

**Writing in a New Environment:
Saudi ESL Students Learning Academic Writing**

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Abstract

This qualitative case study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the obstacles that students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia face when learning English in a writing course that implements critical thinking and writing process pedagogy. The study took place over five months at the Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute in spring 2012. While ten participants--six female and four male Saudi Arabian ESL students--participated in this study, these findings focus primarily on one male and one female student. The aim of this focus was to give a rich and in-depth description of the two students. Two main queries guided this study: 1) How do sex differences affect Saudi students' perception of their teachers' and peers' authority? 2) How do those perceptions affect their development as writers and critical thinkers when learning in an intensive writing course at the high intermediate level? The researcher documented data through three sources: classroom observation, interviews with ESL students and teachers, and student writing samples.

This study found that the Saudi female students in the case study more readily accepted their teachers and peers as authorities than the male students did, although both male and female students valued the teacher feedback over that of their peers. The findings also show that, for

cultural reasons, working in groups of mixed sex is more problematic for female students than for male students.

This case study also showed that how Saudi students perceived their teacher's and peers' authority affected their development as writers, and that the female students were able to progress and assert their voices, moving from silence to perceived knowledge. On the other hand, the male students, while starting with a stronger voice when orally participating in class, were less able to demonstrate their critical thinking in writing.

Dedication

This thesis, and all my achievement and success, are dedicated to my husband Saleh A. Binladen for having inspired, encouraged, and supported me to achieve the highest educational goals. I also dedicate this work to my daughters, Soltana and Ghada, who have been patient and understanding. And last but not least, to Dr. Balkis Nasser, who paved the way for me early on. Thank you all for your faith in me. I love you!

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Preface

In the last seven years, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has implemented an ambitious program to improve the educational, scientific, and cultural experiences of its citizens. The program provides full scholarships to those interested in pursuing higher education. According to a press release published by The Institute of International Education in November 2012, there are “31% more international students studying at US colleges and universities than there were a decade ago.” The source also indicated that after China, the KSA had the second largest number of international students studying in the US (Institute of International Education).

When joining American universities, Saudi students face two major problems: learning English and learning how to function in a new educational system that incorporates critical thinking. Nuray Alagozlu observes that these problems are especially apparent in Rhetoric and Writing Studies because academic success in composition courses, which are a major part of all American college curricula, demands the ability to think critically and make strong arguments (as cited in Barnawi, “Finding a Place” 190). Instead of uncritically submitting to higher authorities (as is expected of Saudi students), students in the US are expected to voice authorial presence and autonomy in their thinking. They are expected to demonstrate critical thinking by questioning the validity of ideas in written texts and judging the ideas of their peers, teachers, and authors. American scholars like William Perry and Mary Belenky et al. looked at American students’ perceptions of authority and their intellectual development in college, but no study has similarly evaluated these aspects of Saudi college students’ experiences when learning English writing.

As I will demonstrate, the Saudi educational system pays little attention to teaching English, and even less to critical thinking. To complicate these issues, Saudi schools follow a religious (Islamic) curriculum that relies on rote memorization and follows a teacher-centered approach. However, as linguist Suresh Canagarajah explains, critical thinking is an ongoing activity especially needed in writing courses at the university level (*Critical Academic Writing*).

The scholarships that Saudi students receive include funds for learning the English language so that they can earn high scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or Michigan Tests, the English language proficiency tests required by most Western universities. Saudi students commonly enroll in special English language programs to pass these exams. They spend as long as eighteen months (some of them even more) studying English in an effort to satisfy the English language admission requirements set by American universities. At Virginia Tech, where I conducted my research, the Language and Culture Institute (VTLCI) offers an Intensive English program, which many Saudi students take advantage of. Together, Saudi and Chinese students constitute the majority of students at the VTLCI. I decided to focus my study on the Saudi students exclusively because I am Saudi Arabian and hope that my personal experiences will enhance the quality of my research and writing.

Although the number of Saudi students attending American universities is on the rise, many of them continue to face difficulties in meeting American academic writing expectations and acquiring skills that would allow them to transition comfortably from grade school to college. Although they are able to manage courses in grammar and oral skills, they often struggle in and sometimes even fail reading and writing courses. According to the administration at VTLCI, a very small number of the Saudi students at the advanced level passed the reading and writing classes in 2011.

The difficulties that Saudi students face when learning the English language are also complicated by the way English composition is taught in American universities, a subject absent from the Saudi high school curriculum. Additionally, English composition in American universities continues to evolve. In the 1960s and 1970s, the focus in English courses shifted from product to process, and the field has continuously witnessed ongoing social and public turns (Mathieu). After the shift in the 1960s and 1970s, writing was no longer seen as just a means to record ideas, but also as a means to create and form ideas (Raimes). Writing also became a way to learn, not just a way to demonstrate learning (Emig, "Writing"). Saudi students come to the US unprepared for these shifts and turns. They come expecting the old, familiar paradigm, and believe that learning how to write is the same as learning how to produce an error-free product. Accordingly, they struggle in their transition to college writing.

The other challenge that most of the Saudi students face when first joining an English program in the US is the mixed-sex environment. At home, they were used to a segregated educational environment where female students are taught only by female teachers and male students are taught only by male teachers; here in the US, they find themselves learning with colleagues of the opposite sex and taught by teachers of the opposite sex.

Although the number of Saudi students studying in American colleges and universities has increased, very little has been written about the writing challenges they encounter when transitioning from a curriculum that is product-oriented to one that is process-oriented. As a Saudi student who faced hardship transitioning to the new writing requirements during my graduate studies and who has experienced teaching in the KSA, I felt that I could identify with the Saudi students' culture, needs, and challenges. Therefore, I became interested in exploring and shedding light on the hurdles that Saudi students must surmount when studying reading and

writing in an American-language institution. To do so, I started with a pilot study in fall 2011 at the VTLCI, during which it became clear to me that it is at the high intermediate level that the problem in reading and writing becomes an obstacle in students' transition to what will be expected from them at the college level.

Gaining Entry

My connection to the VTLCI started a year before my research project began. My husband was a student there, and I met some of his teachers and the student advisor (later Assistant Director for Academics), Linda Sanford. Knowing that I speak Arabic and English, Dr. Sanford would occasionally call on me to help solve issues related to the Saudi students' problems with immigration or other social and cultural problems. During our subsequent meetings and conversations, she learned about my experience teaching English to Saudi college students. She asked me if I would be interested in joining the VTLCI as an instructor. I told her that I wanted to focus on finishing my course work, but that I would not mind substituting for some teachers occasionally. Since every teacher, full-time or part-time, is required to go through the same screening procedures, Dr. Sanford scheduled a meeting for me with the VTLCI director. Half an hour through the interview, he offered me a teaching position and invited me to work as a full-time teacher at the VTLCI. Since I was busy with both my domestic and academic duties, I declined the offer but kept the door open for substitute teaching. And so, on several occasions Dr. Sanford called me to substitute. Only once was I able to sub for a Reading and Writing class. I liked the experience tremendously. I was for the first time teaching Saudi male students and was impressed at seeing male and female Saudi students interacting and learning together in one room.

At the beginning of every semester, the VTLCI organizes orientation sessions before the placement tests. During the orientation program, new students learn about immigration, academics, and living in the US. Because of the large number of Saudi students, most with very limited English, the VTLCI director asked me at the beginning of fall 2010 and spring 2011, to help translate the orientation sessions for the Saudi students. He also wanted me to translate the directions and help supervise during the placement tests. After finishing their tests, many of the Saudi students told me that even if their results placed them at 200 or 300 levels, they wanted to start from the 100 level. When asked their reasons, they all told me that they wanted a good foundation in English. Other teachers in the VTLCI confirmed that they had heard the same claims from other Saudi students.

The VTLCI also asked me to help with the training program. Dr. Sanford called me at the beginning of spring 2010 to talk about the specifics of the Saudi students. She also wanted me to share with the VTLCI teachers my experience teaching in the KSA. She wanted all VTLCI teachers teaching any level of Grammar, Listening, Speaking (GLS), Reading and Writing (RW), or electives to attend. Since the VTLCI was growing steadily, and new teachers were joining the program every term, I shared my experience again the following term with the newly hired teachers. During one training session, a female teacher asked, “Since most Saudi male students do not take me seriously, do you think they do so because I am a female teacher?” Since most VTLCI teachers are females, I heard many echo that teacher’s concern. That question surprised me. I did not know exactly what to say. My first response was, “It could be.” I told the teacher that I had never thought of that. That question got me thinking more about the effects of culture, specifically gender issues, which the Saudi students face when learning writing.

After finishing the course requirements for my PhD program in Rhetoric and Writing, and having done some substitute teaching at the VTLCI, I had been exposed to first-year writing as taught in American colleges and to the writing program taught to the ESL students in the language institutes. In fall 2011, as I was wrapping up my course work and preparing for my preliminary examination, I had to have my pre-prospectus ready, in which I outlined my research interest. The only subject I had in mind was learning about and investigating what the Saudi students go through when transitioning from the Saudi product-focused and teacher-centered approach to writing instruction, to the American student-focused and process-oriented writing instruction; from writing from memory to composing, and from writing rarely to writing on a daily basis. I wanted to understand how the Saudi students can function and meet the writing requirements of an intensive English program in the US in a very short time. (They are given one year of intensive English). But first, I had to consider the cultural issues, my experiences, students' expectations, and the logistics of writing instruction. In the following section, I will describe how my experience teaching Reading and Writing at VTLCI inspired this research.

To get full access to the students' work and environment, I decided to become a teacher-researcher at the VTLCI. I met with Dr. Elsie Paredes, the Associate Director at VTLCI, gave her a copy of my pre-prospectus, and discussed with her what I hoped to learn from my research. As an ESL major herself, she was very enthusiastic about the idea and told me that she would give me her official approval after reading my pre-prospectus. Two days later, I received an email with her official approval and a request to sign a teaching contract.

In spring 2012, I became a teacher-researcher at the VTLCI and used a qualitative case study to explore the writing practices that ten Saudi students developed throughout two intensive terms of learning reading and writing at the high intermediate level. My choice to use a case

study was driven by my desire to provide a holistic view that includes the context as well as the details that influence the ways students learn academic writing. As a Saudi student myself, I could relate to the students' cultural and educational needs, but as a teacher, I had also learned the best ways to approach students and reach out to them. For five months, I taught, observed, interviewed, and collected writing artifacts from these ten students.

Since the curriculum that the VTCLI already had in place engages the students in critical thinking, collaboration, and writing that undergoes several stages of revisions, the major changes that I made to the course design were in the types of topics, class discussion times, tutoring, and reflective journals. For instance, I picked topics for class discussion that I thought would be meaningful to the students and through which they could more easily demonstrate their critical thinking skills in their new environment. For a class composed half of Chinese and half of Saudi students, I chose two discussion topics that each group could relate to. For the Chinese students, the topic was the one child policy, whereas for the Saudi students, the topic was women driving in Saudi Arabia. Knowing that the Saudi students perform best with their speaking skills, I gave them ample opportunities to develop and reflect on their ideas in both whole-class discussions and in small groups and during tutoring. To give them the chance to voice their views about major issues related to their education, I designated one of their weekly reflective journal entries as one in which they could express their concerns about their writing and progress.

In my study, I hoped to learn about the obstacles that hinder a Saudi student when applying critical thinking. What my study has revealed, though, is that Saudi students already possess good critical thinking abilities, as demonstrated in their writing, journal entries, interviews, and most of all, during whole-class discussions. The study also demonstrated clear sex-based differences in commitment to writing activities and in perception of authority. For

instance, the female students were more receptive to the teacher's authority than the male students. Additionally, the Saudi students lacked the ability to fully overcome the new diversity in their learning environment. For instance, the male and female Saudi students were not comfortable working in mixed-sex groups. The Saudi female students, especially, were reluctant to work with Saudi male students. This was not surprising since not only was working in groups of the opposite sex new to them, but also because in the Gulf area, "[p]air or group work, especially concerning the skill of writing, is hardly employed by instructors or favored by students" (Shehadeh 158). An additional obstacle standing in their way is that they do not fully grasp the purpose of class discussions and how to translate those discussions into their own writing. From my observation of this particular group, I noticed that they believed that competence in oral skills equates with competence in all language skills and suffices to meet American college requirements. Accordingly, they do not put forth the necessary effort to translate their good oral skills to written texts. They keep looking at writing through the old prism that focuses on an error-free product instead of on process. They lack a clear understanding of the subsequent steps of writing, the role of each writing activity and how it contributes to improving their writing. Their previous educational and literacy practices have given Saudi students little to no experience in academic writing either in Arabic or in English. So when they are required to write repeatedly and to write different drafts of the same piece, they resist putting in the extra effort and fail to see writing as a process or to take advantage of the feedback they get in order to clearly demonstrate their critical ability. American students also often overlook the advantage of teacher and peer feedback; however, cultural and linguistic challenges exacerbate the problem for the Saudi students.

In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the biggest challenge to many learners is not vocabulary, proper pronunciation, and correct application of grammatical rules, but rather the acquisition of cultural knowledge of the language, or "cultural language" (Wang 7). Culture, as defined by Hofstede, is a mental programming by which every person acquires patterns of thinking, feeling, and potential acting, patterns learned over the course of a lifetime. In Saudi Arabia, as a collective culture, social values such as authority, social harmony, and deference to teachers and elders are the norm.

When studying in the US, the Saudi students bring with them their cultural, social, and educational practices. Suresh Canagarajah called upon educators in ESL to examine their interpretations of composing strategies not from the perspectives of English writers, but from the ESL students' perspectives (*Geopolitics*). He adds:

Students cannot be expected to leave behind their identities and interests as they engage in the learning process. What I call the *negotiation* model requires that students wrestle with the divergent discourses they face in writing to creatively work out alternate discourses and illiteracies that represent better their values and interest. In some cases this means appropriating the academic discourse and conventions in terms of the students' own backgrounds. It can sometimes mean a creative merging of conflicting discourses. (219)

In the following chapters, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which the male and female Saudi students, while learning to write following the process approach, differ in how they negotiate and respond to their teacher's and peers' authority and how those differences affect their development as critical thinkers.

It is important at this point to differentiate between sex and gender. According to Candace West and Don Zimmerman, sex is “ascribed by biology: anatomy, hormones, and physiology,” whereas gender is an “achieved status: that which is constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means” (125). In this project I use the word sex as a reference to biology.

Chapter One: Introduction

In this study, I look at how Saudi students' sex differences affect their perceptions of teachers' and peers' authority, and in turn, how those perceptions affect the students' development as writers and critical thinkers during their learning at the high intermediate level in reading and writing at VTLCI in Spring Terms I and II, 2012. I first present the background, problem statement, and significance of the study, followed by brief reviews of the Saudi educational system, the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) in KSA, and the teaching of English writing in the KSA. I also describe the study's purpose and the research questions that guided me. After providing term definitions, I discuss the limitations and organization of the study.

