulation of data.

Despite the obstacles in terms of women participants, I am still grateful to the research site for allowing me to have women participants. It is extremely rare for male researchers to have women participants in their studies in Saudi Arabia.

## 3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter (Chapter Three) I have explained my reasoning for choosing a qualitative case study – and also my data-collection procedures – for my research. I have described the sampling and data-collection tools to be employed. I have, further, explained my procedures for transcribing the audio interviews; and the approach I used to interpret the data collected. Lastly, I have given brief biographies of my participants; explained the ethical considerations taken into account; and described the obstacles to my study.

In the next chapter (Chapter Four), I discuss the interpretation and findings of the data I collected. The first theme I discuss in the chapter is investment in English and future career choices. The next theme to have come up through the data is that of the right to speak. The data also generated the theme of a feeling of despair. Ending the chapter is the theme of language learning outside the classroom. Chapter Four

supplies the themes extracted from the data and answers the question: How have these experiences shaped their learning and their view of English?

# CHAPTER FOUR

# IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

In Chapter Three, I supplied a brief biography of my participants and discussed my data-collection procedures. These procedures entailed two online interviews and two narrative writings for the men participants and two narrative writings for the women participants. In addition, in Chapter Three, I provided my reasoning for the tools I used and explained how I had ensured the trustworthiness and credibility of my data through triangulation. I also discussed the obstacles to my study and why I did not conduct a pilot study.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I present the findings from the qualitative data collected from my participants, three of them men (Salim, Sayed and Shaheed), and two of them women (Nurah and Asma). In this chapter, I present data from the two interviews I had with the men (I was not given permission to interview the women owing to cultural norms) and from the two narrative writing pieces for both men and women.

My research question was: In what ways, if any, has the learning of English impacted the identities of Saudi Arabian learners?

My sub-questions were:

1. What linguistic and emotional conflicts and effects have learners encountered by transitioning into a new language community as EFL learners?
2. How have these experiences constructed or impacted their present and future identities?
3. How have these experiences shaped their learning and their view of English?

This chapter aims to answer the main research question and sub-questions 1 and 3. In addition, in this chapter, the data has allowed me to discuss the following themes:

- Investment in English and future career choices
- Learning inside the classroom
- The right to speak (positive experiences)
- A feeling of despair (negative experiences)

- Language learning outside the classroom

## 4.1 Investment and future career choices

Across the data and on many occasions, all my participants expressed their investment in learning English as it related to their future professional and economic expectations. We saw in the literature review (Section 2.6.2) that the ideal self is a state that the learner visualises as the goal for an imagined future. Taylor (2010) explains that "the term ideal is taken to represent the best possible combination of attributes that a person would like to have in the future" (p. 81). Section 2.6.2 also covered Taylor's (2010) explanation that the ideal self is not static: it evolves or is renewed as the individual achieves certain goals set previously. This is done by allowing students to imagine their ideal futures and strive towards achieving their goals. The point was illustrated by Asma, the participant who intended to enhance her speaking abilities in order to become a nurse. She constantly practised her English to develop her speaking abilities. In her first narrative writing, Asma said: *to make my dreams true I need to speak comfortably in English because I want to be a nurse. So, I must learn it and keep learning because the learning process never stops.* Asma's words stressed the importance she placed on English for the realisation of her future self. This importance was demonstrated in her usage of expressions such as *must learn*, *keep learning, the learning process never stops*. Her investment in English was strongly related to her future professional and economic opportunities. This tied in with Taylor's (2010) view that, "the Ideal Self would be differentiated from sheer fantasy by the existence and implementation of a strategy for the attainment of the given desired self" (p. 82). Taylor's view was also seen at work in my participant Salim, who showed that his current self and his future self were void of sheer fantasy. He had reached the point where he viewed his goals as reachable and attainable instead of a far-fetched dream. He showed this by viewing himself (as an English speaker) as *a highly academic person who aims for his future using English. English, I'd say, helped me a lot with universities, strangers, and even on the internet. Therefore, I believe that my current self would be happy to be an English speaker.* In addition, Salim showed how his investment incorporated an educational (*with universities),* a social (*strangers*) and a digital (*on the internet*)

aspect of investment in language learning. Salim also realised his actual self by acknowledging “the dynamics of one’s present-day identity” (Taylor, 2010, p. 85).

Norton’s (2013) concepts of ‘imagined community’ and ‘imagined identity’ make it possible to explain changing investments in, and performances for, future selves (Taylor 2010). The above responses from my participants showed their ambitions to become part of an English-speaking community for future goals. Their imagined communities encompassed both learning and working communities, which, they explained, required English. For example, Asma expressed her future imagined identity as an accomplished English-speaking nurse within her imagined medical community. My participants’ desire for their imagined futures was explained by Norton (2013) as we “imagine ourselves bonded” (p. 8) with our fellow peers “across time and space” (p. 8).

Both during the interviews and in the narrative writing, I noticed that my participants viewed English as a global and dominant language that was needed for their future careers. Salim explained that his future depended on English. My participants also highlighted the various important roles English played in their lives at the time. For example, Salim said, *English sometimes acts as a bridge between people who speak different languages.* Nurah explained that because she had learnt English, she had *managed to find* [her] *interest in this life* while making friends by joining an online community of cookery lovers where she would exchange recipes. Sayed also explained that he gamed online with many players from different parts of the world who spoke different languages, but that the *language of communication that took place was the English language*.

All the participants noted that English acted as a medium of communication in their lives. This was also evidenced in Norton’s (2000) participant, Mai. As I described in the literature review (Section 2.5), Mai acted as the intermediary and translator for her family members when they mingled, by speaking three different languages at times. Norton (2000) explains that Mai had no issues practising English and would be the one to initiate conversations. Something similar could be seen in the case of Asma, when she expressed that *I even have online friends now and they’re from different countries. We all speak English, but it’s not our language*. Asma further

showed her lack of language ownership, as she deemed English not to be her language.

## 4.2 Language learning inside the classroom

### 4.2.1 The right to speak (positive experiences)

As mentioned in Section 2.2, Bourdieu (1977) shows that speakers speak because they want to be "believed, obeyed, respected, [and] distinguished" (p. 648). In addition, the right to speak involves aspects of power that shape and maintain a speaker's position in society. Furthermore, the right to speak reveals 1) how individuals understand situations (such as inclusive classrooms) around them; and 2) the ways in which these situations allow them to take control of their speech and their writing – and to be heard by others. Individuals use the right to speak to establish themselves within the social and the cultural spheres.

When attempting to create a safe classroom environment and encourage the right to speak, Norton (2013) advises, second-language instructors should be mindful of opting for pedagogical methods that will eventually "help students develop the capacity for imagining a range of identities for the future" (p. 92). Norton (2013) thus challenges instructors to consider which classroom practices will be more appropriate in supporting students and learners in the learning of language skills.

All the participants viewed English-language learning as a two-fold activity: in class and out of class. As discussed in Section 2.4, the classroom language-learning environment is an important aspect of learning and plays an important role in the language journey of students. Dorman et al. (2006) argue that students learn more efficiently when they have a sense of trust and belonging, and the opportunity to express their thoughts freely. Van Lier (2008) also states that the classroom environment is an important aspect of constructing identities in situations where learners are active participants in learning.

I showed in Section 2.1 that Norton (2006) considers the sociocultural theory of identity under five characteristics, one of which related to classroom practice. Part of the classroom environment is to ensure that students have ownership of meaning-making (and of English), and are confident and comfortable. I showed in Section 2.1

how Norton (1997, 2013) draws on Bourdieu's (1977) view that "those who listen regard those who speak as worthy to speak" (p. 648). Students tend to view native speakers as worthy to speak. A positive, inclusive classroom environment would enable the students and learners to express themselves and develop their confidence. Norton (2013) reiterates this, stating that second-language speakers lack confidence and the required "locus of control" (p. 160), which typically explains why they lack the confidence and the ability to excel when using the target language.

The notion that a positive, inclusive classroom environment promotes learning was evident in the data derived from my participants' inputs. The participants demonstrated that, because they were confident and comfortable using the English language, taking control and speaking in English helped them to excel in the language as learners and speakers. For example, in recounting and analysing their experiences on their comfort and confidence when using English in front of an audience, they showed how being allowed to present their ideas gave them confidence as speakers of a new language. They pointed out, moreover, that this confidence stemmed from being able to convey their message in a different language in front of receptive peers in a classroom. Many of the participants felt that speaking in English was not a concern and they felt comfortable because of the positive classroom environment. Salim in particular felt that there was no reason why he should be uncomfortable, since English was not his first language:

> I'm not a perfect speaker, like I have some people in my class of native speakers and there is one Canadian, there is one English. So, of course, their level would be higher than mine but overall, I wouldn't feel uncomfortable for just speaking a language that is not my mother tongue. Like I may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed for messing up in Arabic but not in English. English is not my main language because I want to learn and because it's not really important for me, it's not compulsory for me to not make mistakes. Any person can make mistakes, but the lights should be less on people who aren't native whose language is not the first language or mother tongue, but overall, I think that making a mistake in a certain language, even if it's your own shouldn't be a problem, or you shouldn't be uncomfortable, embarrassed with that, but that's just what I do. I feel that uncomfortable for messing up in Arabic but not in English.

Another example of the importance of a positive, inclusive classroom environment is that of Shaheed. Shaheed explained that he used to be a shy person, but over the years had developed into a more confident speaker of English. He loved reading

classical English literature, especially poetry, and had written a few poems himself. This was what he said:

> I am actually very comfortable because we have a lot of like-minded people in class. So, the thing is, for example, in class, I would have a lot of people around me that also speak English, which is a good thing about it. Because then, I could express myself in a better way and because there are more people speaking English, I would be able to talk to them and know that they are understanding me fully. And that way, I wouldn't have any problems. Now I'm able to have a conversation or speak out loud in front of crowds because of speaking out in classrooms even though classrooms are comfortable, you know they're comfort spaces, but in the end, they're still talking to, to a vast majority of people in the class. So that way I developed myself by using English and I don't find any hardship now using English in front of crowds.

The same went for Nurah and Asma. Even though women are judged by different standards for learning English in their respective communities (as covered later in Chapter Five), they felt comfortable because of the classroom environment created by the teacher, who allowed them to express themselves comfortably and confidently. Taylor (2010) shows that an individual exposed to a harmonious self-system will naturally "feel valued and appreciated in the classroom, in their family, in their peer group or in their other social circles for what they really are" (p. 97) (see Section 2.7.4). This was seen in Asma, who considered herself a shy child before learning English. She had often kept to herself because she did not feel comfortable and was too afraid and nervous to speak to anyone. But after learning English and getting compliments from others, she had gained in confidence in relation to speaking.

> I was a shy child who stayed at the corner because I was too afraid to speak to anyone. But after learning English from a young age, adults around me were saying how smart I am for a child. That was everything, I need to be proud, and I ended up with a chatty personality. Learning English did make me more confident.