Background of the Study

In the first semester of the PhD program at Virginia Tech, I experienced first-hand a lot of cultural and educational issues that provided me with a good understanding of the expectations of students in American universities. The first issue was the classroom setting and its relaxed atmosphere. Having spent most of my previous educational experience, even as a Master's student, in a traditional classroom setting where all the students, who were mostly female, faced the teacher, I could hardly focus in a seminar circle setting. That setting made me feel that all eyes, especially those of the male students, were on me. As a result, during the first few weeks, I was distracted and self-conscious about every move I made during class, and rarely contributed to any group work activities, especially those which included male students.

The other issue was my limited participation in the class discussions. While students in the US are expected to share their opinions, doing so in the KSA got me in trouble. In my

freshman college year in the KSA, I thought that in college I would have more chance to express my opinion in class, so I raised my hand in one of the general religious core courses and criticized what the teacher was saying. Upon hearing my opinion, the teacher clearly became upset, rejected what I had said, and asked me to meet her in her office after class. After her reprimand, I decided that in order to graduate, I had better keep my opinion to myself in class. As a result, I went back to my old school habits of listening passively and accepting what I was told. During my first year in the PhD program in the US, I gradually lost the fear of sharing my opinion and regained the confidence I needed to function in my new environment. One of the strategies I used to gain confidence in articulating my opinion without risking embarrassment in front of the whole class was through first talking to the teacher alone. For instance, I would wait till the end of class, and walk with the teacher to her office to share with her my opinion between only the two of us.

I am among thousands of Saudi students who have been flooding American universities in the last few years. Recently, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has taken several measures, inside and outside the country, towards educational reform. At the local level, an ambitious six-year project called Tatweer was launched in 2006 with a budget of US \$293 million to develop general education in the country. The project's primary objective is to improve public education so that students will be prepared to participate in an increasingly globalized society and to take part in the complex and challenging problems that globalization brings, without losing their social values and ideology (*King Abdullah Project for Developing General Education*). Tatweer had four particular targets: enhancing teachers' skills, improving curriculum, developing school activities, and improving school facilities and infrastructure (1).

The other important step towards educational reform was through the ambitious King Abdullah Foreign Scholarship Program (KAFSP), whose goal is to improve the educational, scientific, and cultural experiences of its citizens. The program provides full scholarships to those interested in pursuing higher education in colleges around the world—and I am one of those who has taken advantage of the new educational opportunities to study in America. The intended outcome of the KAFSP is to prepare distinguished Saudi generations for a society built upon a knowledge-based economy (Ministry of Higher Education).

There are some general requirements for joining the scholarship program and some specific requirements depending on the degree program. To be eligible, the applicant must be Saudi, not work in the public sector, and be ready to commit to full-time study. There is an extra requirement for the female applicant in terms of having a legally acceptable male companion to travel and remain with her until the completion of her studies (Ministry of Higher Education).

According to the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education website, the immediate goals for the scholarship program are both to improve the Saudi students' academic and professional standards through their enrollment in the most prestigious graduate and undergraduate programs around the world, and to exchange scientific, educational, and cultural experiences with other countries (Ministry of Higher Education).

The Saudi sector that coordinates, assists, and supervises Saudi students in the US is the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM), a part of the Saudi Arabian Embassy to the United States in Washington DC. SACM primarily assists Saudi students studying in the US and their dependents. A major contribution of SACM to Saudi students in the US is implementing the Saudi governmental policy and scholarship regulations concerning the financial obligations to

Saudi students, as well as ensuring their educational, cultural, and social welfare. SACM also represents the Saudi universities, ministries and other governmental agencies that sponsor Saudi students in the US through regularly reporting on students' academic progress. In addition, SACM facilitates communication and exchanges scientific and technological expertise between the different American educational and research institutions and their Saudi counterparts (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission).

The scholarships that Saudi students receive include funds for learning the English language at institutions like VTLCI across the US. These funds for language courses are meant to assist students in earning high scores on the TOEFL or Michigan Tests—the English language proficiency tests required by American universities. Saudi students who lack English language skills enroll in English language centers for up to eighteen months in order to satisfy the admission requirements set by American universities. According to the Assistant Director for Academics at VTLCI, the number of Saudi students enrolled in the VTLCI jumped from 15 students in Fall I, 2010 to 68 in Spring I, 2012 and 78 in Spring II, 2012, the time of my study. As many of these students experience the American educational system for the first time in English language centers like the VTLCI, these centers play a vital role in helping foreign students adapt to the academic reading and writing requirements expected from them in American universities.

Problem Statement

Saudi Arabian students in American universities face the difficult task of acquiring reading and writing proficiency in a language other than their native one, while simultaneously embracing diversity, including working with the opposite sex for the first time, and adapting to an entirely new educational system. In his 2003 study of Saudi students' beliefs about their

difficulties with English writing, Abdulaziz Fageeh writes that, although Saudi students have many opportunities to learn to read and write in English, their performance does not meet the expectations of educational policy makers. Fageeh says, “Students at every level possess a low level of English proficiency and have not achieved the goals of English instruction set out by the Ministry of Education” (4).

In a 2009 study examining the US educational experiences of 25 male and female graduate and undergraduate Saudi students at Oregon State University, Donna Shaw observed that Saudi students considered writing in English one of their most difficult educational experiences. Similarly, Muhammad Abdel Latif revealed that students in the Arab Gulf region face major problems when learning English writing at the linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical levels.

Abdel Latif shows that the most frequent rhetorical problems that Arab Gulf region students face occur in writing argumentative essays, and relate to development, support, organization, and persuasiveness. He also contends that the following issues need to be publicly addressed in order for Arab Gulf region students to have better and more effective educational experiences:

1. What is taking place in English writing classrooms at the pre-university stages.
2. Pre-university students’ English writing difficulties.
3. Sex-related individual differences in English writing performance. (10)

To effectively assist students coming to study in the US, instructors need to learn about the students’ prior English linguistic knowledge as well as major sex-related English writing practices. In my study, I aim to address these issues.

While the number of Saudi students coming to US universities is on the rise, those students increasingly have a difficult time meeting academic writing expectations. In the fall of 2011, at the VTLCI, Saudi students who easily passed courses in grammar and oral skills struggled and even failed in reading and writing courses. While completing the course activities, many Saudi students made little to no progress, especially in writing. Their difficulties have challenged teachers at the VTLCI. Many Saudi students complained of these challenges during their meeting with the Assistant Cultural Attaché for Academic Affairs, who was a representative from SACM charged with listening to the Saudi students' academic and social problems.

Saudi students are not the only ones who face difficulties when learning writing in American universities. Academic writing is the most difficult task ESL students face when studying in the US (Taher). As more foreign students enroll in American universities, interest in this problem has increased. The selected bibliography published in the *Journal of Second Language Writing* of the recent scholarship in second language writing from 2010 to September 2011 reveals that interest in researching the writing of ESL students of different nationalities is on the rise (Silva and McMartin-Miller). In 2011, the selected bibliography contained 46 publications that discussed ESL students' difficulties in American universities—that number jumped to 61 publications in 2013 (Silva and Paiz). The publications covered the writing issues of students of nationalities such as New Zealandian, Russian, Japanese, Hong Kong Cantonese, Korean, Chinese, Spanish, Iranian, German, French, Indian, Singaporean, Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Polish and Latino. However, they mention no studies of Saudi students.

For Saudi students, mastering writing as a process and embracing cultural diversity form the primary obstacles impeding their academic success. Ruth Spack, who wrote extensively about cross-cultural academic reading and writing, maintains that culture plays an important role

in shaping students' identities and their ability to define their own identity. Instead of ESL teachers defining the students' identities, Spack calls on teachers to allow students to construct their own identities. She elaborates that this process is not limited to students' viewing their learning through the lens of culture alone, "but instead through a kaleidoscopic lens that captures the dynamic and complex processes that result from the interaction of individual, cultural, and contextual factors" (745). As my study shows, culture plays a very dynamic part in the way the students participate in academic life.

Significance of the Study

The wealth of research about Arabic ESL writers rarely covers how sex and authority issues impact Saudi students at the high intermediate level when learning to read and write critically in the US. Fageeh, in his 2008 study on the writing difficulties of Saudi college students, explores the students' attitudes towards and beliefs about Arabic and English writing. However, his study was limited to Saudi male students learning English in the KSA. Al-Hazmi's study applied the teaching of writing as a process to promote critical thinking and self-reflection in Saudi college students, but this study was also limited to male Saudi students.

No qualitative study has used a teacher-researcher method to explore Saudi students' writing in a US university setting. With the absence of in-depth investigations into the nature of writing difficulties faced by high-intermediate-level Saudi ESL students, my work aims to provide the field with rich qualitative data to explore those difficulties, especially in terms of authority, sex, and intellectual development.

My personal experiences as an ESL student and teacher in the VTLCI can benefit future ESL students in the US and EFL teachers in the KSA. As a female Saudi teacher instructing male

Saudi students for the first time, I can provide some guidelines for future female Saudi teachers who will be teaching in the new educational institutions such as King Abdullah University of Science and Technology—founded in 2009 as a sex-integrated university, the first of its kind. My study is also distinctive in that, to my knowledge, it is the only study that employs a teacher-researcher method by a female Saudi English-language teacher in the US; thus, it contributes to the Saudi voice in the field of ESL as well as that of composition and writing.

When designing my study, I followed the recommendations of the major scholars in the fields of both writing and SLA, such as Auerback, Blau and Hall, Canagarajah, Fu and Mtoush, Horner and Trimbur, and Matsuda and Cox. All of these scholars urge ESL teachers to reexamine taken-for-granted assumptions about ESL students' literacy and pay more attention to important personal, cognitive, and sociocultural variables in order to help Saudi students prove their agency as writers.

Saudi Education System

Many of the difficulties Saudi students face when joining American universities stem from the Saudi Arabian educational system, which relies heavily on memorizing religious texts. As the birthplace of Islam, Saudi Arabia has always made religion the core of all school curricula. At the same time, current Saudi educational policy aims to ensure that education becomes more efficient in order to meet not just the religious but also the economic and social needs of the country, and to eradicate illiteracy among Saudi adults. Therefore, according to Al-Banyan, the Saudi educational system has been characterized by four major features: 1) an emphasis on Islam, 2) a centralized educational system, 3) separate education for men and women, and 4) state financial support.

The structure and content of the Saudi school curriculum is designed by the “Ulama,” the Muslim scholars whose collective role is to preserve the Islamic foundation of the country (Prokop). The six religious subjects that are taught in schools (around 30% of weekly school hours) continue to be taught at the university level, too (Prokop 79). Even non-religious subjects like geography or science maintain tight ties to Islam by including the contributions of the leading Islamic scholars in each field.

Teachers use textbooks to create a sense of loyalty and obedience to authority at several levels: God, the ruler, the teacher, all the way to the head of the family. The Ulama have authority not only over the educational apparatus but also over other cultural fields such as summer centers, television, and radio programs (Prokop). In the educational and social spheres, the influence of the Ulama “is felt particularly strongly in respect of women’s education and the role of women in public life” (Prokop 78). The Ulama resist women’s enrollment in all the majors that are available to men and resist their participation in public life. Saudi students, especially females, who enroll in a US university where they are expected to demonstrate autonomy, creativity, and independent thinking, find it difficult to let go of their inherited academic baggage.

The Teaching of English in KSA

Although private schools in Saudi Arabia introduce students to French and English in kindergarten, English is the only foreign language taught in public schools, starting at grade 7. From grades 7-12, students study English for four sessions a week, with each session lasting 45 minutes. Saudi schools’ English curriculum is limited to vocabulary and grammar memorization and does not demonstrate a real progression among different levels of difficulty or proficiency, except for some increase in vocabulary. As in the rest of the Arab world, in Saudi Arabia the

teaching of language is dominated by “a traditional, top-down, textbook-oriented, and teacher-led methodology” (Al-Hazmi, “And Reflection” 38). Examinations rely on regurgitation of memorized information and norm-referenced tests to evaluate students. Since most Saudis speak and write in Arabic when interacting with their family, friends, peers, and classmates, they have little to no chance to practice English through day-to-day interaction (Intakhab et al., 2011). In addition, students need not earn passing grades in English language courses in order to move on to the next course level or grade (unlike other courses, for which failing would mean repeating the course or grade).

The Teaching of English Writing in the KSA

When investigating Saudi students’ perceptions of their difficulties in English writing, Fageeh reported that part of those difficulties stem from the fact that Saudi schools do not emphasize writing skills in students’ first language, Arabic. The teaching of Arabic composition in Saudi schools “does not emphasize strategies that skilled writers normally employ when they write, such as prewriting, planning and supporting their ideas by example” (44). Arabic writing instruction focuses on the sentence level and the final product and its linguistic features. Instruction is teacher-centered, and does not train students to express themselves, reflect on ideas or thoughts, or formulate critical and analytical thinking (Al-Hazmi). In intermediate and high schools, Saudi students are introduced to a guided composition in the form of pre-constructed models of short pieces of writing, which they are required to memorize for tests. Memorizing a limited number of pre-constructed, isolated pieces deprives students of experience in some of the major requirements needed for writing. The first requirement that students do not experience is writing as a process of planning, composing, and revising. The second is the opportunity for

students to demonstrate critical thinking ability and voice their own opinions through their writing.

Saudi Arabian colleges do not require entrance exams or entrance essays. All college students must take two English language courses (6 credit hours) during their freshman year. These English courses do not differ much from those at the intermediate and high school level; they are mostly limited to vocabulary and grammatical rules.

In the last few years of my undergraduate education in the KSA, some departments in the College of Business Administration in my university abandoned the Arabic textbooks that had been used for years and adopted American textbooks and curricula. When interviewing Saudi students for my project, I learned that more colleges are following suit and using American textbooks, especially in fields like business, science, and technology. For example, one of the colleges that started assigning American textbooks is the College of Business Administration (CBA) in Jeddah, the second major Saudi city in Saudi Arabia. The CBA offers a Preparatory Year. (College of Business Administration) to assist Saudi students in making the shift from a mostly Arabic curriculum to one that is given through the medium of the English language. This shift to American textbooks and curricula, whether in the KSA or elsewhere, introduces to foreign students the problems they will face when making the transition to American-style academic writing. For instance, students will be required to demonstrate the ability not only to write correctly but also to analyze, synthesize, and organize their writing according to new and different genres.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study is to look at how Saudi students' sex differences affect their perceptions of teacher's and peers' authority, and in turn, how those perceptions affect their development as writers and critical thinkers when learning in high-intermediate-level reading and writing course at the VTLCI during spring terms I and II.

Research Questions

I began my study with the following two primary research questions: 1) How do sex differences affect the Saudi students' perception of their teachers' and peers' authority? 2) How do those perceptions affect their development as writers and critical thinkers when learning in an intensive writing course at the high intermediate level? I seek answers to these questions through the following sub-questions:

1. How do Saudi female and male students respond differently to a female teacher's authority?
2. How do Saudi female and male students' differences in responding to a female teacher's authority affect their development as writers and critical thinkers?
3. What are the reasons behind the Saudi students' different perceptions of and responses to their female teachers' authority?
4. How do Saudi students grapple with the issue of diversity among themselves?
5. How do Saudi female and male students respond differently to their peers' authority?
6. How do Saudi female and male students' differences in responding to peers' authority affect their development as writers and critical thinkers?
7. What are the reasons behind the Saudi students' different perceptions and responses to their peers' authority?