Norton (2013) makes the case that literacy should not be understood as merely reading and writing. She explains that literacy is about the relationship between the student or the learner, the teacher, the classroom and the community. Students and learners who have ownership over meaning-making are able to engage with a wider range of practices both inside and outside the classroom. Allowing the student and the learner to have a sense of ownership over meaning-making eventually ensures that learning is not boring or meaningless. Norton (2013) establishes that students

and learners are often discouraged when teachers are unconcerned about delving into the tasks which their students and learners are invested in. This means that the teacher needs to draw on the students' and learners' interests and identities to ensure that a safe and inclusive classroom learning environment is achieved. This was seen in the words of Salim: *the activities were demanding and difficult, but manageable. The various opportunities of using the English language in speaking with my friends after the classes improved my learning.* In this context, Salim also said: *my enthusiasm and learning were both boosted by the chance to share knowledge in the classroom …. English is the universal language, especially in communication to help a lot, and you need education too as you have a lot of countries to travel to study. If I let go of English, I can't think of a place to go to for future studies. My future depends on English.*

In this second extract, Salim expressed his fear of not having a place to study if he let go of English (My *future depends on English*). He indicated that learning from his peers had increased his investment in the language and that his future imagined identity related to an English-speaking environment. This is possible if the teacher allows for an inclusive learning environment and allows the students and learners to take ownership of meaning-making. Furthermore, Salim showed an example of investment and access to educational opportunities in his imagined identity.

From Asma's and Salim's extracts, we see how important it is for instructors to ensure that students and learners are allowed to imagine their future identities; and then to assist students and learners in achieving them. It allows students and learners to work towards a goal with the assistance of effective classroom practices.

Fairclough (2003) explains that such approaches and actions by teachers are also part of an individual's strong affinity with truth. Salim was aware of the future he wanted and differentiated between truth and fantasy by consciously seeking out opportunities to practise the English language that he deemed necessary for his future. This gave him a motivating awareness, and an academic responsibility to invest in the language to attain his ideal self and ideal future as defined by Taylor (2010). Salim gave insights into how his teacher set up English lessons using an approach that resonated with his students.

> Secondly, the classes included a strong practical component. We were taught using the communicative approach in order to enhance our learning. Speaking, writing, listening, and critical thinking were all skills we were working very hard on. The activities were demanding and difficult, but manageable. The various opportunities of using the English language in speaking with my friends after the classes improved my learning. However, after years of practising English, I felt relieved, proud, and satisfied with myself since I was making consistent progress and seeing results. Thirdly, because the language we learned was recent and also in-demand, learning it was difficult. Reading books, watching movies, and even conversing with one another in English were all recommended as ways for us to learn the language. Last but not least, the people I learnt with were all really motivated and eager. They had a strong desire to learn the language. My enthusiasm and learning were both boosted by the chance to share knowledge in the classroom. I was able to enjoy our classes more because of our group's active participation and teamwork.

The extract above illustrates that investment is driven by social factors. Salim explained how affect had helped him to invest in the English language. For example, *speaking with … friends* made him feel *relieved, proud, and satisfied* because he *was making consistent progress and seeing results*. This encouraged him to learn from his peers and to invest further in the language – the fact that he was feeling proud of himself allowed him to enjoy his lessons. This is an important aspect of learning, as I showed in Section 2.4, where I discussed how Kanno and Norton (2003) and Murphey et al. (2005) believe that creating an imagined identity socially usually promotes inclusive language learning and enhancement.

Additionally, as I showed in Section 2.8.1 of the literature review, the need for language competency in English has led to the call for a better communicative approach to language teaching in that language. Canale and Swain (1980) express the view that the teaching approach used has to "respond to the learner's communication needs" (p. 27). They highlight the importance of the teaching approach being based on the "varieties of the second language that the learner is mostly to be in contact [with]" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 27). The CLT approach has been praised for its student-centred approach and its focus on communicative competence. Salim pointed out that *we were taught using the communicative approach in order to enhance our learning*, and reaffirmed what researchers have said about creating an inclusive environment for learning to assist learners through his choice of the word '*effectively*'. Furthermore, we have seen in the literature the

reasons why Norton (2013) argues that “if learners have a sense of ownership over meaning-making, they can engage actively” (p. 92).

Salim’s extracts once again reiterated Norton’s (2013) view that choosing appropriate pedagogical methods impacts on the learning of students and learners. In the extract below, Salim expressed his belief that the pedagogical method chosen by the teacher had impacted his English language learning positively: *My enthusiasm and learning were both boosted by the chance to share knowledge in the classroom. I was able to enjoy our classes more because of our group's active participation and teamwork*. He further said that he *felt relieved, proud and satisfied* as he made progress in class. Salim’s choice of words in the extracts above showed that teachers can play a huge role in helping students and learners excel in language learning. This was achieved by employing the correct classroom atmosphere. In addition, creating an inclusive and safe classroom space encouraged a sense of trust and belonging, and the opportunity to express their thoughts freely within an English-language-learning classroom so that students might learn more efficiently.

The data showed how a positive classroom atmosphere had propelled Shaheed’s learning:

> Another treasured moment for me is when a representative for the Ministry of Education entered our class while I was presenting a small presentation, I had put together the day prior. He was amazed by my speaking abilities and went on to give me praise in front of the whole class and the teacher. Having moments like these strengthened my desire for excellence and got me to dig even deeper into the vast realm of the English language.

Shaheed indicated how, in this instance, the praise he received kick-started his agency and investment. It was because of his *desire for excellence* that he dedicated more time to learning English. (Learning outside the classroom is covered in Section 4.3). His hunger for excellence and gaining knowledge came to light in his first interview also. Shaheed believed that the more he knew, the more powerful he was.

> First of all, knowledge is power; this is a very important thing to me. The more I know, the more powerful I am in social abilities. For example, if you’re talking with some people or some friends over at lunch and you bring up social, political or scientific topics and you can converse in any of which, then that means that you're more knowledgeable than the average person. Therefore, if you can, for example, talk in many languages that is very knowledgeable compared to people who can only talk in

> one language and some others that are very unfortunate to the point that they're illiterate.

Stated differently, Shaheed was of the opinion that, by knowing the topic, he became worthy of speaking. This tied in with Bourdieu's view that a speaker wants to be "believed, obeyed, respected, [and] distinguished (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 648). Shaheed provided, in the extract immediately above, an example of symbolic capital as explained by Bourdieu (1986) (see Section 2.2). Shaheed equated knowledge with an essential basis of power and consequently placed himself within this form of power in social settings.

Nurah provided another example of an inclusive classroom environment in her first written narrative. Similarly to Salim and Shaheed, Nurah's account reaffirms Norton's (2013) and Taylor's (2010) views that a positive and encouraging classroom environment, and the supportive attitude of teacher and classmates, creates a positive experience for students and learners.

> The mediums I encountered these experiences are school and online meetings. I have never been abroad so these places were very rich place for these things to happen. First of all, people who shared the same interests with me were understandable [understanding]; they knew I was still learning when I was communicating with them. They never made me feel like an outsider or someone who spoils the vibes. They are the biggest reason to help me immerse in the target culture. People at school there were kind of strong effective factors to every experience. For example, some competitive students who are relatively fluent in English at that stage were pushing me to be like them or better.

In the above extract, Nurah highlighted the importance her classmates and classroom environment had played in her English-language journey. Nurah was the only participant who stated that she had *learned English at school* exclusively. Her choice of words verified Taylor's (2010) views: *who shared the same interests with me were understandable … they never made me feel like an outsider … they are the biggest reason to help me immerse in the target culture … people at school there were kind of strong effective factors to every experience … some competitive students … were pushing me to be like them or better*. As Taylor (2010) says, "a student will form an understanding of what is expected of him/her in that circumstance" (p. 84). Nurah revealed how her understanding of what was required from her *to be like them or better* had propelled her agency.

Wang's (2023) participant, Xiaotang, had an experience similar to Nurah's. For example, Xiaotang was put off by the lack of progress she had made compared to her peers. Furthermore, Xiaotang said, she was "often criticized by the teacher", had understood that her "proficiency was much lower compared to my classmates[']" and had realised that "the others were so good and that I needed to work hard" (Wang, 2023, p. 90). However, whereas Xiaotang used self-reflection to transform herself from a person with low self-confidence into "a person [who] facilitated the integration of Japanese into her future career plan" (Wang, 2023, p. 92), Nurah used her peers to emulate or surpass their performance (*be like them or better*). The story of Xiaotang tied into Norton's (2013) and Taylor's (2010) notion that a learner's imagined future helps them to succeed in language learning. Nurah's extract indicated that she had faced experiences similar to those of Xiaotang (Wang, 2023), but had used those negative experiences and feelings of self-doubt to propel her agency in the learning of English.

This section foregrounded the importance of creating an inclusive classroom environment to ensure that students develop the confidence they require to enhance their English language skills. The section also showed how participants envisioned an English-speaking future for their ideal selves. Furthermore, the section provided insights into how the language and the opportunities the participants created for themselves developed their language-usage abilities and instilled in them the confidence they needed to take control of their language-learning journeys.

The section has shown that one of the factors that led my participants to work hard in English was investment. My participants invested in learning English by taking the opportunities presented to them. Also highlighted was Bourdieu's (1986) concept of symbolic capital, which people seek to accumulate in order to achieve prestige within social settings.

In addition, my participants showed how investment was applied to try to achieve their future identities in social and educational settings. The classroom atmosphere created by the teacher, and strong social and affective engagement, brought about inclusive learning.

All these events and aspects led to my participants developing confidence in English and achieving the right to speak.

### 4.2.2 A feeling of despair (negative experiences)

Not all classrooms embody a positive environment conducive to language learning. This section highlights how classroom discourse, the role of the teacher and social learning may lead to the negative experiences my participants faced; and how a classroom that does not incorporate an inclusive learning environment affects learners' and students' language-learning journeys. As shown by the responses examined in this section, some participants lost the will to learn English, had feelings of low self-esteem, wanted to drop out, and considered changing their career choices. Shaheed demonstrated, though his narrative data, how his agency allowed him to propel himself on his journey despite the obstacles he encountered (see further on in this section). He strived to achieve the desired goals and outcomes even though he was mocked by his peers on many occasions for his lack of English control: *I got made fun of many times over and over because of my poor writing and speaking skills in English. I thought I could speak well, but their laughing meant I didn't.* This could easily have led Shaheed to slump into the category of students and learners who lack confidence and a "locus of control" (Norton, 2013, p. 160). The literature covered shows (Section 2.4) that these kinds of experiences may restrict learning. For example, Vitanova's (2005) study shows that her participants were uncomfortable when thrust into uncomfortable situations. Her participants also revealed how these situations restricted their learning journeys owing to the lack of confidence and control over the target language. Shaheed further explained how, at the beginning of his English-learning journey, his experiences could have led him to quit learning English:

> Notwithstanding the existence of positive experiences, negative experiences are bound to face every language learner, and throughout my journey I faced many. One memorable experience I underwent is when I was in 7th grade, when I was forced to do a speaking project, which was the first time I ever speak a script I had memorized prior to the whole thing. Moreover, it was a new class where I faced a lot of bullying for simply being new and unpopular. What occurred was that I had to do a demonstration in front of the whole class, and I got made fun of due to my poor writing and speaking skills. However, after the demonstration I went back home and worked hard on improving both abilities, and later I went on to surprise everyone to the point that even my teacher accused me of plagiarism.