These research questions--although they cannot be fully addressed in a small case study--nevertheless provide the motivating questions behind this study, and each one serves as a possible guide for future research that builds on this project. That is, studying one class, and focusing on a few students within that class, provides insights and case-specific data that provide an important first step toward understanding answers to these larger questions in other contexts and in general.

Challenges

Some major challenges I faced during the study were teaching a totally new syllabus, following a new teaching approach, observing and taking field notes at the same time, convincing the Saudi students to come weekly to the teacher-student conference, and conducting my in-class and especially out-of-class conversations with the Saudi students in English.

As I was educated and taught in Saudi Arabia following the old paradigm that focuses on rote memorization and a product-oriented approach, implementing a process-oriented VTLCI syllabus was challenging during my first term as an instructor. Learning and implementing all the new steps and procedures that go hand-in-hand with the process approach, in terms of preparation and procedures, was not easy at first. I had to prepare and review different types of handouts such as course descriptions, assignment descriptions, checklists, and discussion questions. I also had to become acclimated to reviewing multiple drafts as well as giving feedback that encompassed both local and global issues. In addition to all of these new procedures associated with my role as a teacher, I had to learn other skills related to my role as a researcher. For instance, I had to quickly develop a sharp eye to notice every behavior, response, and action taking place in class and during breaks that was related to my research questions, and write it down as fast as possible without interrupting my role as a teacher.

In order to balance teaching my classes with performing my study and writing my dissertation, I extended the study to the following term (Spring II, 2012). This also allowed me to continue to observe students who remained in my classes and to observe the new Saudi students who joined the section the following term. I was able to periodically invite a colleague to observe my class and to take notes during multiple class discussions in order to free myself to manage the discussion without missing any of the important contributions.

Extending my study for the second spring term allowed me the additional advantage of observing students from Spring I who did not come to tutoring during the first term but came the second. All three Saudi students who joined the section in Spring II were interested in tutoring; one of them would always come with her sister who had been in the section the previous term. In the beginning of Spring I, I encouraged the students to come to tutoring, but often forgot to remind them throughout the remainder of the semester. In Spring II, though, I made it a habit to remind students at the end of every class that I would be in the tutoring center from 1:00-2:00 p.m. I realized the importance of giving each student individualized attention and time to discuss their papers—first, because they preferred direct feedback, which I couldn't give during class time without affecting the lesson plan; and second, because I wanted to learn about the specific areas they struggled in when writing.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations to every research method and case studies are no exception. For instance, although case studies provide thorough and detailed descriptions, they are not used to attain generalization or to create theories (Stake).

There are two limitations of this particular case study. The first one is the small participant size of only ten students. My original plan was to observe Saudi students in two different groups. I, as a native speaker of Arabic, would teach one group, while the other group would be taught by an English native speaker as a control group. However, since only seven students registered for the level 400 course in Spring I, it would have been inconvenient and ineffective to separate them into two groups. Although there were 67 Saudi students taking courses during Spring I, most of them were at the lower levels. I wanted to focus my research on levels 400 and 450 because of the previously mentioned reasons, and because those are the levels that cover and prepare students for the TOEFL and IELTS tests as college admission requirements. Actually, one graduate student and all the undergraduate students who participated in my study received college admission towards the end of Spring II.

The other limitation of the study is that it focuses on only one institution, the VTLCI. My conclusions would be stronger had I worked with multiple institutions; however, as stated earlier, my work aims to provide the field with rich teacher-researcher, qualitative data to explore the writing strategies that stand in the way of the Saudi students' transition to university academic writing. Case study was the right method for this study since it enabled me to get "rich description of an event or of a small group of people or objects" (MacNealy 195).

Definition of Terms

Since my study crosses the fields of both writing studies and SLA, each having specific definitions for key terms used in their research, I thought it best to establish what I mean when using certain overlapping terminology. Throughout the study, I will be using the following terms and definitions:

Critical thinking: “The intentional application of rational, higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, problem recognition and problem solving, inference, expressing and organizing ideas in writing” (Angelo 6).

Writing process: The process through which meaning is created, all the way from generating, formulating, and refining ideas to revising and implementing peer and teacher feedback (Zamel, “Writing”).

English as a foreign language (EFL). Language instruction for nonnative speakers that takes place in a country where English is spoken only as a foreign language (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages [TESOL], 2004).

English as a second language (ESL) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). These are terms used interchangeably to describe English language instruction for nonnative speakers (TESOL, 2004).

L1: Students’ mother tongue or “native language” (TESL Association).

L2: Students’ second language or “language being learned or studied” (TESL Association).

Student-centered approach: An instructional approach in which students play an active role and influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning. (Collins and O'Brien).

Teacher-centered approach: An instructional approach in which the teacher takes an active and dominant role while the students stay passive and responsive. The teacher responds to students’ work and questions through direct, right/wrong feedback (Hancock et al.).

Teacher's authority: Teachers are considered ultimate and reliable sources of knowledge, and students are expected to believe and accept their teachers' messages and assignments.

Peers' authority: Peers are considered a legitimate source of general, cultural, and linguistic knowledge. Accordingly, students are expected to consider their peers' input both out of class, in class discussions, and in peer editing sessions.

Voice: "Students' authorial voice which sets [them] apart from every living human being despite the common or shared experiences [they] have with many others" (Stewart 2-3).

Organization of the Study

In this chapter, I have provided an introduction to the study, including the background of the study, the problem statement, the significance of the study, a description of the Saudi educational system, the teaching of English and English writing in the KSA, the purpose of the study, the research questions that guided me in the study, a definition of terms, and the limitations of the study.

In Chapter Two, I review the literature in two parts. In the first part, I present an overview of existing research related to my study. In the second part, I present the theoretical perspectives that influenced the analysis of the study.

In Chapter Three, I elaborate on my research methodologies and methods for collecting data. I describe the VTCLI program, the students, a typical day at the VTCLI, students' writing artifacts, a typical reading and writing lesson including peer editing, small-group and whole-class activities, and tutoring and writing lab sessions.

In Chapter Four, I present how male and female Saudi students respond to the teacher's authority in different ways. In Chapter Five, I present how male and female Saudi students differ in their response to their peers' authority. And, to conclude, in Chapter Six, I present a summary of the study, responses to the research questions, implications for teaching and learning, and implications and recommendations for further research.

I recall students' experiences as well as my own to offer some advice about how both teachers and students can better meet the challenges of transitioning to the new writing system. My aim is not to create solutions that fit all situations, but to shed light on issues in order to better assist Saudi students in creating their own solutions when writing in English and to inform teachers how to aid Saudi students in their transition.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

In this study I look at how Saudi students' sex differences affect their perceptions of teacher's and peers' authority, and in turn, how those perceptions affect their development as writers and critical thinkers in a high-intermediate reading and writing course at VTLCI in Spring Terms I and II. In this chapter, I present the literature related to my study. This chapter consists of two major parts:

- 1) An overview of the related research associated with
 - a) teacher-student relationships
 - b) peer feedback
 - c) drawbacks of peer feedback
 - d) epistemology
 - e) critical pedagogy in L1
 - f) critical pedagogy in L2
 - g) Saudi students and writing.
- 2) The theoretical perspectives that influence the analysis of this study include
 - a) William Perry's scheme of intellectual development
 - b) Belenky et al.'s women's development theory.

The research associated with this study deals with the shifts that took place in the writing classroom in the US but did not take place in the KSA writing classroom. At the turn of the twentieth century, traditional writing classrooms in the US witnessed three major shifts in approach, focus, and pedagogy. The shifts were 1) from product to process, 2) from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach, and 3) from an oppressive to a liberating pedagogy (Brooke).

While in the late nineteenth century and beginning twentieth century, the emphasis in the writing classroom was on the final product, usually in the form of grammatically correct writing, in the 1960s and 1970s, the field witnessed a major shift to an emphasis on process. That shift was a result of Emig's 1971 landmark L1 research, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*. In 1981, Flower and Hayes developed the writing process theory, which shifted the focus from the "product" of writing to the "process" of writing itself.

Following the paradigm shift that took place in the English writing classrooms, second language acquisition (SLA) researchers such as Zamel and Raimes observed a parallel development in the shift from the focus on the product to the focus on the process of writing. It did not take long for the SLA field to get its independence (Cumming; Hedgcock). When applied to the writing classroom, these paradigm shifts greatly influenced a) teacher-student relationships, b) peer feedback, c) epistemology, and d) critical pedagogy.

SLA scholars distinguish between ESL students' conversational skills, referred to as basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), and their academic proficiency, or what is called the cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins 71). That distinction is the result of many studies that looked at the language proficiencies of immigrant students who

are required to learn English as an additional language in Europe and Canada. What scholars found was that even when those students are able to converse like native speakers, they lag behind their native counterparts in academic achievement. They also found that while immigrant students are able to attain conversational proficiency equal to their native peers “within about two years of exposure to English,” they usually need about five to seven years on average “to approach grade norms in academic aspects of English (e.g. vocabulary knowledge) (Cummins 73). That gap represents an overwhelming task for ESL students who are required both to acquire oral and academic English skills, and to match the skills of their native English speakers’ counterparts who continue to develop their own English language abilities (Hakuta 2000).

Teacher-Student Relationships

Nina Wallerstein defines the teacher’s role in group dialogue as “coordinator of a cultural circle” who, through structured questions, can give students the opportunity to take charge of their learning (41). The shift from product to process led Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers and educators in the 1980s and 1990s to pay special attention to the new social contexts of language learning. For example, the power relationship between teachers and students became a major topic of SLA research. Major scholars saw that the way ESL students and teachers interact in a writing classroom reflected an unequal power relationship (Canagarajah *Geopolitics*; “The Place of World Englishes”; Raimes). Although the unequal power structure or relationship exists in the L1 composition classroom, the ESL students also face not only linguistic challenges, but also social and ideological ones.

Bonny Peirce, in 1995, was among the first to look at how the relation of power affects how immigrant women interact in an ESL classroom in Canada. She found that women hesitated to interact, not because they were unable to, but because they were reluctant to take on the

identities others had created for them. Her study reveals the complex situation of the second language learner. As a result, she called educators to invest in learning about ESL students' social identity instead of simply focusing on motivating students. This investment called on teachers to rethink not only their classroom teaching, but also the feedback that they give ESL students.

Teacher Feedback

The shift from product to process in composition brought with it stages of writing (prewriting, discovering, invention, planning, revision and editing (Emig; Flower and Hayes; Zamel). During these stages, students are given the chance to get feedback from both their teachers and their peers.

Both in L1 and SLA, the studies related to students' perception of teachers' feedback is relatively scarce (Ferris and Hedgcock 240). The research that compares ESL students' preferences indicates that ESL students often prefer their teacher's feedback over their peers' (Nelson and Carson; Tsui and Ng). The few studies that covered students' reactions to teacher feedback indicated that in general, students valued their teacher's feedback and believed that it helped them improve and develop their writing (Arndt; Cohen; Ferris; Zhang). However, they viewed peer feedback differently.

Peer Feedback

Influenced by the idea of knowledge as socially constructed, Bruffee advocated for a pedagogy in which students "work collaboratively to establish and maintain knowledge among a community of knowledgeable peers" (646). Bruffee believed that when students work together and respond to each other's writing, they build critical thinking skills that are essential for

analyzing their own work. SLA scholars, as well as major scholars in the field of composition (e.g. Lundstrom and Baker; Mangelsdorf; Mittan), followed suit in adopting collaborative writing practices.

Collaborative writing requires practices such as group work and peer responses. These practices are designed to encourage students to actively learn to work with their peers instead of passively listening only to the voice of the teacher, thereby giving students more agency and autonomy (Vieregge), as well as practice dealing with conflicting perspectives (Ede and Lunsford).

Drawbacks of Peer Feedback

Studies in the English classroom as well as SLA point out some limitations of group work. Although group work and conversations with their peers help stimulate students to develop their ideas, group work, especially for those who are not used to it, has its drawbacks. One of the drawbacks of group work among US students, as observed by Karen Spear, and Julia Gergits and James J. Schramer, is that many students refrain from giving real feedback out of fear of personal conflict. (Citation?)

Similar insights emerge in Elizabeth Cone's 1997 study of how student writers respond to their peers. She found that peer responses involved different unwelcome issues, especially for the American students whose culture encourages intellectual individualism. Among the drawbacks that Cone mentions are the issues of non-process oriented writing, lack of authority, and consistent fear of interfering with their peers' highly personal expression of ideas. Many of Cone's students were reluctant to give negative responses out of fear of making their peers angry: "I tend to give grammatical corrections because I feel if I give a lot of content corrections

I am changing the person's whole paper. I am also afraid the person will think I do not like their paper. I have never really had anybody mad at the way I responded to their paper, and I hope I never will" (69).

Robert Mittan, one of the ESL composition researchers who wrote about the benefits of peer review, stated that peer review provides students with an authentic audience, improves their oral skills, increases their confidence and motivation, exposes them to different views, and ultimately directs them to learn to read their own writing more critically. Keith also talks about the benefits of peer review in increasing student's metacognitive self-awareness as they reflect on their own writings as well as that of their peers (23). Other noted benefits of peer feedback are that it helps writers spot mismatches between intended meaning and that meaning which was understood by the reader (Berg), as well as an increased sense of audience (Keith; Rollinson).

In 1992, Kate Mangelsdorf conducted a study of 40 advanced students enrolled in freshman ESL composition courses at the University of Arizona to learn about how the students perceived peer review. The students were a heterogeneous group from Asia, Europe, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Mangelsdorf found that in response to peer review, 55 % of the students had positive comments, 30 % had mixed comments, and 15 % had negative comments. Those who perceived peer review as beneficial emphasized that their peers helped them with both ideas and organization. As for the students with totally negative perceptions, all of them came from cultures that stress teacher-centered learning. That led Mangelsdorf to conclude that "the peer review tasks may be resisted by students not familiar with a collaborative, student-centered environment" (280).

The lack of experience with process writing that involves group work and peer reviews is typical of other groups of writing students outside of the US context. For instance, a study done by Miaoa et al. (2006) examined whether a group of L2 Chinese college students considered the authority of their teachers and peer feedback to improve their writing. The study revealed that even though students adopted their teacher's feedback much more than that of their peers', there was "a role for peer feedback" (179). Yet a previous study in 1996 by Joan Carson and Gayle Nelson, which was conducted to investigate Chinese students' interaction styles and reactions to peer response groups in ESL composition classes, revealed that

Although the students...perceived the goal of writing groups as criticizing each other's drafts, the Chinese students were reluctant to do so, recognizing, it seems, that making negative comments on a peer's draft leads to division, not cohesion, in a group. They were, for the most part, more concerned with the group's social dimension than with providing their peers with suggestions to improve their essays. Without the contrasting behaviors and perceptions of the Spanish speaking students, it might be argued that the Chinese students' behaviors were typical of ESL students in peer response groups and that implementing such harmony-maintenance strategies are what human beings do to establish and maintain social relationships in groups. (18)

Linda Nilson (2003) lists the reasons why peer responses are problematic even for L1 writers. Among the reasons she mentions is that students have an inadequate understanding of evaluative criteria. For instance, students feel uncomfortable judging or hurting their peers or being judged by their peers. As a result, they tend to give value-less and positive responses. Nilson also says that peer response groups are problematic because students lack the experience

required for the task, having not previously received helpful feedback from their peers or instructors. Also, they think that what really counts is the instructor's feedback. Nilson summarizes her ideas by saying,

When all is said and done, the problems with student peer feedback seem to boil down to three: the intrusion of students' emotions into the evaluative process, their ignorance of professional expectations and standards for various types of work, and their laziness in studying the work and/or in writing up the feedback. Emotion, ignorance, and laziness are formidable barriers, especially in combination. (35)

Scholars in SLA composition, such as Connor and Asenavae; Ferris; Hamp-Lyons; Liu and Hansen; and Zhang, also expressed concerns about the type of peer responses students receive. They found that the peer feedback students did get was mostly vague and limited to local concerns, which they saw as cultural. Two major cultural concerns covered by the work of Gergits and Schramer are also true of the Saudi culture: they found that students find their “peer feedback activities uncomfortable and face-threatening” (254), and “that only the teacher is qualified to comment on student writing” (256).