Shaheed's extract indicates the potential negative aspects of social learning. Norton (2013) and Taylor (2010) both point out that language learning can be either coercive or cooperative. Shaheed's extract illustrated coerciveness in language learning and the negative elements it brings. For example, it showed how Shaheed was thrust into an unfavourable situation. He was new to the school and faced bullying; and was then forced into presenting his project in a language he was not comfortable speaking. This led him to resort to memorising the presentation. Owing to the role of the teacher in not creating a safe, inclusive classroom atmosphere, Shaheed was accused of plagiarism and mocked by his peers.

This experience affected Shaheed not only academically but personally as well. The teacher took the accusation of plagiarism to his father. In a Saudi Arabian cultural context (from my own experience of teaching in Saudi Arabia), informing a father of a child's misbehaviour results in the child being disciplined. Luckily, Shaheed's father encouraged him instead of getting angry. Using this response to motivate himself, Shaheed displayed a high level of investment and used the incident in class as the start of a determination to better himself.

A similar experience could be seen in the case of Nurah, who expressed that she had had many negative classroom experiences while learning English. As a woman, culturally, she was already on the back foot when she started her English language-learning journey. This was because her community had questioned her decision to study English, asking *why would she choose to learn something that contradicts with her personality and that does not suit her?* This took a toll on her self-belief.

> Of course, negative aspect of language learning was present for every English learner. For me, these experiences were at the beginning of my journey so I believe what I have experienced was not called negative but it pushed me forward to the goal. At the beginning, I underwent some sort of low self-trust. I came across several obstacles in my first steps and fails to success. I thought for a short time, hopefully, that I was not capable and I did not have the courage to obtain what I want.

Nurah's choice of wording: *at the beginning, I underwent some sort of low self-trust. I came across several obstacles in my first steps and fails to success … I thought … I was not capable and I did not have the courage* was an example of Taylor's (2010) private self. As seen in Chapter Two (Section 2.6.5), Taylor (2010) explains that the private self is "understood to mean a person's intimate representation of his/her

present attributes" (p. 85). This entails individuals evaluating their abilities based on past experiences. However, Nurah ultimately used this situation as motivation to excel and prove herself, and to prove everyone else wrong (see Section 5.2).

Nurah explained that her teachers were the cause of her negative language-learning experiences. She had a phobia about speaking in front of her peers in a classroom. Instead of advising her, her teachers stripped away her confidence until she texted a friend to inform her that she was *going to quit the idea of language and translation because I did not fit in there.* This was something I found extremely surprising as, in Saudi Arabia, women teach women and I had assumed that, based on the social situation, women teachers would give extra encouragement to their students and learners to excel.

> She [the friend] stopped me and believed in me with simple words "if you did not fight for it, no one will do it for you". She was the only one in my learning English journey who supported me and I believe she was going through the same thing. No teachers did that, we fixed each other. A funny fact about this experience is that she keeps this message until this moment. On the other hand, and that's so unfortunate to say, teachers were not playing any critical role in my positive experiences. I tried to recall any impact they gave me, nothing appears. However, what I believe is that they made these experiences even worse. I remember I tried to seek advice from one of the English teachers to help me overcome my public speaking fear. She never bothered to offer anything, in fact she tried to shake my confidence saying that she did not see any potential in me. Thankfully, I did not give her attitude any deserved attention; otherwise, I would have been in a miserable situation.
>
> I would say that without these experiences, I would never know who I am, discover myself, interest and reach my goals. All of them shaped me into a competitive and ruthless learner who strives for more and never stops learning. Every lesson and experience was unforgettable and come with benefits. I never regretted any decision I have taken during my learning process and I am proud of my outcomes.

Nurah's account was similar to Eva's in Norton's (2000) study. Nurah took charge and control of her situation. She created a bond with a friend that made it possible for her to converse and feel as if she were a legitimate English learner and speaker. She started to believe that her role in English-language learning depended not on the output of her teachers but on the determination, will, grit and agency she herself supplied. She knew that with languages come different cultures, and she embraced this understanding as she made new friends and blossomed into her new self. In her words, *through my English learning process, I figured out the new me and found out*

*the original traits I had and did not notice them before. I discovered who I truly am, and it seems like learning English has awoken something marvelous in me.*

At the beginning, because of Nurah's culture and community, Nurah was questioned by her community: *why would she choose to learn something that contradicts with her personality and that does not suit her?* This and her negative in-class experiences resulted in Nurah describing herself as someone who *underwent some sort of low self-trust.* At the end of her first narrative writing, she explained that she got encouragement from within her social life domain, her friend. This showed that learning in a constructive informal social context could lead to positive identity construction (see Gee, 2005). Nurah's first narrative writing showed that the objectives and desires of others (her community) for the individual's future state were forcefully instilled within her as shown in Norton (2013) (where the social aspect is coerced) and in Taylor's (2010) imposed selves (see Section 2.6.3). However, her final words: *awoken something marvelous in me*, show how Nurah shifted from an imposed self (what the community wanted), through an unhealthy private self (which evaluated her abilities negatively based on past experiences), to her actual self, where she is happy with *the new me and found out the original traits I had and did not notice them before* (Taylor, 2010).

As noted previously, Norton (2013) and Taylor (2010) advise teachers to use suitable pedagogical procedures ensuring that students and learners operate in a positive, inclusive classroom environment; are actively learning; and have a sense of ownership over meaning-making. The lack of an inclusive and safe classroom environment leads to many negative learning experiences, as seen from the cases of Nurah and Shaheed. Their negative experiences also highlighted the difficult and problematic facets of the dynamics of social learning between the learner, peers and the teacher. For example, although Nurah was able to succeed, this was as a result of her high motivation and investment and in spite of her teachers' negative attitudes.

In the previous sections I provided an example, through Salim's choice of words, of how a positive, inclusive classroom environment could be brought to life – as he affirmed the view that *we were taught using the communicative approach in order to enhance our learning*. Similarly to Shaheed and Nurah, however, Salim had had experiences of negative learning experiences resulting from the negative role played

by a teacher. Salim's narrative pointed out that he had had many positive experiences and that a positive, inclusive classroom environment had allowed him to enjoy learning. But Salim explained that when he changed teachers (while progressing to the next level at school), doubts had started creeping in about his English-language-learning journey.

> The majority of my negative experiences happened in class. As a student, my needs were not effectively met. When I saw my teacher behave uninterested, I really felt quite discouraged. At one point during my learning, I began to doubt my study of English as a result of constantly seeing this from my teacher. I believe that my teacher was uninformed of my background, interests, and even concerns. With this information, he might have made the lesson feel more personalized and the content more understandable. The teacher did not provide resources and materials that suited all or the majority of learning styles. I learn best by seeing things. I frequently found it difficult to understand or remember what I had heard during a class. I would have remembered more information if I had access to visual aids while studying. The use of visual aids would have enhanced my ability for accurate and thorough information understanding, storage and recall. Seldom was the communicative method adopted. Everyday life situations are used in communicative language learning. But sadly, my teacher rarely presented me with scenarios that I might experience in everyday life. My learning was also not driven by relevant topics or events from my life. I was learning the language outside of its social and linguistic context. The teacher should have provided opportunities for me to express my thoughts and experiences during class discussions, but I was seldom given an opportunity to do so. The teacher spoke more and I spoke less. I was becoming less confident in my ability to participate due to my reduced active participation. I generally felt much less in control of my personal learning. My self-esteem suffered and my grades suffered as well. My poor learning pattern developed as a result of my damaged self-esteem. I missed a significant number of lessons and I lost interest in all of my lessons and felt withdrawn.

Salim's extract showed that he experienced negative elements to his learning journey. For example, he indicated that the needs of the students were not met, which hindered his learning. He said, further, that what they were learning did not make use of real-life situations and he was learning language out of context, which meant that he did not have ownership of meaning-making. This showed that CLT is not always implemented within schools even though it is the preferred method in Saudi Arabia. In addition, as I pointed out in Section 1.9, CLT does not allow students to have ownership of meaning-making as it does not cater for the learner's needs. The lack of ownership of meaning-making led him to a low self-esteem and he lost his will to learn the language. Norton (2000; 2010) shows how important

ownership of meaning-making is in order for students and learners to invest in language learning effectively.

Salim was able to compare the teaching styles of his teachers at different levels of schooling; and to understand how his one teacher caused his learning to deteriorate based on the deficient teaching approach used. In his written narrative, Salim made it clear that the CLT approach had assisted his grasp of the language and made classes fun and interesting.

In conclusion, this section has shown why it is important to understand the needs of students and their goals for their futures. A safe, inclusive learning environment induces positive learning, whereas a negative learning environment or a teacher-focused classroom will lead to the lack thereof. My participants showed, through their contributions as relayed in this section, how their negative experiences had impeded their progression in learning the English language; hindered their ownership of meaning-making; and inhibited their learning in the classroom. Furthermore, this section has shown how my participants struggled with self-esteem as the result of other obstructions to their learning inside the classroom. Their identities and individual past experiences were not acknowledged. Instead of partaking in an environment where learners and students were learning from each other in the classroom, they were being mocked by their peers for their limited proficiency in the English language. Once again, the teacher did not set up a safe, inclusive classroom for learning. However, even though my participants had faced this, their investment in English was retained and, at times, made them more determined to learn. This could be seen especially in the case of Nurah, whose investment to excel in the language in fact increased in the face of the obstacles she faced. On the other hand, Salim's level of investment decreased. It could have led him to drop English entirely, if not for his strong desire to achieve his future imagined identity.

## 4.3 Language learning outside the classroom

In Section 4.2, I described how learning inside the classroom resulted in either positive or negative experiences based on the classroom environment and the educator's teaching approach. Irrespective of whether my participants had had both

negative or positive experiences inside the classroom, however, they still felt the need to learn outside the classroom.

Many researchers (see Billah, 2015; Norton, 2013) deal with the effects of a limited or poor teaching pedagogy on language learning. Linked to this, Norton (2013) points out how important agency is to language learning. To achieve this agency, my participants took control of their language learning outside the classroom and this enabled them to excel. For example, the media and literature played an important role in their English-language-learning journey. Four of the five participants (the exception was Nurah, whose English language learning had happened only within the confines of the school) viewed English language learning as a twofold activity: in class and out of class. They viewed books, movies, music and TV shows as playing the role of additional tutors in their language learning. Their responses showed that they aimed to improve their English outside of school. In the first interview, my participants gave examples of this. Salim, for instance, said:

> I believe that movies, TV shows make your level in a language very high, they really help in understanding and communicating in a language. Class doesn't teach English really well. You may develop your writing skills and you may develop your reading skills in class, but speaking and listening, you have to develop them by yourself.