Personal Epistemology and Critical Pedagogy

The Russian philosopher Lev Vygotsky stressed the important role social interaction plays in acquiring a language. Influenced by Vygotsky, the postmodern school of thought changed the definition of the nature of knowledge—and how knowledge is created. Knowledge stopped being a mere collection of facts. Instead, knowledge became seen as socially constructed. This new understanding of knowledge together with the shift from product to process influenced the dynamics of how knowledge is constructed in the writing classroom. The

source of knowledge was no longer limited to only books or teachers, but instead became socially constructed by the conversations that take place in classrooms, between students and teachers, and among students themselves. While this is discussed above in terms of the ways that this idea was applied to writing pedagogy, it also had broader pedagogical implications.

Because power relations are central to every social experience, especially education (Shor, *When Students*), in the late 1980s and 1990s, the new perception of knowledge led to the development of critical pedagogy. The main goal of critical pedagogy was to explore the power relationship between teachers and students and how that power influences classroom dynamics (Delpit).

Although critical pedagogy was established only in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the psychologist John Dewey is considered the father of the progressive education movement for his earliest questioning of the teaching methods that consider the teacher as the sole authority in the classroom while the students take only a passive role. About a century before the creation of critical pedagogy, Dewey criticized not encouraging students to take an active role in their learning. His main message was that education is not a passive activity during which the teacher speaks and the students listen, but rather an active and constructive procedure. Dewey believed “that education must engage with and enlarge experience; that thinking and reflection are central to the act of teaching; and that students must freely interact with their environments in the practices of constructing knowledge” (Darder et al. 3).

Hofer and Pintrich describe personal epistemology or epistemic cognition as the way in which an “individual develops conceptions of knowledge and knowing and utilizes them in developing understanding of the world” (*Personal Epistemology* 4). As such, personal

epistemology studies how people come to know about what they know. It takes place when we are engaging in learning and knowing. Personal epistemology is “often linked to educational issues” as a result of research evidence that shows that it “plays a crucial role in the learning of individuals, such as its impact on argumentation, problem-solving, and achievement” (Bendixen and Feucht 4).

Hofer and Pintrich say that “students approach the learning process quite differently depending on whether they view knowledge as a set of accumulated facts or an integrated set of constructs or whether they view themselves as passive receptors or active constructors of knowledge” (*Personal Epistemology* 3). They describe personal epistemology in college as when individual students develop their concept of knowledge and become critical thinkers. In this crucial development, students learn “how to inquire, to think for themselves, and to be capable of using relevant information to make informed decisions” (Baxter Magolda, *Creating Contexts for Learning and Self-Authorship* 5).

Following Dewey’s lead, major scholars contributed to critical pedagogy. The most recognized and classroom-applied works are those of Paulo Freire, (1970, 1985; Shor and Freire, 1987); as well as Henry Giroux 1988. While many other scholars have written about critical pedagogy, in this study I focus only on Freire because his perspectives are most connected to my work.

Since the 1970s, many educators have considered Paulo Freire “to be the most influential educational philosopher in the development of critical pedagogical thought and practice” (Darder et al. 5). Freire played a significant role in transforming educational contexts in Africa, Latin America, and Europe through proposing the concept of a liberating education based on dialogue.

His goal was to give students voices and agency as opposed to perpetuating traditional schoolings' oppressive culture and power (Darder et al.). Voice and agency play a major role in students' lives because "[w]ithout a sense of agency, young people are unlikely to pose significant questions, the existentially rooted questions in which learning begins" (Maxine Greene 1988, 3)

Liberating education works by creating a dialogue, which Darder et al. considered "one of the most significant aspects of critical pedagogy" (Darder et al. 15). Darder et al. add that through dialogue, both teachers and students become speakers, listeners, learners and teachers; "the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges; teacher-student with students-teacher" (Darder et al. 63). Freire criticized teacher-centered pedagogy by saying,

Teaching cannot be a process of transference of knowledge from the one teaching to the learner. This is the mechanical transference from which results machinelike memorization... Critical study correlates with teaching that is equally critical, which necessarily demands a critical way of comprehending and of realizing the reading of the word and that of the world, the reading of text and of context. (Freire 22)

Freire offers two analogies of the relationship between teachers and students in the traditional school system. The first one "involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)" where the teacher as a narrator "leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content." The second analogy is the bank-clerk educator where educators take the role of regulating students' world by organizing old processes to fill students' heads with information (Darder et al. 60). In this approach the students stay passive entities.

Building on Freire's analogy of power, Shor advocates a critical pedagogy in which teachers do not totally abandon their authority as academic experts, "but they deploy their power and knowledge as democratic authorities who question the status quo and negotiate the curriculum rather than as authoritarian educators who unilaterally make the rules and lecture on preset subject matter" (Shor, *When Students* 56). His famous quote, "[p]ower is a learning problem and learning is a power problem" speaks volumes (x).

From Freire's work on creating dialogue, Darder et al. created the dialectical theory of education. Darden et al. explain that "in opposition to traditional theories of education that serve to reinforce certainty, conformity, and technical control of knowledge and power, critical pedagogy embraces a dialectical view of knowledge that functions to unmask the connections between objective knowledge and the cultural norms" (12).

Critical pedagogy is not without criticism. Elizabeth Ellsworth believes that "strategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact." (306) Ellsworth bases her belief on the fact that "theorists of critical pedagogy have failed to launch any meaningful analysis of or program for reformulating the institutionalized power imbalances between themselves and their students, or of the essentially paternalistic project of education itself" (306). The failure to create discourses in critical pedagogy, which is intended to liberate, has instead exacerbated the conditions that it meant to avoid (Ellsworth)

Critical Pedagogy in ESL

In addition to the transition from product to process, the ESL field went through different pedagogical shifts as it started taking its own path (Ferris and Hedgcock). At different times, the

field focused on discursive form, the writer, disciplinary content and discursive practice, the readers and literate communities, social interaction (collaboration), sociopolitical concerns, and critical literacy. Another major result of these new shifts is the attention that was given to critical pedagogy. SLA scholars started examining writing instruction and addressing issues related to critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, and critical literacy (Canagarajah, *A Geopolitics*; Canagarajah, “Ideology and Theory”; Gunderson et al.). Scholars in composition started analyzing students’ writing to learn about the relationships of “cultural, social and political power” (Luke and Dooley 856). Led by Paulo Freire in 1970 and followed by Ira Shor, Henry Giroux, and Ann George, SLA scholars started exploring and emphasizing, in addition to the academic elements, issues related to the context of writing and real-life issues that affect students’ lives.

Sonia Nieto, and Ovando and McLaren (2002), wrote about critical pedagogy in the realm of bilingual and multicultural education. Additionally, other scholars pushed for critical pedagogy for minorities to use writing as a way to learn about, interpret, reflect, explain, analyze, argue, and act upon the world (Walsh, *Literacy as Practice*). In “Critical Reflections for Teachers,” Walsh summarizes the transformation needed in literacy practices in schools by saying:

Traditional skills-based approaches to literacy assume that knowledge is neutral, universal, and verifiable information that must be formally acquired and taught.... Whole language challenges the traditional approach by presenting a view of knowledge that is connected to the student, her/his social context, and personal/social needs. The acquisition of knowledge (i.e., learning), is considered to be a part of a natural meaning-making process in which the student actively draws from prior knowledge and lived

experience to construct meaning; the teacher helps facilitate and encourage such exploration and interaction.... In practice, critical approaches challenge teachers and students to work together.... To construct new and sometimes different ways of interpreting, understanding, reading, writing and acting in the classroom, with one another and the world. (93-94)

Canagarajah offers a comprehensive understanding of critical thinking not only as defined by the liberatory scholars whose focus is on critical pedagogy, but also as defined by the ESOL scholars whose focus is critical thinking. He presents the major differences between the TESOL scholar version of critical thinking, and the critical practices of the liberalitarians. While the CT version is monological, mentalistic, instrumental, neutral, rationalistic, universal, and leads to understanding, the CP version, is dialogical, socially grounded, self-reflexive, multimodal, and leads to social change (*Critical Academic Writing*).

A component of critical pedagogy is critical thinking, and when critical thinking is discussed in terms of ESL students, most studies focus on culture and cultural influences, debating the merits of fully implementing a critical pedagogy classroom approach. Studies such as those by Osman Barnawi and by Paul Stapleton refute the claim that critical thinking is absent in EFL writing programs in countries that still follow the traditional educational system. What those studies say is that different social values surpass critical thinking. For example, Barnawi says that, in many Asian cultures such as China, Japan, and Saudi Arabia, “social values such as authority, social harmony and deference to elders and teachers are highly appreciated” (Barnawi, “Finding a Place” 192). (See also L. Liu; Stapleton; and Barnawi, “The Construction of Identity.”) Other voices critique ideological issues, especially those that are irrelevant to the lives of the ESL students in their home countries (Leki; Canagarajah, *A Geopolitics*; Bailey et al.;

Silva et al., “Broadening the Perspective”). Those scholars argue that ESL students possess critical thinking skills but have a hard time demonstrating them in their new social context.

Influenced by sociolinguistic studies, major SLA scholars such as Ramanathan and Kaplan, Dwight Atkinson (1997) criticize the practice of forcing ESL students to follow the argumentation process and reasoning strategies typical of the mainly white, male, Eurocentric, middle-class social person’s practices. Those scholars believe that those strategies do not take into account ESL students’ major cultural values and preferences. Instead, critical pedagogy practices enforce what they see as English-language cultural norms. A major issue explored by SLA scholars is how cultural preferences in an individualistic culture differ from those in a collective culture.

Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999), for instance, criticized teaching L2 students composition pedagogy which incorporates a US mainstream ideology of individualism in terms of voice, peer review, critical thinking, and textual ownership. Ramanathan and Atkinson say that those pedagogies do not take into consideration the non-mainstream cultural values and practices. While the L1-oriented composition pedagogy encourages “linguistic behavior which is clear, overt, expressive, and even assertive and demonstrative” values (48), for a large number of L2 students, these values do not matter much. Instead, in many countries, people “conventionally adopt models and norms of communication that are almost diametrically opposed [to the American way] in that they foreground the subtle, interpretive, interdependent, non-assertive, and even nonverbal character of communicative interaction” (48).

For example, Paul Stapleton, a college English teacher in Hong Kong, Macao, and Japan, who wrote extensively about English language issues of Asian students, raises doubt about the

prevailing constructs that portray Asian students, especially Japanese, as group-oriented, harmony-seeking, hierarchical, and lacking critical thinking skills. He conducted two studies. In the first study, in 2001, he proposed a model for assessing critical thinking in the writing of L2 Japanese learners to determine whether content familiarity plays a role in the student's critical thinking abilities. The findings of his study of 45 undergraduate students indicate that the quality of critical thought depended on the topic sentence. When writing about a familiar topic, the Japanese students demonstrated better critical thinking. Stapleton's study also suggested that differing assumptions between the L1 and L2 cultures may lead to misinterpretations of the critical thinking ability of L2 learners. He invited scholars and educators to stop assuming that all students from Eastern cultures lack critical thinking skills compared to students from Western cultures. It was not that Japanese students did not have such skills, but that they were less able to deploy them when asked to write on unfamiliar subjects (Stapleton).

Stapleton's second study took place in 2002 when he did an attitude survey of 70 undergraduate Japanese students to learn about their ability to think critically and to voice their opinions. His study revealed that students demonstrated their ability to do both, even when the opinions they voiced were counter to authority figures (Stapleton, 2002). He criticizes those who stereotype the Japanese students and limit them to being "passive, respectful, Asian students" (Stapleton, 2002, 255). He adds that the "stereotype of obedient and passive Asian student is only a surface phenomenon, which does not reflect the real desires of the students" (255). He goes on to say that it might have been true in the past but under the current use of internet and education reform, "change is occurring especially among younger people" (255).

Until the late 1980s, and years after Freire's recommendations, the field had not done much to effectively encompass ESL students' needs. Jim Cummins confirms this when he writes,

“Unfortunately, the reality is that schools continue to promote rote memorization rather than critical thinking and encourage consumption of predetermined knowledge rather than generation of original ideas; the curriculum has been sanitized such that students rarely have the opportunity to discuss critically or write about issues that directly affect the society they will form. Issues such as racism, environmental pollution, US policy in Central America, genetic engineering, global nuclear destruction, arms control, and so on, are regarded as too “sensitive” for fragile and impressionable young minds. Instead, students are fed a neutralized diet of social studies, science, and language arts that is largely irrelevant to the enormous global problems that our generation is creating for our children’s generation to resolve” (Cummins, *Empowering Minority Students* 5-6).

The above sections explore the topics of teacher-student relationships, peer feedback, epistemology, critical pedagogy in L1 and L2, and Saudi students and writing, providing a general foundation for the study that I conducted. What follows is a more focused examination of the research related to these topics as explored through the population and focus of my research—Saudi Arabian students. The focus of my study is to look at how Saudi students’ sex differences affect their perceptions of teachers’ and peers’ authority, and in turn, how those perceptions affect their development as writers and critical thinkers.

Research Related to Saudi Students

Research that deals with the teaching of English writing in the KSA covers different areas ranging from educational policies, writing and technology, and writing strategies, to writing process and critical thinking. In the following sections, I review the studies that are most closely related to my research, specifically in terms of process writing with a focus on revision and feedback, and critical thinking.

Writing Process

Abdulmojeeb Jouhari, an EFL researcher, studied six Saudi college freshmen at King Abdul Aziz University, who were very similar to those at the VTLCI, to explore the effects of a process approach to writing instruction on writing development. The results were that students became more proficient in generating ideas, drafting, processing feedback, and revising.

Other studies done about Saudi students' writing process include study participants ranging from the school level to the postgraduate level. One very significant case study took place in 2008 when Najwa Alhosani, an English language college teacher and researcher, looked at the role the writing process approach played in developing the writing ability of five fifth-grade male and female Saudi students when writing in English as a second language classrooms. The questions the researcher asked focused on the roles ESL teachers play when using the writing process approach with ESL students. Her findings revealed that teachers played a key role in "passionately and persistently providing numerous writing teaching techniques to their ESL students [which] had [a] tremendous impact on engaging them in writing activities and consequently improved their writing and their attitude toward it" (271). Coming from a collective culture, and still young enough that sex had not yet become an issue, these Saudi students adapted well to working collaboratively. Alhosani also found that "[c]ollaborative activities were obviously the most popular technique used among teachers" (277).

Cooperative learning (CL), which depends mainly on group work, is an effective method to promote students' learning as well as their social skills. Nasser Mansour, a Saudi educator, conducted a study to investigate the extent to which cooperative learning is used in the Saudi classroom. The findings of his study indicated that "the current classrooms and the school

environment in Saudi Arabia do not accommodate the CL principles and practices. Moreover, where cooperative grouping was found, it lacked the features recommended in the literature for effective CL” (1).

The two major studies that looked at male Saudi students’ perceptions of their peers’ feedback in the KSA are by Al-Hazmi and Scholfield, and Hamouda, all of whom are teachers and researchers. Their studies revealed that Saudi students do not take seriously the feedback they get from their peers. Al-Hazmi and Scholfield undertook an action-research style study to investigate the effect of enforced revision and peer feedback on 51 male Saudi students in the third year at King Khalid University in KSA. The researchers found that although students expressed favorable comments about peer revision, which was new to them, feedback had little effect on what the students revised. The researchers concluded that the students “were not ready to abandon the traditional surface error focus” (237). Still the experience of Al-Hazmi and Scholfield with only male Saudi EFL college students in the KSA differs from that of both male and female Saudi students who are in the US as ESL students planning to attend US universities, which encouraged my study.

Arafat Hamouda looked at students’ and teachers’ preferences and attitudes towards correction of written errors. The result revealed that both teachers and students have positive attitudes towards written error correction. While teachers and students share such common preferences as the importance of error correction and the types of errors, there are considerable discrepancies as to the techniques of error correction. For instance, students favor the overall correction, whereas most teachers do not. However, the results show that students prefer teacher correction to peer and self-correction.

Another study that looked at issues related to the writing of both male and female Saudi EFL student was conducted by McMullen. McMullen aimed to examine the differences between the language learning strategies of male and female students enrolled in university-level English composition classes in Saudi Arabia. When looking at the social, metacognitive, compensation, and cognitive strategies students used, the researcher concluded that, “Although no statistically significant differences were found, female Saudi EFL students reported using language learning strategies more frequently than male students at all three universities polled in Saudi Arabia” (422).

Rami Mustafa, a researcher in the EFL field, conducted a qualitative study that employed informal conversational interviews and semi-structured individual interviews to learn the Saudi students’ perception of what constitutes helpful feedback. The study showed that Saudi students are uncertain about the effectiveness of feedback for improving their writing in the long-run. Even though the teachers focused mostly on local errors, the students felt that the feedback was not showing them how to fix their errors.

One of the few studies done in the US that focused only on female ESL students was conducted by Ream Alkarni in 2012. Her study included two students from Saudi Arabia and two from Libya who were studying English in Denver, Colorado. The purpose of the study was limited to learning about the students’ purpose in learning English. In my study, though, while keeping sex in perspective, I cover the intellectual development with a focus on only Saudi students.

A study related to my work in terms of sex was done by Cindy Gunn in 2007 at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) in the United Arab Emirates, a neighboring country to

the KSA. Inspired by her belief that “understanding of the culture and its influence on male-female relationships is imperative, especial when the teacher asks students to work together in groups” (68), Gunn wanted to learn about students’ perceptions of coeducational institutions. Her study included 132 students from different nationalities; among them were only five Saudi students--three males and two females. The main goal of her study was to find “whether or not multicultural, coeducational group work at AUS results in creative collaborations or problematic partnerships” (76). She concluded that a definitive answer to her question was hard to find as a result of the complexity of the issue and the huge range of differing opinions she got from her students.

Critical Thinking and Related Research in KSA

When closely examining the goal of education in the KSA and the goal of the scholarship program, one can easily find two discrepancies. One aims to prepare students locally, and the other to prepare them globally. The first one emphasizes religion, while the second one emphasizes preparation for competing globally. Among the scholars investigating the teaching of critical thinking in Saudi Arabia is Al-Qahtani, who found a lack of focus on critical thinking in the KSA. Elyas recently started calling for educational reforms that incorporate critical thinking in local educational programs.

Critical thinking is not only absent in the teaching of English writing in the KSA, but also in the teaching of Arabic writing. When investigating the Saudi college students’ beliefs regarding their English writing difficulties, composition scholar Abdulaziz Fageeh found that writing, both in Arabic and English, is an ignored skill. In Arabic, all that students are required to do is “imitat[e] models of writing produced by famous writers” (44). What makes the matter worse is that “reading is not emphasized or used as a source of knowledge, rather, it is used as a

drill of decoding and memorization,” with no room for a wide range of reading (44-45). Instead, students are required merely to “read their textbooks, which are supplied by the government in order to pass the final exams” (45).

Al-Hazmi conducted a study of nineteen Saudi university students to investigate the students’ reflections on writing in Arabic and English in a composition classroom. The researcher used an open-ended questionnaire to get participants to reflect on how they normally write in Arabic and English. The study revealed positive results with regard to promoting students’ critical reflection in the service of EFL writing. Other positive indications included making a writing class a personal process, that is, a continual critical reflection (“And Reflection”).

In “The Construction of Identity,” Osman Barnawi examined how two KSA first-year graduate students in the US negotiated their identities in a L2 academic classroom. He found that both students “experienced difficulties and challenges in negotiating competence, identities, and power relations” (62). Barnawi related the students’ difficulties in properly expressing themselves in class discussion. He says that the students’ cultural background trained them to believe “that teachers should not be questioned and an expression of disagreement in classroom discussions with teachers or peers is a sign of disrespect” (64). Among the recommendations Barnawi offers is that teachers in the US consider “the classroom context in which learners participate so as to gain in-depth understanding about their behavior as newcomers” when dealing with L2 students (79). That is what I intended to do.

Alhasan Allamnakhrah considers the Saudi culture a major reason for the lack of critical thinking among Saudi students. He sees that critical thinking “is inextricably bound up with

Saudi culture [which] actively encourages submission to authority in all spheres: social, educational, political and domestic” (“Learning Critical Thinking” 206).

Reem Al-Degether conducted a quantitative study in five teacher colleges in Saudi Arabia to learn about female teachers’ opinions of and knowledge about critical thinking and the methods they use to encourage critical thinking in their teaching. The results of the study revealed that although participants had positive opinions about critical thinking and had occasionally used different critical thinking methods, the teachers were “unsure of the constructs or elements of critical thinking” (iii).

Perhaps the most important study on KSA students studying in the US was done by Suresh Canagarajah in 2006, in which he looked at how a Saudi female student shuttles between Arabic, French, and English. The aim of the study was to prove the agency of multilingual writers and urge teachers not to consider all textual and linguistic differences as errors, but to focus more on the social act of language. Another recommendation Canagarajah offers which is very applicable to the KSA students is to consider “the place of orality in writing. Oral discourse and oral traditions of communication may find a place in writing as they provide useful resources for narrative and voice for students from multilingual backgrounds. They can also help deconstruct the values behind literate traditions and expand the communicative potential of writing” (603).

The literature reviewed above shows that although different researchers have looked at the impact of the shifts from a teacher-centered to a student-centered writing classroom, from product to process, and from oppression to liberation, there is a lack of studies that look at issues of authority and sex as they relate to the Saudi students in the writing classroom in the US. In my

study, I looked at those issues and how they relate to students' intellectual development, following Perry and Belenky et al.'s epistemological development models as they are presented in the following section.

Theoretical Perspectives

This case study's framework integrates two major intellectual theories: 1) William Perry's theory of intellectual and ethical development, and 2) Belenky et al.'s on women's ways of knowing. Over the last three decades, these two theories have been used to study the intellectual development of students in different majors and fields. In this study, I extend these theories' application to the ESL field. What follows is an overview of these theoretical approaches.

William Perry's Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development

As an educational psychologist, William Perry was interested in the epistemological growth and perspectives of college students. His focus was "primarily on establishing models of [epistemological] structural or developmental sequences college students go through" as influenced by a liberal arts education (Many et al. 304). A pioneer in his field, in the 1950s and 1960s, Perry conducted a longitudinal study at Harvard University with a sample that comprised almost entirely male freshmen students. Perry first published his *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* in 1968. Educators in different fields have since used Perry's scheme as a primary reference when discussing the epistemological growth of college students. His work, which centered on "the uniqueness of the student voice" (Perry xiv), formed a road map that was later repeatedly applied "as a heuristic for interpreting college student development" (Hofer and Pintrich, *Personal Epistemology* 5).

Perry's original work was extended by other scholars to three major models:

1. The work of Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule in *Women's Ways of Knowing*.
2. The work of Marcia Baxter Magolda's longitudinal study in *Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-Related Patterns in Students' Intellectual Development*.
3. The work of King and Kitchener in *Developing Reflective Judgment: Understanding and Promoting Intellectual Growth and Critical Thinking in Adolescents and Adults*

In his scheme, Perry suggests that college students move through a series of well-defined (fixed) positions depending on the ways they perceive truth, knowledge, and authority. He also explains why and how people transition from one position to another. Perry produced a scheme of nine positions of student intellectual development which can be summarized in four major sequential categories: basic dualism, multiplicity, relativism subordinate, and relativism.

Belenky et al. summarize Perry's "positions" as follows (in the order that, according to Perry, students experience them):

Basic dualism: (positions 1 and 2): "The student views the world in polarities of right/wrong, black/white, we/they, and good/bad" (9). Students in this position are passive learners who depend on their teachers, not peers, as the sole authority to teach them right from wrong (9). (The term "dualism" comes from the student's "dualistic faith in absolute authority and truth" [9].)

Multiplicity (positions 3 and 4): The student's dualistic view gives way to an increasing awareness of other people's and peers' diverse opinions and multiple perspectives. Students

become aware that authorities do not always have the right answers. Students become liberated from external authorities and start trusting in their own opinions (9).

Relativism subordinate (positions 5 and 6): Faced by the teacher’s request to support his opinions with evidence, the student abandons multiplicity in favor of “relativism subordinate,” where he starts using an analytical, evaluative approach to knowledge (9).

Relativism (positions 7 and 9): The student completely understands that truth is relative and that context is crucial in knowing and understanding the meaning of an event (in academia and also the rest of the world). That context includes the framework that a student uses to understand an event. This transition leads to the student’s understanding that knowledge is “constructed, not given; contextual, not absolute; [and] mutable, not fixed” (Belenky et al. 10).

Table 1: Summary of Perry’s Categories of Development

Basic Dualism	Multiplicity	Relativism Subordinate	Relativism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Black and white” view of the world • Passive learner • Depends on external authority for answers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware of diversity • No absolute authority • Authority may not have the right answers • Starts relying on his own authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abandons multiplicity in order to support his own opinions • Analyzes and evaluates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context is major in knowing and understanding • Understands that knowledge is constructed, not given

A cornerstone of Perry's work is his emphasis on a student's "positionality," or the "perspectives acquired from one's lived life" that influence how a student approaches learning (xii). Perry describes positionality as an important factor in the evolution of students' conceptions of the nature and origins of knowledge and "how their understanding of themselves as knowers changes over time" (Belenky et al. 9). Perry also stresses the student's ability both to construct meaning and "to shift or change those constructions or standpoints to developmentally accommodate uncertainty, paradox, and the demands of greater complexity in knowledge and learning" (xii). He adds that students can be "in several different positions at the same time with respect to different subjects or experiences" (xii).

A major benefit of Perry's scheme is that it offers teachers a better understanding of students' perspectives by giving them "a lens to clarify the diversity of backgrounds and dispositions that students bring to a topic" (Patrick Troup 2011 p. 9). A clear example of this lens occurs when teachers deal with students who are at the dualistic level and expect one right answer. Those students may tend to question the teacher's credibility when not immediately responding to their questions. They also get confused when their teacher tells them that some arguments elicit a variety of valid interpretations (Troup, 2011). Being aware of students' different perspectives will enable teachers not only to understand the students' reactions but also to set goals and assignments that meet their intellectual needs.

Perry's work did not go unchallenged. Critics questioned the setting of the study and the assumptions he made. In particular, his work was criticized for being confined mainly to white males, with limited applicability to women or other diverse groups (Belenky et al.; Sharon Pugh, 2000).

Although Perry interviewed mainly male students, his scheme did not differentiate between the students' experiences on the basis of sex. The analysis articulated by the University of Oxford's Institute for the Advancement of the University Learning (4) indicates that it was not clear whether his scheme was equally applicable to all college students irrespective of their fields (4-5). Another question is whether his scheme, which was built on the perspectives of the generation of the 1950s and 1960s, remains relevant in the twenty-first century when undergraduates more comfortably occupy a relativistic world even before joining college (5). Others have been concerned that Perry's scheme may not be applicable, effective, or as accurate in the light of the latest advances in technology (Sharon Pugh (2000); Felder and Brent).

William Moore responds to those who doubt the applicability of Perry's work in the twenty-first century by saying that "Perry's scheme represents the kind of reconstruction and synthesis [which are] necessary for a genuinely postmodern understanding of the work" (18). Moore adds, "Even after thirty years of extensive and varied scholarship, the Perry scheme continues to reflect the most critical dimension to educator understanding of learning and students' approaches to learning" (18).

Marlene Schommer challenges Perry's assumption "that personal epistemology is unidimensional and develops in a fixed progression of stages" (498). Patricia Bizzell criticizes Perry's work for being limited to what students told him in interviews about their attitudes toward school work. In my work, I used not only interviews but also students' writings in order to follow Bizzell's recommendation to connect students' papers "with their understanding of academic ways of thinking" (301)

Bizzell also criticizes Perry's view of education as "acculturation, not training; inculcation of values, not practice in techniques" (303). Bizzell further critiques Perry's work for not considering students' acceptance of the academic community. She says, "Certain typical problems students have with writing in college should be regarded as problems with accepting the academic community's preferred world view, and not necessarily as problems with achieving 'normal' cognition" (304).

I became interested in learning about the role epistemology may play in the writing classroom, particularly in how the different beliefs of male and female Saudi students shape their cognition and critical thinking. Perry's study seems very applicable to the Saudi students, especially because the current Saudi educational system is similar to that of the US system in the 1950s and 1960s when Perry conducted his study.

Mary Belenky and "Women's Ways of Knowing"

A major extension of Perry's epistemological model is Mary Belenky et al.'s 1986 book, *Women's Ways of Knowing*, which examines the epistemological growth and perspectives of female college students. Their goal was to learn how women come to know what they know. Although their study was limited to females, they believe that their findings were not necessarily sex related, but instead could apply to males too.

Following an interview case study approach, Belenky et al. used a phenomenological approach in order to assist the interviewees in providing their own frames of meaning through two- to five-hour interviews. They interviewed 135 women, 90 of whom had either recently graduated or enrolled in one of six diverse academic institutions. Forty-five of the women had been seeking parental information or assistance from human service agencies.