Here Salim revealed that he had had no option but to develop certain skills outside the classroom. I asked Salim what he meant in the excerpt above, as the statement there contradicted a previous one, where he had said:

> Reading books, watching movies, and even conversing with one another in English were all recommended as ways for us to learn the language. Last but not least, the people I learnt with were all really motivated and eager. They had a strong desire to learn the language. My enthusiasm and learning were both boosted by the chance to share knowledge in the classroom. I was able to enjoy our classes more because of our group's active participation and teamwork.

His response was that it had been based on the teacher teaching him at the time. In addition, he felt that as he moved to higher levels in school, practising speaking in class was not sufficient as teachers focused on completing the curriculum and less focus was given to practising natural (unscripted) speaking.

Salim was not the only participant to feel this way. For example, Sayed said:

> There are somewhat colloquial words in colloquial English, where they only learn from the community, you won't learn it in a book only on TV which I found that I didn't know them because I didn't live in English communities. So, what I tried to do was, listen to TV shows like old Comedies from the 80s, 90s, very colloquial TV shows that are based in London or like TV shows that are based in Liverpool. And you know that somehow improves your vocabulary and improved my English language when I didn't even grow up in England. So, it improved that if I have to ever go back there, it helped me in those ways.

It was clear Sayed had realised that he could not learn in a classroom about the England-based community he would need to communicate with and fit into if he went back to the UK. He needed to invest in obtaining the vocabulary he desired and needed to be able to fit into his community because it was not offered in school. The language and vocabulary he would learn from these shows was local colloquial language. Because Sayed had spent all his life in Saudi Arabia, he felt that he needed this vocabulary to fit into his society in England. This also ties in with the need for group inclusion, which is discussed in Chapter Five.

As for Shaheed, he said he had found his classes insufficient. He believed that most of his English had been self-taught, through English media and literature. This is an example of language ownership, where individuals take responsibility for their own learning. Shaheed used the English he learnt from literature and media, and would try to use what he learnt in his own way.

> Most of my English knowledge doesn't come from school, a lot comes from movies and games and music and I listen to an awful lot of music, usually it's meaningful. Meaningful means more expressive words and that's how I actually improved my English, my linguistic abilities. I would try to read things like Charles Dickens, one of my favorite writers and I would try to convey the way he spoke English, for example, and use it in my own way.

Shaheed went further, explaining how the change in his language learning had come about. He had become interested in poetry, and reading poetry had upgraded his vocabulary in many ways:

> A huge change in my English career was when I read, "Hard Times" by the renowned writer Charles Dickins. What made it a great alteration was when I delved into the world of old English, which changed my point of view on the English language a lot. It changed my understanding of it, my style of writing and much more. Soon I picked up even more books, such as Oliver Twist, a Christmas Carol, and The Great Gatsby. Later I even began reading poetry, to list a few of them Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare, Do Not Weep Maiden; For War is Kind by Stephen Crane, and Lord

> Randal by Sir Walter Scott. Reading them levelled up my English skills in speaking and writing, which aided in the development of my academic level in subjects.

Because of his desire to learn English, and the books he started reading, he fell in love with poetry, and writes poetry as well:

> My classmates enjoyed hearing my poetry and it became almost a weekly thing. I used a lot of my free time on poetry and enjoyed reading it. I even memorized, ‘’Do Not Go Gentle into That Goodnight’’ which was my favourite of all time. The most important thing about the poetry is the support I received from friends and family. Even the Coordinator of English in our school enjoyed reading the poems. It was a very interesting experience for me, and it changed my learning experience a lot.

The two extracts directly above show the importance of affect in enhancing language learning. In Section 2.5, I discussed affect as an important aspect of language learning: a positive student or learner self-belief leads students or learners to participate actively in language learning, which in turn leads them to better results. In Section 4.2.2, Shaheed was mocked by his peers for his lack of proficiency in English. Yet, in the very different later situation he recounted, Shaheed had a receptive audience. He was praised for his writing, and this led him to enjoy reading his poems to others.

We saw that Asma (see Section 4.1) aspired to be a nurse, and that in Saudi Arabia the medical fields are taught exclusively in English. Asma’s words showed the importance she placed on English for her future self. This importance was shown in her usage of words such as *must learn*, *keep learning*, *the learning process never stops*. However, because Asma was a woman and came from a relatively small city outside Riyadh, she and Nurah had various social barriers to learning English (see Chapter Five for further discussion). Owing to this, Asma showed her drive and will to learn English:

> [At age 10], I was so eager to learn the language that my favorite character in Disney movies is using. So, I started repeating what they said and with time I managed to learn it and use it to make new sentences and I can understand anything I hear but I learned how to write it in the last year of my elementary school (they learn it now from the third grade).

She reiterates that most of her learning took place outside the classroom and believes that *music and shows are the main reason that made me capable of understanding whatever I hear*.

In this section, I have presented my participants' experiences and their insights into why they felt the need to continue learning English outside the classroom. My participants showed that books, television shows and music all played a role in their English-language development.

## 4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter (Chapter Four) I provided the responses and data of my participants on their English-language-learning journeys. I categorised their responses under the themes listed below; and explained why my participants had these experiences and how these related to the current literature in the field.

- Investment in English and future career choices
- Learning inside the classroom
- The right to speak (positive experiences)
- A feeling of despair (negative experiences)
- Language learning outside the classroom

What is clear from the responses of my participants is that although they mostly experienced a safe and inclusive classroom environment and improved their English, negative experiences were present. For example, the data showed that students had positive experiences by gaining confidence and having a safe and inclusive classroom environment. Some examples of the negative experiences were the lack of desire to learn and low self-esteem. However, they used these negative experiences as fuel towards their investment and agency, ensuring that they reclaimed their ownership of meaning-making and, together with that, their stances and voices on their English-language-learning journeys. This in turn allowed my participants to reclaim their right to speak. For example, Shaheed showed how he went from being mocked at the beginning of his language-learning journey to being praised and encouraged in his right to speak. My participants took this route as they showed in the data that they were of the opinion that classes were not sufficient to

improve their language. Furthermore, the data showed the investment, motivation and agency my participants placed in learning the language and the conscious decision to learn outside the classroom via media, music, games and TV shows. The literature discussed in Section 2.2. shows that identity is also formed with the understanding of social power and that language learning also happens in a social setting. Norton (2013) and Taylor (2010) argue that language learning can be either coercive or cooperative. The data showed that my participants experienced coerciveness in their negative experiences of learning English. For example, the data in Section 4.4.2 showed how Shaheed was forced to present in front of his peers, which led to his being mocked. In Section 4.2, I showed the experiences my participants experienced inside the classroom, both positive and negative. I explained in Section 1.9 that universities all over Saudi Arabia expect their English instructors to employ the CLT approach within classrooms for a better learning experience for their learners. However, as the data in this chapter show, this approach is not always effectively implemented by teachers. I mentioned previously that Norton (2013) and Taylor (2010) encourage teachers to find the appropriate classroom environment to allow students to excel in learning the language. In addition, I pointed out in Section 2.8.1 that researchers (see Billah, 2015) call for language instructors not to be fixated on one particular approach and to tailor their teaching methods using the multiple-line approach (better known as the eclectic approach). This allows teachers to employ various teaching methods, which allows students and learners to benefit from the teaching pedagogies best tailored to their needs. This ensures, as Norton (2013) suggests, that students have ownership over the important task of meaning-making in language learning.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# IDENTITY AND GROUP MEMBERSHIP

In Chapter Four, I presented the findings for the qualitative data collected from my participants, Salim, Sayed, Shaheed, Nurah and Asma. The data showed that my participants had both positive and negative experiences that shaped their identities and how they reclaimed their right to speak. In addition, the data revealed how non-inclusive classroom environments hindered my participants and how the latter used the negative experiences they experienced in learning English as motivation to better themselves in the language and to assert their agency. In this chapter I continue to present data, this time mainly from the second set of written narratives. Based on the data gathered, the following themes arose:

- Inclusion into group membership
- Exclusion from group membership

To recap, the research question that this study aims to answer is: In what ways, if any, has the learning of English impacted the identities of Arab students?

The sub-question I focus on in this chapter is:

- How have these experiences constructed or impacted their present and future identities?

Therefore, the data presented in this chapter allow me to answer my research question as well as sub-question 2.

## 5.1 Inclusion in group membership

As covered in Section 2.5, before the establishment of Saudi Arabia in 1932, communities identified themselves by their tribal names. These tribes implemented a political identity based on the regions they occupied and the power they held. Saudi Arabians are now unified under one citizenship, and it is now “possible to speak of the emergence of a Saudi identity” (Yamani, 2000, p. 6). Yamani (2000) uses this concept of identity as an important aspect of Saudi Arabian cultural membership. Researchers have argued that group membership is an important facet of identity

(see Norton, 2001). In addition, Norton (2001) and Taylor (2010) have indicated where and how group membership forms.

As discussed in Section 2.5, Saudi Arabians have set their identity to conform to the Islamic religion as well as Saudi Arabian culture. This can also be seen from the extracts of Shaheed's second narrative:

> Saudi Arabia follows the rules of Islamic Sharia [law] and it must not violate this Sharia because this is its political power. Sometimes the state needs to open up a little, but not to a level that affects its Islamic strength. Every Islamic country must not change its historical approach to some matters and all Muslims must preserve their principles.

In the above extract it was evident that Shaheed felt, as a Saudi Arabian and a Muslim, that the state could *open up a little* as long as it did not forgo its identity, which is based on the Islamic religion and Arab culture. This opinion tied in with Kabel's (2007) and Donn and Al-Manthri's (2010) views that the Arab culture, which is derived from Islamic teachings, is so deeply inculcated into the Saudi Arabian people that the threat of losing their identity is not a factor, something argued by Karmani (2005a; 2005b; 2005c) as well.

However, Taylor's (2010) theory of possible selves (Section 2.6.1) allows for individuals to link to an idea of being members of an imagined community (in the case of my participants, an English-speaking community). I discussed the notion, in Section 2.1, that identity is fluid and keeps undergoing reconstruction. In addition, I argued that identity cannot be controlled; and can be shifted through the conscious decision of an individual or agency. This enables an individual to choose their desired identity based on their beliefs, current aspirations and future goals. This I showed in Section 4.1 through my participant Nurah, who explained that as a result of learning English, she had *managed to find* [her] *interest in this life* while making friends – by joining an English-speaking community of cookery lovers. Another example discussed in Chapter Four was that of Asma, who imagined her future community as one consisting of English-speaking nurses.

As noted in Section 1.7, some researchers fear that – by learning English – Saudi Arabians will forego their native language and their Saudi Arabian identity. This topic has long been under discussion, with the hope of keeping Saudi Arabian identity

intact (see Al-Hazmi, 2003, 2017; Al-Jarf, 2008). Other researchers (see Kabel, 2007) argue that English will not replace the Saudi Arabian culture, but will add to it by enhancing the individual's views about other nations. This we can see in Nurah's second narrative writing, where she indicates that her identity is multifaceted:

> In this case, I think my identities became interlinked. For example, sometimes I feel like I am an Arab-Saudi and I want to be identified with my Saudi taste of music and songs in which I cannot show through English songs. Other times, I recommend an English song that expresses some part about me, I would not find any equivalent song in my culture to deliver what I want. So, every language we speak carries layers to build us. Every one of them carries different meanings to us, they complete us rather than shape or change who we are.