Unlike Perry, whose positions describe the nature of knowledge and truth, Belenky et al. “focus more on the source of knowledge and truth” (Hofer and Pintrich, “The Development of Epistemological Theories” 96). Another difference is that while Perry's positions are organized around the implicit metaphor of “views,” those of Belenky et al. are organized around the metaphor of “voice” (95). A few years after Belenky et al.’s study, Blythe Clinchy, a coauthor of the original study, reported that the research team revised their definition of epistemological perspective to emphasize the source rather than the nature of knowledge (“Issues of Sex”).

According to Belenky et al., the basic assumptions that female students make about “the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way [they] see the world and [themselves] as participants in it” (3). These assumptions also affect their definitions of themselves, the way they interact with others, their public and private personae, their sense of control over life events, their views of teaching and learning, and their conceptions of morality (3).

Belenky et al. at first used Perry’s framework because he believed that “the women’s transcripts could be mapped onto the pattern of development he had identified in men” (Hofer and Pintrich, “The Development of Epistemological Theories” 94). The other reasons for Belenky et al. to use Perry’s framework was “to ground their findings in existing framework” (96). They kept Perry’s phenomenological method but added special structured questions in order to accommodate the female special ways of knowing because “women’s ways of knowing are intertwined with self-concept” (94). Therefore, they came up with a new classification scheme of five epistemological perspectives that apply specifically to a woman’s perspectives on knowing. The categories are as follows:

Silence: “A position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority” (15).

Received knowledge: A perspective from which women think of themselves as capable of receiving or reproducing knowledge given to them from external authorities, but not capable of creating knowledge on their own (15).

Subjective knowledge: “A perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited” (15). In this stage, women “move from passivity to action” and their silence is replaced by “a protesting inner voice and infallible gut” (54). Subjectivism is still considered dualistic—women retain the conviction that there are right answers; however, they understand that truth can reside within and can negate answers from the outside world (54).

Procedural knowledge: “A position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge” (15). In this stage, women learn to view a subject from another person’s perspective in order to improve their argument. Women “use this new mode of thinking to construct arguments powerful enough to meet the standards of an impersonal authority,” whether teachers or classmates (101).

Constructed knowledge: “A position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing” (15). Women learn that they are capable of influencing other people and manipulating others’ perception of reality with words (131). Belenky et al. seem to be offering a new definition of rhetoric as epistemic.

Belenky et al. described two forms of knowing: separate and connected. “The separate knower stood at arm’s length from the object to be known and approached perspectives from a doubting stance in order to come to know. The connected knower entered into the object to be known, trying to see what could be believed about it” (Baxter Magolda, *Making Their Own Way* 17). The metaphor Belenky et al. give to “connected teaching” is a midwife metaphor to replace the banker teachers. They say, “While the bankers deposit knowledge in the learner’s head, the midwives draw it out. They assist the students in giving birth to their own ideas, in making their own tacit knowledge explicit and elaborating it” (217).

Like Perry’s work, Belenky et al.’s work has not been without criticism. Ruddick, for example, criticized the authors’ perspective, saying, “Despite the explicit disclaimers, the rhetoric of the book, reinforced by its organization and the invocation of other developmental psychologists, continually evokes notions of progress from simpler to more complex, less to more adequate ways of knowing or epistemological perspectives” (Ruddick, 1996, p.252).

The other critique of Belenky et al.’s work comes from Hofer and Pintrich who, while acknowledging that the theory includes similar categories in men’s thinking, claim that the study provided no means to assess the sex-related nature of their findings (“The Development of Epistemological Theories”). Hofer and Pintrich also criticized the fact that Belenky et al. failed to vary the interview order and protocol to accommodate the group of women who were not college students. Having the same interview protocol for two different categories resulted in difficulty when drawing “meaningful conclusions about the resulting differences in epistemological perspectives” (96). Concerning the ordering of the interviews, Hofer and Pintrich note that “[a] section on ‘Relationships’ precedes the sections on ‘Education’ and ‘Ways of Knowing.’ Given their finding that many women have a relational, connected approach to

knowing, it is hard to know the degree to which this may have been primed by the interviewers in these earlier questions” (96).

Both Perry and Belenky et al. acknowledge that their categories are not comprehensive, universal, or always linear (students may experience these stages in different orders or experience more than one stage at a time).

Table 2: Summary of Belenky et al.’s Categories of Development

Silence	Received knowledge	Subjective knowledge	Procedural knowledge	Constructed knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No voice • Only external authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capable of reproducing knowledge from an authority, but not creating it on her own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves from passivity to action • Moves from silence to protesting • Truth is within the person and can negate answers that the outside world supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies objective procedures • Develops a critical understanding of how authority wants her to think • Able to construct arguments powerful enough to meet the standards of an impersonal authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge as contextual • Creates knowledge • Values both subjective and objective strategies • Knows that she can manipulate reality with words

In this chapter I presented the literature review related to my study. In the following chapter, I describe the methodology I followed in my research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

According to Donna Mertens, in order to "understand, describe, predict, or control an educational or psychological phenomenon or to empower individuals in such contexts," researchers have used systematic methods to inquire, investigate, collect, analyze, and interpret data (2). This chapter presents a description of the methodology I used in my study, starting with the purpose and research questions as presented in Chapter 1, followed by the methodology, the setting of the study, and participants' demographics. Next, I present the research procedures and instruments, followed by data analysis and validity. I conclude with my story as the researcher and explore how my story connects with the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the writing challenges related to critical thinking, sex, and authority of the Saudi students studying reading and writing (RW) at the high intermediate level (RW400-450) at VTLCI during the spring terms of 2012. This study provides insight into the types of challenges that the Saudi students face when moving from an educational system that is segregated by sex, teacher-centered, and enforces memorization to one that is coeducational, student-centered, and incorporates critical thinking.

Research Questions

I began my study with the following two primary research questions: 1) How do sex differences affect Saudi students' perception of their teachers' and peers' authority? 2) How do Saudi students' perceptions of their teacher's and peers' authority affect their development as writers and critical thinkers when learning in an intensive writing course at the high intermediate

level? These questions were my beginning point, but as I will report later on, I found that throughout the study, as is the case with most research, I modified my questions as the data presented various avenues of exploration. I seek answers to these primary questions by breaking them down to the following sub-questions:

1. How do Saudi female and male students respond differently to a female teacher's authority?
2. How do Saudi female and male students' differences in responding to a female teacher's authority affect their development as writers and critical thinkers?
3. What are the reasons behind the Saudi students' different perceptions of and responses to their female teachers' authority?
4. How do Saudi students grapple with the issue of diversity among themselves?
5. How do Saudi female and male students respond differently to their peers' authority?
6. How do Saudi female and male students' differences in responding to peers' authority affect their development as writers and critical thinkers?
7. What are the reasons behind the Saudi students' different perceptions and responses to their peers' authority?

Method

Newman and Benz emphasize that research questions should determine what research methods researchers use. Glossner believes that “[the] richness and complexity of students’ attitudes toward learning might be better understood through qualitative research techniques than

quantitative research techniques” (16). Since my questions deal with the social and educational issues of the Saudi students studying in the VTLCI in spring 2012, the qualitative method was the right approach.

Among the different types of qualitative studies is the case study, which I used in my research.

Case Study Research

According to Robert Stake, “Case studies have become one of the most common ways to do qualitative inquiry” (435). Yin defines the case study research method as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (23). Baxter and Jack describe qualitative case studies as a methodology that provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts. If applied correctly, the qualitative case study becomes a valuable method for a host of human sciences in which researchers can develop theories, evaluate programs, and develop interventions (544).

My goal is to provide a holistic picture of the Saudi students’ writing process during an intensive course at the VTLCI. The use of a qualitative case study was appropriate because my research took place in a natural setting and depended on data collection methods that were based on words rather than on numbers.

MacNealy defines a case study as a “qualitative tool that aims at providing rich description of an event or of a small group of people or objects” (195). To differentiate an

empirical case study from any other “case history” or “case research,” MacNealy says that a case study “involves a plan for studying or investigating a topic or problem, collecting data rather than retrieving them from memory” (196). My study used both case study and case history. Data about the Saudi students were collected from a planned case study, while data about my own experiences as an EFL and ESL learner and teacher were collected as a case history based primarily on reflections retrieved from memory.

From the different styles for presenting case studies, I chose the storytelling style because this style highlights the good oral skills that the participants have and provides room for the text to emerge. As Stake says, “[s]torytelling as cultural representation and as sociological text emerges from many traditions but nowhere more strongly than oral history and folklore” (441).

When writing about the advantages of using case study as a research methodology, especially with L2 students, Lier says, “Among the advantages of the case study approach are the attention to context and the ability to track and document change (such as language development) over time. In addition, a case study zeroes in on a particular case (an individual, a group, or a situation) in great detail, within its natural context of situation, and tries to probe into its characteristics, dynamics, and purposes” (Lier 195). Lier outlines the methods of case study as interviews, document analysis, and observations. In my research, I applied all three: interviews with students and teachers, analysis of artifacts and texts, and observations in the role of a teacher-researcher.

The Role of the Teacher-Researcher

In my study I was both the teacher and the researcher. Perhaps the best advocate for teacher-researcher work in the composition classroom at all levels is Ruth Ray (1992). Ray

tracks, defines, and examines the purpose, practice, and politics of teacher research and states that the purpose of teacher research is to “describe classroom-based inquiry involving both schoolteachers and university researchers” (173). James Berlin indicates that the teacher-researcher model represents “a direct response to the social, political, and cultural moment” (9). Berlin adds that such a research model allows “the teacher to understand her students by using research methods that will identify their characteristics as learners” (9). George Hillocks, Jr. and Richard Gebhardt encourage composition teachers to take advantage of the most accessible source to them--their writing and their students' writing--and to reflect on their own teaching practices and students' writing processes.

Teacher-researcher work is not without limitations. According to Ray (1992), the limitations include the following problems that some teacher-researchers fall victim to:

1. Lacking the perspective necessary to see and interpret their own classroom environment.
2. Conducting research that does not always meet the expectations of the established research community.
3. Failing to frame their findings in terms of theory, which means their research has little relevance beyond their own classrooms.
4. Creating a tension in the classroom between researching and teaching, dividing the teacher's attention between data gathering and instructions.

I took different measures to overcome these limitations. In order to ensure having the right perspective when interpreting my own classroom environment, I invited a colleague to observe my class over two weeks and to compare her notes with mine. In order to meet the expectations of the established research community, I planned, documented, and transcribed all

interviews and kept hard copies of all transcribed documents as well as students' writings. I also made sure that my observations did not interrupt my teaching or create any tension in my classroom. Only when students were writing timed writings in class did I take notes to describe their seating, body language, and how they wrote. During class, I took notes as minimally as possible. I wrote down key words about conversations and activities to trigger later recollection. While students were doing group work, I jotted down key words about dynamics and major issues. I wrote my notes in two different tables. The first one documented the physical interactions, as suggested by Merriam, and included five columns: 1) setting, 2) participants, 3) activities and interactions, 4) frequency and duration, and 5) subtle factors. The second table described writing issues. It was developed after consulting with my advisor. The table was divided into three columns: 1) local/global issues, 2) writing practices: revision/feedback/brainstorming, 3) writing as thinking: expressing ideas/developing ideas. Immediately after the end of class, while events were still fresh in my memory, I would go to my corner in the library and write extensive field notes.

Thompson-Panos and Thomas-Ružić say, “[i]t is incumbent upon the ESL specialist both to be familiar with the differences in organization between the students' native language and English and to make the students aware of these differences so that they are better prepared to meet the expectations of their readers” (619). Since Arabic is my native language, I was able both to identify with the Saudi students when they struggled with common language difficulties, and also to help them articulate their ideas when they found it hard to express themselves in English.

By becoming a teacher-researcher, I got a detailed picture of how the Saudi students perform in writing classes. I was able to investigate my questions about the Saudi students and

systematically document what happens not only during class time but also during the tutoring sessions. I was able to collect and analyze data from my classes, including my own observations and reflections.

Setting of the Study

This study was conducted at the VTLCI in Blacksburg in southwestern Virginia. VTLCI is part of Virginia Tech's Outreach and International Affairs division. It provides intensive, full-time English courses to international students seeking admission to US universities. Instruction is offered from beginning through advanced proficiency levels, and is supplemented by self-paced, interactive computer-assisted training.

VTLCI Curriculum Structure

Every semester in the VTLCI is divided into two terms: Term I and Term II. In Term I, only X00 levels are offered. In Term II, only X50 levels are offered. Intensive English consists of 20-24 hours of instruction per week. Core classes and electives are offered as part of this program. The two core classes, Grammar, Listening and Speaking (also termed Core I) and Reading and Writing (also termed Core II), are each ten hours per week and are constructed around five proficiency levels.

The instruction provided at the VTLCI starts at a very basic level, teaching how to write a sentence in English and progressing to a five-paragraph essay. The five levels of the core courses are divided into ten tiers: beginner (level 100-150), high beginner (level 200-250), intermediate (level 300-350), high intermediate (level 400-450), and advanced (level 500-550).

The official descriptions of the Reading and Writing components of the levels under research are as follows:

Level 400: Upon completion of the level, students can produce organized, cohesive paragraphs and essays to support opinions, evaluations, or arguments. They have developed basic editing skills. They are able to read a full-length novel, summarize plots, and participate in discussions and debates. Students use targeted academic vocabulary in meaningful contexts. In grammar, students can form and appropriately use verb tenses, phrases, and clauses. Modals and structures such as connectors are used to express specific meaning. (Language and Culture Institute at Virginia Tech).

Level 450: Upon completion of this level, students can produce analytical thesis statements, organized and cohesive essays, and reports organized by chronology or classification. They can research a focused research question and do basic academic citations accurately. The students can utilize various strategies for effective academic reading, including differencing, and can read and summarize a novel of over 250 pages. (Language and Culture Institute at Virginia Tech).

In addition to the five levels of English, the VTLCI offers a set of electives, such as Study Skills, American Idioms, Orientation to American Culture, TOEFL Preparation, and Business English. Students are assigned to levels based on a placement exam and written essay. .

Because of the growing number of students enrolled in the VTLCI in the last few years, the VTLCI started offering two shifts, a morning shift from 8:00-11:50 a.m., and an evening shift from 1:00-5:45 p.m. During those two shifts, Core I or GLS (Grammar, Listening and Speaking) courses are offered from 8:00-9:50 a.m. Monday through Friday; and Core II, or RW (Reading

and Writing) are offered from 10:00-11:50 a.m. Monday through Friday. I taught RW during the morning shift from 10:00-11:50 a.m. Elective courses are offered from 12:00-12:50 p.m. Monday through Thursday and can be chosen by the students. The elective classes offered vary each term based on students' needs and interests. The electives during Spring I and II in 2012 were American Media, Academic Listening, TOEFL Preparation, and Academic Vocabulary.

For eight weeks in the first term and nine weeks in the second term, the students spent five hours per day in the VTLCI (a standard amount of time for an intensive language program). Each term at the VTLCI starts on a Wednesday, lasts for eight to nine weeks, and ends on a Wednesday.

Incoming students take the Michigan English Placement Test (MEPT), which covers listening, grammar, vocabulary, and reading skills, and a short writing assignment. It is scored and used in conjunction with the writing sample.

Course Structure

My initial plan when designing my study and writing my pre-prospectus was to study students in the advanced level of Intensive English, 550, which prepares ESL students to take the TOEFL, a major requirement for international students to be accepted to American universities. During the pilot study, I learned from both students and teachers at the VTLCI that it is at the 400 and 450 levels where ESL students in general, and Saudi students in specific, struggle the most. It is also at these levels that students first encounter argumentative essays. Therefore, I altered my focus to the 400 and 450 levels. According to Professor Violet, in the first three levels, 100-200-300, students work on the basics for writing complete sentences, so when they reach the 400 level, they mistakenly assume that they will just be required to write more complex

sentences. They struggle with accepting that, in fact, they are required to produce organized and cohesive paragraphs and essays, and also to support opinions, evaluate, refute, argue, and edit. Additionally, I chose the 400 level because, according to the teachers, most students at the 500 level are also applying for college admission, and once accepted, they usually stop taking their work at the VTLCI seriously.

When designing the syllabi for RW 400-450, there were certain minimum requirements that I had to incorporate as a VTLCI instructor, including the textbook, grades, and the number and frequency of assignments. These constraints are typical of most college courses and did not prevent me from conducting the study. The book assigned by the VTLCI, *North Star 4: Reading and Writing*, was effective for my goal since it includes various activities that integrate critical thinking and enhanced academic skills such as questioning, differentiating, and synthesizing. In Spring I, we covered the first five chapters, and in Spring II, the last five chapters. In addition to the textbook, we had two different novels: *Between Shades of Grey* by Ruta Sepetys in Spring I, and *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho in Spring II. In the twice-weekly novel discussions, students were required both to articulate their understanding of the reading and to interpret and to reflect on related ideas and issues in their own world.

Silva and Brice advise teachers to develop curricula and material that support their goals for their students. Since my major goal was to assist students who were moving from a teacher-centered environment to a student-centered one, I designed a syllabus that engaged the students in critical thinking, collaboration, and essay writing that incorporated several stages of revisions. I did so through combining lectures with whole-class and small-group discussions and by encouraging reflective thinking.

To accommodate all these aspects, I followed the Freirean pedagogy which is characterized by its “participatory, critical, value-oriented, multicultural, student-centered, experimental, research-minded and interdisciplinary” nature (Shor, “Educating” 22). Given the structure of the course curriculum, I was not able to design a truly interdisciplinary reading and writing class. During class discussion, I asked students to identify with the topics, discuss their understanding, share their personal experiences and opinions, and compare and contrast their experiences with those of their classmates. Being Saudi myself, I tried to be sensitive to the students’ cultural backgrounds.

Larson and Smalley describe culture as a “blueprint” that guides the behavior of people in a community and is incubated in family life. It governs our behavior in groups, makes us sensitive to matters of status, and helps us know what others expect of us and what will happen if we do not live up to their expectations. Culture helps us to know how far we can go as individuals and what our responsibility is to the group. Having the same cultural background as my study participants, I felt I could use my understanding about their background and the topics that interest them for discussions. Following the techniques suggested by Brown (2000) when discussing cultural issues, I chose topics which recognized the value and belief systems of the participants; I refrained from any demeaning stereotypes, and I did not push the students beyond their comfort zones, especially when it came to the perceived roles of males and females. Using topics for in-class discussions that had been limited to social, not academic settings, such as women driving in the KSA, allowed them the opportunity to experience different audiences and listen to new perspectives.

Taking advantage of the Saudi students’ excellent oral skills, I tried to organize lessons so that student talk dominated classroom time, instead of the teacher-centered lecture format

familiar to the Saudi students from their education in the KSA. I structured the course as a practical workshop, dedicating a majority of the class time to introducing the chapter units, group discussion, and writing activities. During each term, students were required to write four four-paragraph essays. In class I introduced each essay, opened the floor for whole-class discussion, and followed it with small-group discussions before students started the first draft. My aim was to give students time to negotiate, plan, draft, and proofread their assignments and their peers'. I also provided the students with detailed written directions for every assignment and paced the assignments far apart to give students enough time to work on each one, both in and out of class.

In the first hour of the first day of every term, I reviewed the syllabus with the students, gave them what the VTLCI called book vouchers (a list of all the books required that term for the different courses the students are taking), and did an “ice breaker” activity. In the second hour, I introduced the first chapter and the assigned novel. The first hour (10:00-11:50 a.m.) of the last Wednesday of each term was dedicated to an achievement test on the last assigned chapter in the reading textbook. I designated the second hour (11:00-11:50 a.m.) for cultural activities such as an Arabic potluck meal, picture taking, and sharing.

The weekly schedule included some fixed activities and many variable ones. The fixed activities consisted of writing lab practice, novel discussion, and timed writing. Every Wednesday, from 10:00 -11:50 a.m., I took my students to the writing lab. Depending on their level of proficiency in writing in English, they wrote a first draft of whatever current piece they were working on, edited a second or third draft, searched for material online, or proofread a final draft. The other fixed activity centered on the assigned novel. The last half hour of every Tuesday and Thursday was dedicated to discussing the novel. The students formed groups to respond to the assigned discussion questions, and participated in the whole-class discussion.

Another predetermined assignment with a fixed timetable was journal writing. Every Friday, students were required to turn in four to five journal entries in which they wrote freely about a subject of their choice to increase their writing fluency. I responded to the students' journals in a conversational manner to help establish a relationship with them. Additionally, through comments on their entries, I encouraged my students to write freely and not to worry about errors. I wanted them to think on paper and to overcome their fear of making mistakes.

The last preset activity was in-class writing. During the last 50 minutes (11:00-11:50 a.m.) of almost every Friday, students completed timed writing exercises in which they responded to a prompt related to the reading and writing themes discussed that week.

In every term, the students wrote four essays following the process writing. First we brainstormed the topic as a whole class. Then students formed small groups to discuss and share their ideas before starting their first draft. For every essay, the students submitted three different drafts. For the third draft, they were asked to bring two copies for the peer-editing workshops.

Participant Demographics

I selected my participants purposefully because my goal was to get rich information which “will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton 230). The participants were all Saudis, ranging in age from 18 to 30, had similar educational backgrounds, and were studying RW 400-450 at the VTLCI. Of the ten purposefully selected participants (six females and four males), Fadia and Kareem were the main focus of my study. Nine of the male and female participants were from the KSA, while one female (Falwa) was from Kuwait. In the following section, I present a brief demographic description of each of the ten students. Seven of the participants

took part in the study during Spring I. In Spring II, three additional students joined the study. Below are biographical sketches of the ten selected students.

Majda is twenty-five years old and married to Hassan, one of the male students in my group. Hassan and Majda have a baby girl who turned one year old in the middle of the term. Majda was pregnant during the first term and gave birth to her second baby girl three weeks before the end of the second semester. She was enrolled in public school during elementary and secondary school, but she moved to private school for high school. She has a Bachelor's degree in chemistry. When she first joined the VTLCI, she was placed in the 250 level. At the time of my study, she had been at the VTLCI for three terms. She had progressed smoothly to the 400 level, the level I researched. Majda was not sure what field she wanted to focus on in her graduate studies. Her major concern was to be accepted to a program that would guarantee her a job when she returns to the KSA.

Hassan is thirty years old and married to Majda. He was educated in both public and private school and has a negative impression of private schools. He has a Bachelor's degree in Architecture and six years of work experience in the KSA. When he first joined the VTLCI, he was placed in the 350 level. He studied for four terms and reached the 500 level but decided to go back to 400 because he felt he needed a stronger foundation before moving to the level in which he would be required to write research papers. One of SACM's scholarship requirements for female students is that they must be accompanied by a mahram, a male companion. One of the advantages of being a mahram is that he receives all the same educational opportunities as his female companion. These opportunities include language preparation and a scholarship once he earns college admission. Hassan was part of my study during both spring terms.

Kareem is a nineteen-year-old male. After high school, he took one term of conversation in an English language institute in the KSA. When he joined the VTLCI, he was placed at the 300 level. He passed levels 300 and 350, but failed the 400-level class in reading and writing. Since the 400 RW class is not offered in Term II, he would have been required to go back to 350. As he had he successfully passed the 400 level in GLS, his teachers and Professor Dr. Sanford , the student advisor, agreed with him that it would be a waste of time to repeat the 350 level in reading and writing. So Professor Dr. Sanford asked him to write an essay to be evaluated by a group of teachers. The teachers split in their opinion; some believed that he would be better served by taking 350 again, but others, including Dr. Sanford , believed that he was ready for a 400 RW class and should wait and take that course in the following term. Dr. Sanford showed me Kareem's paper and asked me if I was willing to take him in my 400-level RW class. I took him. He wants to major in engineering like his father. His mother, although she has a college degree, chose to be a housewife. Kareem took part in my study during both terms.

Falwa is the only Kuwaiti student in my class. Kuwait, like the KSA, is a part of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC). After talking with and interviewing her, I saw how similar the Kuwaiti educational system is to the Saudi one when it comes to English as a foreign language, so I decided to include her in my research. Falwa is eighteen years old. She spent all her school years in public schools. Her number-one goal in life is to study in the US. As a young, single Arabic female, she had to fight tirelessly to get her parents' approval to travel and live alone. She started her fight in her junior year of high school and finally won. Her study interest is architecture. Like the Saudi government, the Kuwaiti government also encourages its citizens to get the best higher education and provides scholarships to those who are willing to travel and learn abroad. Falwa successfully applied for a

scholarship. Before coming to the US, she started preparing for the TOEFL test. When she arrived at the VTLCI, she was immediately placed in level 400. Falwa participated in my study during both spring terms, her first at VTCLI.

Fadia is eighteen years old, and would like to major in computer science. She is accompanying her husband, a graduate student in engineering at Virginia Tech. In the KSA she went to public schools. Both her parents have high school degrees, but not college degrees. Her mother, like many other Saudi mothers of big families, chose to be a stay-at-home parent. When Fadia first joined the VTLCI, she was placed in level 300. When she joined my study, she had finished two terms at the VTLCI. Immediately after joining the VTLCI and learning about the free conversational sessions that were offered by the Writing Center at Virginia Tech, she joined those sessions regularly. She became friends with the tutors at the Writing Center and would go shopping with them, conversing in English. Fadia took part in this study during both terms.

At twenty-five, Salma has a Bachelor's degree in Microbiology and hopes to enter graduate school in the same field. All her school years were in public school. She had already progressed from level 350 through level 500 at the VTLCI, and was in my class only because, to her chagrin, no 550 class was available that term. Her mother had attended the first year of medical school but had to stop and move with her husband to a new city where there were no medical schools. Salma's father has a high school diploma. Salma was part of this study both terms. Hana is twenty-three years old. The period of my study was her second term at the VTLCI. She was looking for admission to a graduate school to study marketing. During the elementary and secondary years, she went to public school. She moved to private school during her high school years. Both her parents have college degrees. Together with her sister Basma, Hana was offered a scholarship from the Saudi government. Because she is unmarried, her

brother accompanied her and her sister as a mahram. Like Hassan, her brother is also learning English at the VTLCI, but at the beginning level.

Basma is twenty-four and Hana's older sister. She attended both public and private school. Although she majored in accounting in her undergraduate studies, she has recently developed an interest in interior design. She has completed six terms at the VTLCI. Like Salma, she had to take 450 because 550 was not being offered. Midway through the term, she was accepted to a Master's program in Northern Virginia.

Majed is twenty-one. He spent all his high school years in private schools. He was enrolled in an undergraduate engineering program at a public university in the KSA for one semester. This is his fifth term at the VTLCI. He started at the 300 level and progressed all the way to the 500 level. He joined my class in the second term of the spring semester. Although he was enrolled in Advanced GLS, 550, he voluntarily chose to go back to 450 for RW. As he explained, "I am repeating this level voluntarily because I feel that I am not strong enough. I want to make sure that I am strong enough before I move to a higher level. I feel I need more practice."

Tarik is also twenty-one. He went to public school. He finished his first year in a public university in the KSA. In the US, he wants to major in software engineering. He has been at the VTLCI for a full year. He started at the 150 level and has worked all the way up to 450. Tarik joined my group in the second term of the spring semester.

Research Procedures and Instruments

In *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, Creswell describes data collection as a series of interrelated activities researchers do to gather information in order to find answers to

their emerging research questions. In this study, I used four methods of data collection: a pilot study; interviews with students and teachers; observations of students in class, lab, and tutoring observations; and student writing samples.

Pilot Study

To explore the writing challenges related to critical thinking, sex, and authority encountered by the Saudi students studying writing at the high intermediate level at VTLCI during the spring terms of 2012, I began with a pilot study. During this stage, I observed three classes of RW, electives, and GLS at the high intermediate level, 450. In addition to my observations, I interviewed three teachers who provided me with the syllabi used in the VTLCI and some students' writing samples. I also interviewed Saudi graduate and undergraduate students to learn about their experiences learning English writing at the VTLCI. From now on, I use the term graduates to refer to the students who plan to enroll in a graduate program, and undergraduates to refer to those students who plan to enroll in an undergraduate program. The classes I observed and the interviews I conducted during the pilot study familiarized me with the place, teachers, and the educational environment.

Student Interviews

MacNealy considers interviews the most important data-gathering tool in qualitative research because they help researchers collect facts, opinions, goals, plans, and insights that may not be available from any other source; develop a respondent's answers more fully; and clarify puzzling answers (203-4). Weiss also explains that the main reasons for using interviews in qualitative research are accessing the observations of others, learning about people's interior experiences and perceptions, hearing multiple interpretations of events, developing detailed

descriptions, and integrating multiple perspectives. Interviews not only give access to people's experiences in certain events, but also to the meaning people make of those events (Weiss 1). Since the goal of my study was to learn about the common experiences of the Saudi students learning writing in the KSA as well as in the US, conducting interviews offered the best approach.

I conducted two interviews with the students: one at the beginning of the study and the other at the end. Right at the beginning of the second day of the term, I introduced my research to the whole class. I dedicated the last fifteen minutes of the class that Monday to telling my students, Chinese and Saudis, about my research and inviting them to participate in it. I distributed the consent form, explained each point to them, and asked them to think overnight about being part of my project, and if they agreed, to sign and bring back the consent forms the next day. I emphasized that their participation in the study would in no way influence their final grade in the course and that they had the right to quit the study any time without any negative consequences. As soon as I finished introducing my project, all the Saudi students gave me their consent forms back after having signed them. I thanked them, and reminded the Chinese to think about it and inform me about their decision as soon as they could. The next day I reminded the Chinese students about the consent form, but got nothing. I told them that that was okay and not to worry about it. With the consent forms signed and secured, I started scheduling the first interviews. Since all the Saudi students were busy daily from 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., all interviews took place after 1:00 p.m. To make the process manageable, I interviewed one participant at a time, except for Hassan and his wife Majda, and Hana and her sister Basma, whom I interviewed together.

From the three different interview types (structured, semi-structured, and in-depth interviews), I chose the semi-structured type for the flexibility it offers in having two-way conversations with both students and teachers. The semi-structured interviews included a list of preplanned questions as well as open-ended questions that gave the students the opportunity to express themselves freely.