Here Nurah illustrated shifting and multiple identities, as discussed in Section 1.5. She was of the opinion that learning English had given her identity extra dimensions that enabled her to express different parts of herself. She felt that it had allowed her to tap into her inner self and to interact with various cultures without losing her Saudi Arabian identity. Rather, she had become able to take up new identities at will. Her experience tied in with the 2008 study by Luna et al., including with the "relative activation strength of culture-specific mental frames" (p. 279) that was covered in Section 1.5. Research on biculturality indicates that bicultural individuals may take up different identities while switching languages. For example, in their 2008 study, Luna et al. prompt their participants to take up different identities by allowing them to switch between languages in their responses. Their results show that their participants had a bicultural shift when they changed from one language to another. They also show that these shifts can be recognised, evaluated and even encouraged. In addition – and as Section 1.5 discussed – the extract from Nurah's second narrative (above) supported findings in the literature that ethnicity plays a significant role in identity, and in hybrid identity formation. Nurah's quote also related to the work of Kamada (2010), which shows that ethnicity contributes to hybrid identities. Nurah's excerpt further tied in with Yashima's (2009) findings that "English is something that connects us to foreign countries, and people with whom we can communicate in English" (p. 145). Yamani (2000) reiterates this point, by saying that Saudi Arabians are being conflicted as a result of hybrid identities resulting from the comparisons more recent generations of Saudi Arabians are drawing between 1) their Arab–Saudi Arabian identities and their parents' past identities and 2) their

Arab–Saudi identities and the different identities encountered among other cultures throughout the world. This in turn can lead to conflicted identity choices for Saudi Arabians caught between their views of their current and future selves as approved in terms of Saudi identity and their imagined futures and communities (Yamani, 2000; Norton, 2000; Taylor, 2013, 2014). Nurah, however, viewed the different layers of her identity not as being in conflict with one another but rather as different layers of herself *that complete us rather than shape or change who we are*.

Asma had sentiments similar to those of Nurah. She was also of the opinion that an individual could take up various identities, based on the groups they interacted with and the contexts they interacted in. These were the views she expressed in her second written narrative:

> I think speaking two languages will give you two different voices. Adopting new habits that you are attached to, even if these habits are out of your culture for example, clothes or food. It's possible to have two cultures or to choose what you like to keep from two different cultures. People on social media use another language other than their original language and a separate personality other than who they really are.

Asma believed that speaking more than one language allowed people to possess different voices and to interpret society in different ways. Moreover, being capable of doing that granted a person a certain amount of power – which related to their status in society. This tied in with Bourdieu's (1986) view of symbolic capital; and with his (1991) view that the voices of individuals can be projections of their power that shape and maintain their position in society. Interestingly, her words: *people on social media use another language other than their original language and a separate personality other than who they really are*, showed she felt that people do not show their true selves when integrating into an English-speaking community or switching between two cultures on social media. Her words further indicated her opinion that when Saudi Arabians interacted on social media, they were too afraid to show their identity as Saudi Arabians. When I asked her why she viewed things this way, she indicated that the stigma of the Saudi Arabian identity had forced Saudi Arabians to take on a new identity to hide their Saudi Arabian identity on social media. As described by Nurah and Asma, taking up certain identities to meet the contextual situation was a natural part of hybrid identities as shown by Bakhtin (1981) (as

discussed in Section 2.3), who argues that individuals in certain situations can revoice themselves in order to conform to their societal and contextual situations.

Additionally, Asma explained in her second written narrative how she had to look for an English-speaking community outside of her cultural circle because finding friends to join her hobby of reading English novels was hard. This then led her to look for friends who had the same passion for reading novels online.

> Learning English made me more confident. I even have online friends now and they're from different countries. We all speak English, but it's not our language, but we feel connected. I have a hobby which is reading English novels. But no one in my family loves it and no one in my class does, so I started searching for new friends online and I found them. I believe learning English is necessary to enjoy your life to the maximum level.

Nurah and Asma found their various English online communities so as to enjoy their hobbies. Their words revealed that learning English had had a huge impact on them in terms of growing their interests and meeting their needs. As was evident from the extracts, Nurah and Asma felt that – ever since learning English – they had discovered a new version of themselves. It was also interesting to see the choice of words both Nurah and Asma used in respect of English and their lives. For example, Nurah said, *through learning the English language, I managed to find my interest in this life*; while Asma said: *I believe learning English is necessary to enjoy your life to the maximum level*.

Asma explained she felt that people took up certain behaviours and identities based on the situation they were in. As a Saudi Arabian woman, she felt that her identity was restricted and constrained by cultural and ideological norms (as discussed in Section 2.5). Even with these restrictions in terms of gender identity in Saudi Arabia, Asma believed that she could take up different identities, based on whom she was interacting with. She also revealed a strong inclination towards affinity groups, as discussed in Section 2.3. Asma had this inclination because, as research in Section 2.3 shows, individuals join affinity groups to be able to share a similar identity and interest with the rest of the group. Her affinity also resonated with Taylor's (2010) ideal self. This demonstrated that Asma's identity was not static – and had evolved based on the situation she found herself in. It could be said that when she was with family, she took up the imposed self (what family and society viewed her to be); but

that she took up a different identity when she was with her friends online. In addition, Asma's words demonstrated the coming into play, in her life, of Taylor's (2010) public self. Asma believed that her true identity was that of a Saudi Arabian, Arab woman. Yet the conflicting aspects of her identity might come to the fore, depending on what she did to please either group (online friends, family and society).

Nurah's and Asma's situations were similar to that of Kinginger's (2004) participant, who envisages the French community in France to be "populated with refined, interesting, cultured people who are in turn interested in her" (p. 228). Nurah said, in her second written narrative: *I feel I am now a part of this world and the English language is very important to me, both to my personal life and my future career.* In her own second narrative, Asma explained: *learning the English language is something that makes me proud of myself and will let other speakers show interest in what you say*. Asma here referred to other speakers of English taking an interest in what she had to say. Manifested throughout the data was the importance the participants placed on English and the respect shown to it for being a dominant, global language. It thus made sense for Asma to have felt proud of herself for learning the language, and to have believed that speakers of English would take an interest in what she said. Both Nurah and Asma illustrated the way in which a student or a learner will often invest emotionally and personally in the target language when their language learning is linked to future identities – and to the additional group memberships they may hope to achieve.

The men participants held similar views. Shaheed explained, in his second written narrative, that he had learnt English *to simply know more*, as he viewed himself as inferior to bilinguals.

> Knowing only one language made me feel inferior to those who were bilingual; therefore, it increased my childhood curiosity to learn more, especially in the English language. I invested myself in English and put more effort to be able to simply know more.

Shaheed spoke about the feelings of inferiority he would experience from not being able to speak a second language. In the same narrative, he clarified what he meant by feeling inferior:

> this period before diving into the realms of education was a critical period. One thing I want to clear up is that my sense of inferiority is not a negative thing, rather it was simply a thing that fuelled my curiosity and hunger for knowledge.

Shaheed also expressed the view that his feeling of inferiority stemmed from not knowing English as a second language. He knew that English was an important language for his future. Because he knew that his future depended on English, he made sure that his imagined future and his inferiority complex did not hinder him but acted as a driving force to learn English.

Shaheed also believed that people might view his identity as changed when engaging with English-speaking members on social media. He said, in his second narrative :

> One other question mentioned is if I think English changed my specific identity or not. First things first, it would depend on how I define specific identity, which I define by how a person is characterized by the people holding a conversation with this said person. Secondly, my answer would depend on the case. For example, if the question were to refer to how people on social media think of my character while texting me then yes it did. While texting in English I'm a more open and expressive person than when I chat in Arabic. People tend to turn to me when they need to get some things off their chests while expecting some advice as well. I would be capable of expressing certain emotions and feelings in a more engaging manner. However, in Arabic, I'm more of a get-to-the-point kind of person. I chat in short messages. Same thing would apply to public things like speeches and presentations. On the other hand, in real life and face-to-face conversations, there is hardly any difference in both languages. I still speak in the same style and reach my point in the same manner.

Shaheed recounted that he displayed emotions differently when chatting on social media in English. This is an example of some of the literature I referred to in Section 2.3, where the right to speak is reclaimed by being part of one or more affinity groups. The internet allowed Shaheed to have anonymity and a freer space, and to being more confident despite the fact that he was texting in his second language.

However, Shaheed believed that even though he had come to fit into an English-speaking group, this had not changed his identity. Even though he felt that *language is capable of changing culture for some people*, he believed that he did n*ot fall under that category.* This was, Shaheed said, because he still cherished his *mother tongue and embrace*[d] [his] *culture and heritage, which includes religion and tradition*.

Despite these statements, however, Shaheed shared Asma's sense that the Saudi Arabian identity was woven through with a bad stigma.

For this shared reason, the two participants tended to take up a new identity in order to get away from what they felt was a stigmatic Saudi Arabian identity. This meant, at times, that Asma would take up an identity based on the situation at hand. I explained, earlier on in this section, how Asma conformed to certain selves suggested by Taylor (2010). For example, it could be said that she depicted both the imposed self and the rebellious self. The imposed self is potentially coercive, especially for women in Saudi Arabian culture. This then leads the individual to accept the rebellious self – by opposing social norms and taking up an identity that the individual feels is ideal for the situation. In addition, as shown by Taylor (2010), my participants could express their opposition against Saudi Arabian cultural norms and identities because their affinity groups, anonymous status and internet presence allowed them to have freer spaces in which to rebel. This gave the women the freedom to take up a variety of identities beyond the constraints of the more conservative, imposed gendered cultural identities. Ultimately, Asma insisted, she was not ashamed of her Saudi Arabian identity, but at times took on a new identity to not let her friends feel out of place.

The data derived from Asma's, Nurah's and Shaheed's contributions showed that my participants willingly took up different identities in different situations, not only to hide (from) their Saudi Arabian identity but also to feel empowered through their identities on social media. Shaheed also pointed out that when he communicated in English, he took up an identity that differed from his identity when he communicated in Arabic. Once again, the phenomenon of taking up different identities for different contextual situations was covered in my discussion of Bakhtin (1981).

The data also indicated that the women experienced investment with a strong emotional component towards the learning of English, their intent being to achieve their desired imagined futures.

Analysis of this theme has shown that my participants had the same goals: to learn English to build their future identities and attain group membership. My participants expressed the need to be part of a group, whether that was a cookery group or a

reading club. My participants' ideas and future aspirations aligned with the literature by scholars of the field (as covered in Chapter Two). In addition, I explained in Section 2.3 that affinity identity is formed by taking part in groups. My participants showcased this by looking for inclusion in affinity groups. The use of the internet for communication and joining a cookery club showed how my participants fell into Gee's (2004) definition of affinity identity. This was because my participants could share a common interest and identity with other members in their group. Furthermore, this section highlighted that my participants wanted to feel included in their groups and sought group membership. The next section discusses exclusion from group membership.

## 5.2 Gender, English and exclusion from group membership

As covered in Section 2.5, gender identity in language learning is a factor in identity formation. In patriarchal societies such as Saudi Arabia, gender resistance is an important factor in determining identity. In Section 2.5, I showed how Saudi Arabian gender identity in the country is based on the Islamic religion. McMahill (1997, 2001) and Norton (2000) explain that these societies create situations and experiences that construct their participants' gendered identity (see Section 2.5). Chapters One and Two discussed the Saudi Arabian class system stemming from religion and culture, in which men are viewed as superior to women. This was exemplified in Section 1.8, where the numbers of men students in Saudi Arabia were significantly higher than those of women students. In addition, I explained that women in Saudi Arabia were viewed as housewives, and that the right to attend university, drive a car or even have their own identity document had been hard for them to achieve.

I showed, in Chapter Four, how Nurah and Asma felt the pressures from their respective communities because they had chosen to learn English. Because they were Saudi Arabian women, their motives for learning English were questioned. Nurah explained that her community would constantly ask *why would she choose to learn something that contradicts with her personality and that does not suit her?* On this statement, Nurah commented: *they wanted me to be a housewife and they were afraid I would go away from being a Saudi.* Nurah's two written narratives showed that she had had various obstacles from her family, her community and her teachers.

Yet even though they had made her feel like an outcast, she had used it as motivation and determination to excel and prove them wrong:

> Before learning English, I used to be a close person. I limited myself to short conversations and a small number of people. I used to talk to those who I assumed to be similar to my personality. I have heard a lot of people saying that why would she choose to learn something that contradicts with her personality and that does not suit her. They wanted me to be a housewife and they were afraid I would go away from being a Saudi. I believe I took these words as a challenge. Starting here, I wanted to prove to them that they don't know me. I don't know myself in the first place so how could they judge me? I think I did not know myself at all before I decided to learn English. I did not find what the best of me is and what I am good at. I was assuming traits people wanted for me, but my thoughts were mostly negative about me.

Nurah showed her conflicting thoughts by saying that she did not truly know herself until she learnt English. This led to Nurah having a low self-esteem and falling into Taylor's (2010) category of imposed self. This meant that the objectives and desires of others concerning Nurah's future state were forcefully instilled in her, to make sure she would conform to the gender ideology of Saudi Arabians.

Asma shared a similar story. Her family had been against her studying English out of fear she would forget her Saudi Arabian culture and identity.

> However, in everything in life there are two sides even in learning English itself, it is considered something great. To some people, I mean older people, who think learning new languages is the first sign of a change in the heart or in the way of thinking, as if your child will run to another country or will change his religion. My negative experience is I was always told English is not for Muslim women. It is the language for people who are not Muslim. It was hard for me to convince my grandparents to let me learn English. So, I learned a lot from TV because of my family. My grandfather thought English would change me and I'll not be Saudi. For me it was hard to show my grandfather that I didn't change. So, I made a learning class for all his grandchildren. He didn't like it until one day he got lost in the hospital and I asked about the direction in English and I was useful, I mean the English language was useful. He stops bothering me about it and he also joins the English class.

Asma's choice of words: *I was always told English is not for Muslim women. It is the language for people who are not Muslim*, shows how the debate among Saudi Arabian scholars became the way of thinking of the Saudi people. As shown in Section 1.7, Saudi Arabian scholars such as Al-Hazmi (2003, 2017) and Al-Jarf (2008) have been of the opinion that the English language will infest the Saudi

Arabian people and derail them from living out their Saudi Arabian identity (religion and culture). This is because they view English as a language for non-Muslims (whereas Arabic is the language of the religious book). Owing to the widespread idea that the English language is for non-Muslims, my participants (especially the women) described how they had had to choose between 1) conforming to the idea of the elders that English is not a language for Saudi Arabians and 2) following their desires to learn English for their imagined futures. This situation is encountered in the works of Norton (2003) and Taylor (2010). Norton's participant, Eva, recounts a similar situation – in which the women of the house experienced objections being raised and barriers being erected by the men of the house with the aim of hampering their learning of English. Women in Saudi Arabia had to be kept inferior to men because men were viewed as the protectors of women. Thus, education provision was focused primarily on the men, to elevate them to a position of greater status.

Because knowledge is power, Saudi Arabians feared that if women were given the opportunity to educate themselves, men's elevated status would be in jeopardy as women would be raised to equal status. This thinking ensured that women were not educated. Even when the opportunity arose for women to seek education, older generations still disapproved. This was demonstrated in the data related to Asma, when her grandfather was upset because she was learning English. This stemmed from the conservative culture that Saudi Arabians adopted whereby women had to be kept inferior to men. Nurah's data, too, showed how her community and her family questioned her decision to learn English.

In addition, as shown in Section 2.3, resistance has an impact on language learning, and on identity construction and reconstruction. My data suggested that both men and women experienced resistance to their English-language learning from elders and other conformist community members. As discussed in Section 1.7, Saudi Arabian scholars have, in the main, been against Saudi Arabians learning English – because they have feared that it would lead to corruption of the approved and adhered to Saudi Arabian identity.

Shaheed gave a detailed explanation of elders' fears that learning the English language would dissolve young Saudi Arabians' Arab origins, and of elders' opposition to it:

> Arabian culture and heritage are expressed through poetry and stories of the past characters we take pride in, such as the rise of Prophet Mohammed and his companions and the caliphates that followed the Prophet's passing. On the contrary to many other dynasties and empires, the Arabs were so proud of their language that it is still unchanged to this day. The reason I'm mentioning all of this is to prove the point that language is the companion of culture. In fact, many Arab teenagers now lean toward western culture simply because they believe it is trendy, which is something that angers the older generations, as they hold their culture and language dearly as Arabs. They believe that this will lead to presenting a threat on our culture, as the now teenagers make up the future.

Even though Shaheed faced some obstacles from his community, these differed from those of the women participants. This was because, as I showed in Section 2.5, Saudi Arabia's gender identity allowed men to have multiple options while women had to be restricted to the domestic sphere. Nurah and Asma faced resistance as women from their community, whereas Shaheed faced it mostly because of the older generation's view that deemed English a threat to Saudi Arabian culture – not because he was a man. Shaheed did not share the opinion that English would replace the Arabic culture and identity of Saudi Arabians. He believed that English was the future, in that it was needed for his career and the betterment of his country. All five participants shared these sentiments, and looked for opportunities to learn English beyond what was taught in a classroom.

## 5.3 Conclusion

The data showed that the participants in this study had to overcome a number of obstacles in terms of Taylor's (2010) categories in the quadripolar model of identity selves. Nurah and Asma, as women, fell into several categories of Taylor's (2010) quadripolar model. The data also showed that Nurah and Asma fell into the rebellious self-system by learning English and thereby rebelling against the norms of Saudi Arabian culture and ideology. There were times when my participants' situations resonated with the experiences of Norton's (2003) participants. In addition, my participants, although proud of their Saudi Arabian identity and culture, took up different identities depending on their situation at the time.

The responses demonstrated that Saudi Arabians, especially those from the generation of elders, deemed English to be a language of non-Muslims. This belief was also pointed out in the works of the Saudi Arabian scholars covered in Section 1.7. In addition, I covered Karmani's (2005a, 2005b, 2005c) belief that English-language learning had been implemented in schools to oppose the ideologies, cultures and language of the Saudi Arabians and give them a new identity. The responses by Nurah, Asma and Shaheed showed that Karmani's (2005a, 2005b, 2005c) ideas resonated with the elderly of Saudi Arabia. My participants showed how they transcended the constrained ideas concerning Saudi Arabian identity to invest in English while taking up different identities in order to achieve their imagined futures. In the following chapter, I draw conclusions from the insights gained from the data collected for this study and show how the data answers my research question as well as my sub-questions. Furthermore, I reiterate my limitations and provide recommendations for further studies.

# CHAPTER SIX

# CONCLUSION

This study examined in what ways, if any, learning English has an impact on the identities of Saudi Arabian learners. The aim was to go beyond the ideas of language-learning motivation and anxiety, and to focus on identity and investment in language learning. I adopted the framework of Norton (2000, 2013) and Taylor (2010) in a poststructuralist view where identity is fluid and always changing. With five participants and a specific context, the results may not be generalisable to other situations of Saudi Arabian learners in Saudi Arabia. However, the results and conclusions in this study could have relevance for identity and language learning in other contexts for educators in Saudi Arabia. There are very few studies (Hopkyns and Zoghbor (2022) being one of them) that concentrate on learning English by Arabic-speaking students living in Arabic-speaking countries. This study addressed this gap by considering how Arabic speaking native students learning English viewed and (re)constructed their identities. This research also explored the factors that played major roles in the construction of their identities. Drawing on Norton's (2000, 2013) notions of identity and Taylor's (2010) quadripolar system, my research aimed to answer one research question and three sub-questions.

My research question was: In what ways, if any, has the learning of English impacted the identities of Saudi Arabian learners?

My sub questions were:

1. What linguistic and emotional conflicts and effects have learners encountered by transitioning into a new language community as EFL learners?
2. How have these experiences constructed or impacted their present and future identities?
3. How have these experiences shaped their learning and their view of English?

Chapter Four served to answer my main research question, with a focus on sub-questions 1 and 3. Chapter Five aimed to answer the main research question with a focus on sub-question 2. Chapter Five found that my participants fell into various categories of Taylor's (2010) quadripolar systems. For example, Nurah and Asma

fell into the rebellious system, positioned against the norms and traditional views relating to the ideal Saudi Arabian woman.

## 6.1 In what ways, if any, has the learning of English impacted the identities of Saudi Arabian learners?

As explained in Chapter Two, I used the views of Norton (2000, 2006) to show that identity is not static but is always evolving; and that engagement in language learning helps to develop – and at times restructure – identity. I adopted Norton's (2000, 2006) and Taylor's (2010) notion of imagined futures to illustrate the link between language learning and identity. Based on my adoption of this framework, my participants' data highlighted many important aspects on how learning English had impacted their identities. Through their answers to the questions, various themes arose from the data that provided insights into their language-learning journeys. The data demonstrated that three of the participants – Nurah, Asma and Shaheed – had shown shifting identities and bicultural identities of the kinds discussed in Section 1.5.

Section 2.1 covered Norton's (2006) suggestion that researchers view identity from a sociocultural aspect. In sociocultural theory, identity is not viewed as static. Rather, it is considered to be fluid and changing. Nurah showed a strong sense of shifting identities in her narrative writings. She explained that her identities were interlinked and that learning English had completed her rather than changed her. Shaheed also showed a sense of shifting identities. For example, he explained, he would be more expressive when chatting in English and more direct when chatting in Arabic. Like Nurah, Shaheed felt that his identity had not been changed by his learning of English, but that speaking English allowed him to take on a different identity. Asma's data revealed further instances of shifting identities when she said that people did not reveal their true selves or who they were when speaking Arabic. Asma's words showed that identities shifted across contexts; and that many Saudi Arabians hid their true selves, particularly Saudi Arabian women because of the cultural expectations placed on them. These instances of shifting identities were clear to see from the data; and I showed, through the research, that an important aspect of foreign-language learning was the possibility that learners might take up bicultural identities. Luna et al. (2008) explain that learners of foreign languages will adopt a

variety of cultural values from being exposed to different cultures. Unlike monocultural members whose identity construction is drawn from one culture, they have choices and the ability to develop shifting identities

Furthermore, an important aspect of identity construction is that of future imagined identities and career choices. My participants' imagined future identities were strongly evident within the data. Although the male participants had no clear idea of what career paths they would take, their imagined future identities were linked to English. On the other hand, the women participants had a clear idea of their career paths and their imagined future communities. To illustrate, Nurah's imagined future consisted of being an English teacher and Asma's imagined future consisted of being a nurse. This may have been the result of Saudi Arabian culture and ideology, as a result of which women marry at an early age. This leads to some women in Saudi Arabia having clear, set goals for their futures, possibly to counteract the narrow expectation that their future is limited to marriage.

Based on the experiences of the participants on their English-language journeys, some of them clearly fell into the quadripolar model suggested by Taylor (2010). For example, Nurah's identity shifted from an imposed self (what the community wanted), through an unhealthy private self (evaluating her abilities negatively based on past experiences), to her actual self, when she was happy with her identity at the time. The data also showed that Asma's identity was not static and had evolved based on the situation she found herself in. When she was with her family, she took up the imposed self, to conform with what her family and society wanted from her. However, when she was with her friends online, she took up a different identity so as to fit in with them. In addition, Asma's data showed that Taylor's (2010) public self also came into play. Her English identity enabled her to work towards her imagined future of being an English-speaking nurse, as opposed to accepting her Saudi Arabian identity of being a woman who needed to stay home to take care of the children.

In conclusion, although each of my participants' identity journeys was unique and although their identities changed within the scope of a continuum, it was evident that each one of them had undergone substantial identity changes as a result of learning English.

The next three sections – Sections 6.1.1, 6.1.2 and 6.1.3 – answer my sub-questions and give further information on how learning English may impact the identities of Saudi Arabian learners.

### 6.1.1 What linguistic and emotional conflicts and effects have learners encountered by transitioning into a new language community as EFL learners?

My participants' data referred to a mix of positive and negative experiences. The data showed that not all classrooms offered a safe and inclusive learning environment conducive to language learning. The participants recalled their negative experiences while facing a coercive learning environment. I discussed in the research how a coercive learning environment hampers learning. The data revealed how some of the participants lost the will to learn English and even developed low self-esteem. For example, Salim expressed how he was used to a certain teaching style from his previous teacher which he saw as beneficial to his learning of English. However, as he progressed to the next level, and got a new teacher, the teaching style differed which made him lose the desire to learn English. He lacked the willpower and self-control to learn English and this made him lose interest in learning the language. Similarly, Shaheed gave his account of the negative experiences he had had. One instance highlighted the negative effects of social learning and coerciveness in language learning. It also showed how language learning could affect a student or learner negatively if the teacher did not create a safe, inclusive learning environment in a classroom. For example, Shaheed recalled an instance in Grade 7 when he was new to the class and bullied, but was forced to present a project to the class. He ended up being mocked by his classmates for his poor speaking and writing skills.

The female participants also shared the negative learning experiences they had had while learning the English language. As covered in Section 1.8, the numbers of men studying in Saudi Arabia and abroad were significantly higher than those of women (even though Section 1.4 showed that there were more female student graduates than male student graduates in STEM subjects). This is based on culture and the cultural pressure for a woman to be an ideal wife and mother who stays home and takes care of the children. Nurah described how her community would constantly ask

why she, as a woman, would want to study English. She revealed, further, how her teachers displayed no interest in her, until she was on the verge of giving up her dream of being an English teacher. The data showed, too, that she later developed a low self-esteem owing to those negative experiences. This section also highlighted the importance of teachers creating a healthy learning environment and understanding the needs of their students.

An important aspect of identity construction is group membership. Both inclusion in and exclusion from group membership can have a strong impact on identity. A striking aspect of these data was the way in which membership of online affinity groups impacted on participants' shifting identities. The data showed how Nurah's community questioned her decision to learn English, saying that it contradicted her personality. However, even though Nurah faced these objections from her community and family, she used it as motivation to invest in learning English and proving her doubters wrong. Asma faced similar concerns from her community and family. She explained, for example, how her family was against her learning English, maintaining that it was a language for non-Muslims. In addition, Asma's family did not want her to learn English out of fear that she would lose her Saudi Arabian identity. The data also pointed to the female participants' activation of Taylor's (2010) rebellious system against society's thinking, to continue with their study of English and attain their desired imagined futures. This meant that the female participants had to choose between conforming to Saudi Arabian gender identity, culture and ideology and pursuing their imagined future, in which English was important. Shaheed faced similar negative sentiments from his grandfather, who also feared that Shaheed's generation would lose their Saudi Arabian identity by learning English. However, Shaheed made it clear he believed that this was not the case and that learning English was imperative for the future of Saudi Arabia.

### 6.1.2 How have these experiences constructed or impacted participants' present and future identities?

I showed, in Section 2.5, that gender and religious identity are big obstacles for women in Saudi Arabia. I also pointed out that there are different Saudi Arabian identity expectations for both men and women. For example, female gender identity in Saudi Arabia is situated in the private domain (socialising with other women in the

home) and the male gender identity is situated in the public domain (socialising with other men in public spaces). Furthermore, the women in Saudi Arabia have a conformed Saudi Arabian identity that entails the following: no higher education; getting married at a young age; staying at home; having children; and seeing to their husbands' wishes. This led to my female participants shifting between identities at times to conform to the accepted Saudi Arabian identity. My participants also joined online spaces in order to reclaim their right to speak and to claim their voice. In addition, my female participants' data demonstrated that both Asma and Nurah felt freer to take up different identities beyond the constraints of their imposed gendered cultural identities when participating in online spaces. The data also showed that all my participants had goals for their imagined future communities and identities. It is evident from the data that the participants allowed their voices to be heard in the course of their study of English. At times, it was equally clear that they had had to reclaim their right to speak. For example, Asma's data showed how she had positioned herself within different voices to claim power and acceptance within her societal spaces. Shaheed's data showed how he had positioned himself within society and symbolic capital. He viewed knowledge as a form of power that granted him social status and prestige.

In conclusion, my participants' strong imagined futures allowed them to invest in English; and to join affinity groups to reclaim their voices and their right to speak. Even though society in Saudi Arabia has different conformed gender and religious identities for men and women, my female participants pushed back against the expectations entailed.

### 6.1.3 How have these experiences shaped participants' learning and their view of English?

The data reported on in Chapters 4 and 5 revealed that my participants had very high levels of investment and agency owing to the experiences they had faced. In every instance, they had used their negative experiences as motivation to further invest in learning English, especially outside the classroom, for their imagined futures. In addition, what was evident in the data was the importance of affect in language learning and the impact this had on their level of investment. Affect surfaced strongly in the course of their language-learning journeys, and did so in

many different guises: pride, enjoyment, fear and low self-esteem. In addition, affect helped the participants to invest strongly in English and to reclaim their right to speak. They also viewed English as an important aspect of their future careers – and of their future imagined communities.

All my participants struggled with self-esteem at specific points on their learning journeys. This was a direct result of the impact on their learning of being in a negative learning environment at times. These situations highlighted the importance of teachers and the methodologies they used. In some instances, there was a lack of acknowledgment of their identities and/or no comfortable space for the expression and the development of their identities owing to both the methodology implemented in classrooms and the lack of awareness from the teachers. Rather than learning from their classroom peers, my participants were judged and mocked by them. At times, as in the cases of Shaheed and Nurah, they were despised and disrespected by the teacher for their limited English proficiency. However, they all retained their investment in English despite the negative experiences and in some cases became even more determined to overcome the obstacles they faced.

For example, Salim expressed how he lost his desire to learn English based on the classroom activities and teaching approach implemented by the teacher. This experience damaged his motivation and he became withdrawn while missing many English lessons. However, instead of giving up on learning English, Salim invested in learning English outside the classroom. Similarly, being mocked by his classmates for his low level of proficiency in English prompted Shaheed to invest in learning the language outside the classroom. Shaheed's data showed that he would listen to music and read books by Charles Dickens to increase his vocabulary. In this way, Shaheed displayed a strong sense of investment in learning English. He later started developing confidence and would read his poems to his approving classmates. Nurah faced the same issues in her classroom and developed low self-esteem owing to the negative comments her teacher aimed in her direction. However, she used this as fuel to invest in the language and excel in order to achieve her imagined future.

All my participants invested heavily in English and adopted a variety of identities, and this was greatly influenced by the function of affinity groups and participation in English outside the classroom. Using English outside the classroom, especially in

online affinity groups, gave the majority of them access to ‘free’ spaces where they could adopt different identities to express different facets of who they were –and were becoming.

## 6.2 Limitations of the study

In Section 3.3.14, I provided my obstacles to the study. I explained that I felt that my biggest obstacle had been the time period in which I had collected the data. The initial site I had in mind for data collection denied my request based on the fact that they felt I could/would misinterpret the data and cause issues for my participants socially. I then had to change my data-collection site, and even though I initially started with 15 participants who met the criteria (see Section 3.3.1), I ended up with five participants. Furthermore, owing to Covid-19 restrictions and the stipulations of the school, I could only communicate with the participants via WhatsApp and conduct non-recorded interviews via Zoom.

## 6.3 Implications for language learning

This study has shown that my participants’ identities were constructed, shaped and reshaped, and that these identities shifted as they learnt English. The participants also communicated that they had constructed their identities as English-language learners, re-voiced themselves and claimed their right to speak. English did not play a role in their daily lives and they had to take the initiative to extend their learning of English in out-of-school contexts. Similarly to participants in other works, including Norton (2000), my participants had limited opportunities to develop themselves socially as English speakers and showed strong signs of investment and agency.

Owing to the conditions inherent in teaching EFL, my participants’ only opportunity to practice the language was inside the classroom. At times, the atmosphere there was not conducive to English-language learning and left several of them demotivated. Future research should look at ways of combating negative classroom atmosphere(s) to permit students and learners to maximise their participation in the classroom space and take ownership of meaning-making. It is thus important that teachers understand students’ and learners’ needs in order to allow their voices to be heard.

Overall, the implications of the data from this research highlighted the importance of creating an inclusive and safe classroom environment to provide students and learners with a more supportive environment when learning English. Also, drawing on the learners' own resources and their out-of-school language practices was important. In addition, these findings made me realise, as an EFL instructor, that when teaching English, teachers need to be aware of the conflicting identities within Saudi Arabian students and learners owing to their religious, social and cultural identities. Furthermore, the findings also suggested that teachers should not be fixated on a specific methodology, as this may in fact hamper students' learning. For example, I showed in Section 1.9 that the preferred teaching method for teaching English in Saudi Arabia is CLT. In Section 2.8, however, I explained that various researchers (Norton, 2010; Palmer, 1968; Prabhu, 1992; Wallace, 2003) advise teachers to be wary of the limitations of CLT. In that same section, I also dealt with CLT's use of set scenarios as part of curricula and gave the example of Norton's (2000) participant, Martina, who was discomfited to discover that what she learnt in class could not be applied to the outside world. For this reason I suggested – based on the views of Prabhu (1990, 1992) – that there was no guaranteed best methodology for teaching EFL. Instead, teachers should use the better parts of different methods and merge them together in order to ensure that each student learns the target language in ways that meet their needs and grant them ownership of the meaning-making process.

This study has also shown me that teachers of EFL in Saudi Arabia should consider affect as an important aspect of language learning and consciously create free spaces void of judgement for students and learners – to help provide them with the necessary tools to achieve their imagined identities. The impact of affect could be seen in the data collected, in which it was shown to have played a large role in the learning processes and experiences of my participants. For example, Salim expressed throughout the data he supplied that affect played an important role in his language-learning journey. Salim explained that *speaking with … friends* made him feel *relieved, proud, and satisfied* because he *was making consistent progress and seeing results*. Another example of the relevance of affect was Shaheed, who showed in Section 4.2.2 that being mocked by his peers for his lack of proficiency in English had had a negative impact on him academically. At the same time, when

Shaheed acquired a receptive audience who praised him for his writing and his poems, his peers' response resulted in a positive impact on his academic performance.

Furthermore, teachers can create judgement-free spaces for students by understanding the obstacles language learners in Saudi Arabia face – among them affect, religious identity and gender identity. This study has shown that affect played an important role in the language-learning journeys of my participants and highlighted the religious and gender-specific obstacles students face when learning English. For instance, the data showed that Nurah and Asma had faced gender-specific obstacles on many occasions, and that these constant obstacles had hindered them from learning English. Nurah and Asma also showed how they had nevertheless used this hindrance to propel their agency in learning the language. Nurah expressed this in her narrative when her community questioned her: *why would she choose to learn something that contradicts with her personality and that does not suit her?* Nurah's data further showed that her teacher's negativity towards her had meant that she *underwent some sort of low self-trust* and felt that she *was not capable and… did not have the courage*. Inspiring themselves based on the data supplied by the women in this study, teachers should create free spaces so that students do not face these obstacles in the classroom in future.

## 6.4 Recommendations for further research

Based on my findings in this research, the following can be used to extend and better the findings:

- Teachers should foster an inclusive learning environment in which students feel free to express their identities and their interests. This would allow students to express themselves freely, and make it possible for students to garner their right to speak, as seen in the example of Shaheed when he felt confident to present his poetry to his peers in class.
- Teachers should consider online affinity groups as they are extremely helpful in fostering safe spaces for identity development. This could be seen very clearly in my participants' experiences and in how they used their online affinity groups to better their English and claim their right to speak. Teachers could apply Schug and Torea's (2023) idea of e-tandems in their classrooms.

Teachers could categorise their students' hobbies and create groups under headings such as "gaming", "cooking" and "sports", depending on the various popular categories put forward. Students could then interact and get practice with native speakers online as students in Saudi Arabia have limited options for practising English. For example, Shaheed expressed how he interacted differently while online; and Nurah felt more confident and gained her right to speak after joining her online cooking group.

- Teachers should be sensitive to gender dynamics in language learning, and to any cultural difficulties that students may encounter when studying English, especially in the Saudi Arabian environment. This was experienced especially by my female participants, who had to endure the views of their communities and families concerning their learning of English. Nurah also expressed how her teacher had made her lose her self-belief and how she had nearly ended up quitting English. In addition, my female participants showed how they had to break free and fall into Taylor's (2010) model of the rebellious self so that they could continue their English-language learning journey.
- Teachers and researchers should theoretically consider the significance of affect in language learning and explore how it contributes to the development of learners' investment. My data have shown that confidence augments learning and investment. For example, a healthy environment allowed Shaheed to deliver his poetry in a classroom where his peers cheered him on. Similarly, when Nurah was thinking about quitting her English-language learning journey owing to the attitude of her teacher, her friend's encouragement was able to persuade her to continue. Teachers should encourage a nurturing and engaging classroom environment to assist learners to build their confidence, as this in turn facilitates the growth of learners' investment and language competence.
- Further research should explore the role of online affinity groups in the learning of English and this should be incorporated into the English classroom curriculum. This would allow teachers to understand the extent to which agency and investment are demonstrated by students of English in Saudi Arabia, and the sizeable impact these have on their identities.

## 6.5 Conclusion

In this study I attempted to close the apparent gap in the literature as a result of few studies being conducted on identity in English-language learning by Arabic-speaking students and learners living in an Arabic-speaking country. I did this by considering how Arabic-speaking students and learners learning English view and construct their identities. To establish the framework for this study, I used Norton's (2000, 2013) work on identity from a sociocultural perspective that views identity as fluid and evolving over time; and Taylor's (2010) quadripolar model of selves. I hope that the findings will enlighten teachers about how investment and agency in English-language teaching and learning can impact the identities of Saudi Arabian foreign language learners.

This study has also reshaped my own ideas on teaching English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. I have come to realise that EFL teachers should be sensitive to the identities of Saudi Arabian students learning English. The study has also reminded me that affect plays a major role in language learning and that I should ensure that my activities are set up in such a way as to promote a positive learning environment with a collaborative, supportive ethos both in terms of learner–teacher relationships and peer–peer relationships. In addition, this study has shown that we as teachers in Saudi Arabia should ensure that our students have ownership of meaning-making, so that they may excel in language learning.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: First Interview used in the main study

## Interview guide 1

1. Tell me about yourself (age, hobbies, likes, dislikes, etc.).
2. Using as many adjectives as you know, how would you describe yourself now that you're a final-year student?
3. Would you say learning English is important? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Would you have learnt English in school if it was not compulsory? Give reasons for your answer.
5. How would you describe your English learning journey? (Possible prompts: When did you learn English for the first time? Where? What was your experience? What were the positive and negative aspects (where relevant)?
6. Would you say that you have tried to improve your English outside of school? How? When?
7. Do you feel comfortable using English in class? Why? Would you prefer speaking about/doing activities in class related to English movies, books, etc.?
8. What words come to your mind when you think about the English language? Use as many adjectives as possible.
9. How do you feel about learning English as a Saudi citizen/resident? Give reasons for your answer.

## Appendix B: Second interview used in the main study

## Interview guide 2

1. In your own words, define identity.
2. How did you view yourself as a (Syrian, Jordanian, Egyptian) before you learnt English and how do you view yourself now?
3. Do you think that learning English has had a positive or a negative impact on your identity? Why or why not?
4. Now that you viewed it did or did not have an impact on your identity, do you feel positively or negatively towards it?
5. Do you feel you are socially more attached to English culture after learning English? English movies, games, music, etc.
6. Do you think the more you watched English movies, played games in English, listened to English music; it caused a change in your personality?
7. Is it easier to convey your thoughts and feelings in English or in Arabic?
8. Do you think that you are prouder of yourself now that you speak both English and Arabic?
9. Now that you do or do not feel prouder, do you prefer to speak English with your friends and classmates, or do you prefer speaking in Arabic?

# Appendix C: First narrative writing guide

## Narrative writing – Task 1

**Identities and language learners: A case study of English-language learners in Saudi Arabia**

Welcome to the first writing of your narrative biography. I thank you for participating in my study.

**Part 1**

I would like you to make notes on the following:

- Introduce yourself (name, age, hobbies, likes, dislikes, etc.)
- How many languages do you speak? How did you come to learn English?
- How do you feel about speaking English in an Arabic-speaking country?
- Do you think speaking English will benefit you for your future and career in Saudi Arabia?

**Part 2**

I would like you to brainstorm some ideas:

- What are some positive experiences language learners may encounter (you can give examples of personal experiences)?
- What are some negative experiences language learners may encounter (you can give examples of personal experiences)?

**Part 3**

For the final part of this activity, I would like you to use what you've noted in Parts 1 and 2, then write about 1000–1500 words (2–3 pages) of what personal experiences (positive and negative) you encountered on your English language learning journey. You can write about:

- The **positive** experiences you had and **why they were positive**.
- **The negative experiences** you had and **why they were negative**.
- You can tell me **who was with you** or caused you to have these experiences.
- **When you encountered** these experiences (age, stage in school, etc.)

- **Where you encountered** these experiences (home, school, abroad, etc.)
- How did these experiences **make you feel**? (Write as many adjectives as possible.)

Do not worry about spelling and grammar. The most important is for me to know your experiences.

# Appendix D: Second narrative writing guide

## Narrative writing – Task 2

**Identities and language learners: A case study of English-language learners in Saudi Arabia**

Welcome to the second writing of your narrative biography. I thank you for participating in my study.

**Part 1 (groups)**

You will be assigned to a group. For this task I would like you to discuss the following with your group members:

- How would you define the word identity?
- Do you think that having a specific identity (Saudi, Syrian, Jordanian, etc.) is important? Why?
- Do you think students learning English can have a different view of themselves? Why?

**Part 2 (groups)**

For the second part of this activity, I would like you to brainstorm some ideas together in your groups. Think about the following saying and discuss the questions below:

“A big element of a culture is its language; learning a new language will not only give you a deeper understanding of a culture, but will also allow you to expand your circle which will result in acquiring friends in different languages” (languagetrainers.com).

- Do you think learning English could affect a student’s thinking, ideas and behaviour? If yes, what are the positives and negatives?
- Is it possible for a student learning English as a foreign language to have two personalities, two cultures etc.? Why?
- Can a student lose the current culture or get confused by learning English? Why?

**Part 3 (on your own)**

For the final part of this activity, I would like you to use what you've learnt from your groups and write in as many words as possible (at least 2–3 pages) what **impact you feel learning English has had on your personal and educational life**. You can write about:

- How you viewed yourself before you studied English.
- The way you view yourself now that you study English.
- Do you think learning English has shaped or changed your specific identity? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- Do you feel your thinking about culture and modern life has changed now that you study English? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Do not worry about spelling and grammar. The most important is for me to know your experiences.

# Appendix E: Ethics clearance certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**
R14/49 Satardien

| | |
|---|---|
| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | **PROTOCOL NUMBER: H20/11/55** |
| **PROJECT TITLE** | Identities and language learners: A case study of a group of male Saudi English-Language learners in Saudi Arabia |
| **INVESTIGATOR(S)** | Mr S Satardien |
| **SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT** | Education/ |
| **DATE CONSIDERED** | 20 November 2020 |
| **DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE** | Approved<br>Risk Level: Minimal |
| **EXPIRY DATE** | 27 January 2024 |

**DATE** 28 January 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Dr B Mendelowitz and Dr I Fouche

**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)**

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

ssatardien
**Signature**

28 / 01 / 2021
**Date**

**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES**

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