In the beginning of the interviews, I reminded the students of the goal of the study and thanked them for participating. Because I wanted verbatim transcripts so that I could quote respondents' comments in my report, following Weiss, I asked at the beginning of each interview for the participant's permission to record it. All interviews (except those with Hassan and Majda who preferred not to be recorded) were recorded using my Samsung cell phone recording application. At the end of each interview, I asked the students if they had anything else they would like to say. Although most of the interviews were recorded, I still took notes. I did that both to keep myself focused, and to keep myself from interrupting the participants. At the end of the second interview, I asked them if they would give me their personal email for any follow-up, since their VT student email account would not be valid after they left the VTLCI.

During the interviews, I talked very little and gave the students the chance to speak as much as they wanted in English or Arabic. As suggested by Seidman, I applied active listening during the interviews. I listened more than I talked. I listened to what the participants were saying, to what they were trying to convey, while at the same time staying "aware of the process as well as the substance" (79). Aside from the demographic questions, I made sure that the questions I asked were open-ended and then followed up with a request for concentrated details. Following Seidman's recommendation, I followed the "I-thou" relationship to convey closeness to the participants, while at the same time "keeping enough distance to allow the participant to

fashion his or her responses as independently as possible” (96). In order to avoid the trap of predetermined assumptions caused by our shared background, I tried to keep enough distance by asking authentic questions related to their experience learning writing in the KSA as well as in the US.

Semi-Structured Interview #1

The general purpose of the first interview was to gather information from the participants about the following issues:

1. Background information
2. Reading and writing practices
3. The teaching of English writing in the KSA
4. Opinion about peer activities during group work

Semi-Structured Interview #2

The main purpose of the second interview was to give students the chance to reflect on what they had said in the first interview and on what worked best for them when learning writing in the VTLCI in terms of:

1. Whole class discussions
2. Revisions
3. The teacher’s role
4. Teacher-student conferencing
5. Teacher interviews

Using semi-structured interviews, I interviewed five VTLCI teachers. All of them had experience teaching Saudi students reading and writing skills at different levels, from 100 to 550.

All of the teachers work full-time at the VTLCI and teach 20 hours a week. Three of the teachers had previously taught and/or tutored five of the Saudi students in my study. I conducted two interviews with each of those teachers to get specific information about those students. I conducted only one interview with each of the other three teachers to learn about their experiences with Saudi students in general. All five teachers praised the oral and social skills of their Saudi students. At the same time, four of the five teachers attributed the Saudi students' writing difficulties to their overreliance on using Arabic, both in and out of class. All of the teachers suggested that a major obstacle for the Saudi students is their difficulty in understanding, or unwillingness to follow, teachers' directions and to put in the extra effort required for writing more than one draft.

Teachers' Interviews

In my study, I conducted one semi-structured interview with three of the VTLCI teachers who have taught Saudi students at different levels. The interviews lasted about fifty minutes and took place in the teacher's room. The main purpose of the interviews was to learn the teachers' general impressions of teaching the Saudi students in terms of:

1. The Saudi students' areas of strengths and weaknesses
2. Strategies that the teachers used which worked best with the students
3. The things that differentiate the Saudi students from other ESL students
4. The specific difficulties the Saudi students have when learning writing.

Observations

Although some of the observation occurred during Spring Term I, most occurred during Spring Term II. I paid attention to the conversations that took place in class, in the writing lab, and during tutoring, and wrote down verbatim conversations as often as possible, including nonverbal cues and gestures, which I later turned into extensive field notes. I tried to remember things in chronological order and took full advantage of technology. Every day I carried my laptop to class, and jotted down keywords in the two tables discussed previously. At the end of every session, I would go to the VT library and develop the notes that I had taken either in class while students were doing group activities or during in-class writing, or after a tutoring session. On my way to my corner in the library, I recorded the major stories and activities that had taken place that day on my cell phone recording application. Once seated at my desk, I would take out the lesson plan, the two tables, and listen to any notes I had recorded on my way. The lesson plans provided a structure to the keywords jotted down in the two tables. With the memories still fresh in my head, I wrote a full journal about each day's activities and events.

Student Writing Samples

I collected writing samples from both Spring I and II (January 2012 to the middle of May 2012) for all ten study participants. These writing samples, or writing artifacts, came from their in-class writing and process writings (the term 'process writing' is what others call formal or revised essays; I am using the term 'process writing' as it is what the VTLCI uses), their weekly journals and novel reflections, and their reflections on their own writing process. Collecting these samples throughout the study enabled me to explore how the students' writing demonstrated their intellectual development, especially in terms of how they used feedback from their teacher and peers.

Data Analysis

In this section I describe how I coded and analyzed my data as I sought to explore how the ways the male and female Saudi students differed in their intellectual development related to the way they responded to the teacher and peers' authorities. Weiss urges researchers to begin the analysis as soon as the data is available (151). Since my case study includes two in-depth student interviews, teacher interviews, and in-class observations, I tried my best to have the collection of data and the analysis go hand-in-hand.

As the study progressed, I tested theories of writing based on the patterns collected. I continually compared, aggregated, contrasted, sorted, and speculated about the findings. Since part of the findings relate to issues I learned about from the interviews and the observations, while others deal with the respondents themselves, the analysis fell into two categories: issue-focused and case-focused. The reason I chose to follow a blended methodology of issue and case is the striking differences between the Saudi students in the group I was studying. Some issues, for instance, related only to the undergraduate female students, while others related only to the graduate female students.

As soon as I finished translating and transcribing the interviews and field notes, and in order to produce a rich descriptive analysis of all the data, I organized, coded, and searched for patterns in my data. In the beginning, I did not try to make sense of every action and response. After a few readings, I started asking myself what issues recurred and what types of questions the collected material raised. At that point, I did a careful reading of my transcribed data and started developing categories from which I was able to make meaning. I connected what the respondents did and said during the interview, in class, in writing, and during tutoring, to the generated categories. Whenever I located a meaningful segment, I coded it by marking the

segment with descriptive words. I continued the process until I had coded all of the data. I kept a master list of all the codes.

I then created different folders for each interview of every student and every teacher, and for my field notes. Then, following the recommendations of Rubin and Rubin's *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, I examined the data and classified it by the major evolving recurrent themes. I created folders for each issue that started to evolve. I then started moving material from interview or field-note files into an appropriate excerpt file, depending on the emerging themes and what I believed the material was telling me. Then I used local integration by organizing and integrating my observations and understandings in each section of the report.

Reliability and Validity

Although case studies contribute to the knowledge in the field researcher's study, they are not without limitations. The major limitation is reliability. Yin defines reliability as "demonstrating that the operations of a study – such as the data collection procedures – can be repeated, with the same results" (34). MacNealy states that the findings of a case study cannot be generalized since they result from a study on a small group of people at a specific time and place (53). My study is such a case. My focus was on a small group of Saudi students at the VTLCI in Spring Terms I and II, 2012. Even if I replicated the study in the same place for the same length of time following the same curriculum in subsequent terms, the students would be different, with different backgrounds.

The other major issue in case studies is constructing validity. To do so, the researcher needs to establish a "correct operational measure for the concepts being studied" (Yin 34). Like

Canagarajah's, "my orientation to language and literacy is informed by my own background and investment" (Canagarajah, *Translingual Practice* 17). In order to avoid introducing any bias or overlooking the ways in which my experiences shape my thinking and research, I "adopted proper measures to triangulate" my findings in order to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability, and validity (Canagarajah, 2013 p. 17). I did so through planning and following a systematic strategy when collecting the data. I prepared the interview questions in advance, and recorded and transcribed the interviews. I also used triangulation to check that what students said in the interviews was consistent with their written products, my field notes, and the interviews with teachers.

Researcher's Story

Many et al. write about the importance of examining the reading and writing teachers' literacy in order to learn about any tensions between their experiences and that of their students ("Epistemology and Preservice Teacher Education" 302). Canagarajah, in his book *Critical Academic Writing and Multilingual Students*, starts by reflecting on the pedagogical actions in his life as both an EFL and an ESL student. His goal was to encourage ESL teachers to follow his steps in revisiting their pedagogical assumptions and their impacts on their students' lives. Following Many et al.'s recommendations, as well as Canagarajah's example, in the following section, I present my story both as a student and teacher in the KSA and in the US. Through describing and comparing my experiences in the two different environments, I aim to present a firsthand image of what many KSA students go through when moving from a traditional educational environment that is sex-segregated and teacher-centered to an educational environment that is mixed-sex, student-centered, and encourages critical thinking.

Being from the KSA and having taught in the university there, I am intricately connected to the subject matter of this study. With that in mind, it is only fitting that I give my story as a framework for the reader to understand my many perspectives as the teacher-researcher. To provide a lens on those perspectives, I will describe the systems of learning and teaching in the KSA, generally and personally; my learning in the US as both a Masters and PhD student; my experiences with teaching at the VTLCI; and my perceptions of the cultural issues involved in all of these situations.

Learning in the KSA

Education at all levels in the KSA has deep Islamic religious roots. Every religious subject reminds students about the unique position and roles of the KSA as the birthplace of Islam. Even non-religious school subjects like geography or science have a religious character. In addition to standard school subjects, I took five core religious subjects throughout high school and college: Quran Recitation, Quran Commentary, Prophetic Sayings, Islamic Jurisprudence, and Monotheism. Because of the sacred nature of the subjects, my exams were evaluated according to how closely my writing adhered to the textbooks. Writing for the other school subjects was not much different than for the religious subjects. In my years as both a high school student and an undergraduate college student, the only Arabic academic writing I did was either descriptive composition or dictation. My writing was evaluated mostly on grammar and spelling.

English writing instruction in the English Department at King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU) where I earned my Bachelor's degree was mostly teacher-centered and product-oriented. As an English major, I took four writing courses called Composition and Grammar in addition to

two courses called Essay I and Essay II. The focus in the Composition and Grammar courses was limited to the sentence level, whereas in Essay I and Essay II, some attention was given to structure and genre. Rarely did I experience group work or writing more than one draft and receiving teachers' feedback. Not even on those rare occasions when I was given the chance to write two drafts was I required to start a fresh draft or revise global issues. The feedback I got was mostly either correcting spelling or grammatical mistakes, or crossing out redundant sentences. As for literature courses, the teacher would write on the board the themes, characters, plots, etc., which we would memorize and regurgitate on the exam date. There was no writing center in the university to assist me with essay writing. For none of my undergraduate courses was I given any handouts about the course or assignment descriptions or checklists. The finals for the English Reading courses consisted of passages from outside the assigned reading book. The finals for the English Composition were to respond to a new prompt. As a result, I rarely had to study or memorize anything for the Reading and Writing finals except for some vocabulary.

Teaching in the KSA

After getting my Master's degree in Linguistics, I received a lecturer position at KAU, and taught general English courses, Engl. 101 and Engl. 102, at the English Language Institute (ELI). These two courses are university requirements for all college students. The courses were focused on grammar and the exams were the same for all sections. One year before I went for my PhD, the ELI started offering integrated courses that developed reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Because of the huge number of students, there was very little opportunity for actual writing; exams were multiple choice. As a teacher, I was not required to write any course descriptions, since that was the level coordinator's duty. I would simply fill in my name, contact

information, office hours, and classroom location on the general course description that I received from the level coordinator. Since most writing instruction was limited to grammar and sentence skills and used the book as the major reference, there was no real need for handouts or assignment descriptions.

Before moving to my experience learning and teaching in the US, I must mention that all decisions regarding my college life in the KSA, both as a teacher and as a student, were made by men. Although female students have their own campus, faculty members, and administrators, the male section of the university holds all the authority. All decisions related to the female section in terms of appointments, promotions, awards, scholarships, etc. are issued by and from the male section. Even the Dean in the female section in my school cannot communicate directly with a party outside of the university. Any communication must pass through the male correspondent part in the male section.

Learning in the US

During my first graduate experience in the US, I fell victim to my mistaken assumptions as well as one of my teachers' assumptions about my background. When I joined the Masters' program at the University of Louisville (U of L) Kentucky, I carried with me the belief that I need only learn what is in the book and what the teacher says in class to get my degree. I also believed that good writing consists primarily of a product free of spelling and grammar errors, and that it does not require collaboration. During my first term in the program, sensing that I needed to get oriented to the new environment, my Introduction to Linguistics teacher recommended that I go to the writing center (WC), to which I was introduced for the first time. Although the teacher herself told me to go, during the tutoring session I could not help but feel

guilty of cheating because I would be turning in work which someone else had corrected. On the other hand, the same teacher, who was also the head of the ESL program in U of L, learned during our first meeting that I used to work at a university back home. She mistakenly assumed that I had been a Teaching Assistant, when in reality I had been an administrator. Around the middle of the term her feedback on my journal told me to include in my weekly journals a reflection on my teaching experience. After class, I explained that my work experience was limited to administration. Although I tried from that experience to be on guard when designing the course for my study and to test the assumptions I made, I did not always succeed. Even as a Saudi student myself, I sometimes made erroneous assumptions about the participants.

My understanding about the particulars of the PhD writing program developed gradually. First, I changed my old perception about Rhetoric and Writing. In the KSA, there is no English course that is called “Rhetoric,” whereas both grade school and college include Arabic courses called “Rhetoric” and “Rhetoric and Criticism.” “Rhetoric” is not part of the English Department in the KSA, but part of the Arabic Department. While the Arabic Department in the KSA is mostly concerned with preserving the writing of the sacred books, I found out during my course work at VT that Rhetoric and Writing Departments in the US are mostly concerned with the advancement and interpretation of language according to the latest understanding. Second, I had to learn to focus on the process of writing more than the product. Although I had read about the paradigm shift in the teaching of writing from one that focuses on product to one that focuses on process, I was still prone to apply what I was used to. One of the things that took me a while to start reading and applying was the course descriptions. The first week in the PhD program, I worried that I would not be able to meet the program requirements. Scanning the course descriptions distributed the first day of the term and looking at the grade distribution and criteria

only confirmed my fears. Realizing that the bulk of the course grade depended on a major final paper was nerve-racking. I did not take the time to carefully read the detailed information provided with the syllabus, which gave extensive step-by-step directions. Instead, after quickly scanning the syllabus to see the type of assignments and grade information, I filed it. In the back of my mind, I assumed that the course description, like those my ELI used to provide back home, supplied nothing of use beyond the course criteria.

Feeling confused and uncertain about how to start my first paper, I approached a friend of mine in the program. I expected her to tell me what to do. But what she did was open her file, look at the course description, and point to the answers to my questions. I was both happy and embarrassed. Happy to realize that at the tip of my fingers lay the answers to many of my questions and embarrassed that I had not seen them.

Recognizing the long process that writing goes through was another aspect of my gradual realization of the writing approach used in the new environment. When writing my Field Research Method paper during the first semester, I experienced a lot of panic. I could not easily believe that the reading, outlining, drafting, and data transcribing were required steps and a major part of the writing process. I could not see that while doing them, I was actually writing, that I had started the process of writing. I worried that I was wasting my time and would not be able to meet the deadline, which might jeopardize my scholarship. My colleagues and teacher kept telling me not to worry, since I had all the material and information I needed and all that remained to do was organizing and analyzing my data in what they considered a first draft. I did what I had to do, but the idea of the new writing process was not yet totally clear in my mind.

After years of learning and teaching in a writing system that never supplied course descriptions or extensive directions for the different writing stages, I could not easily see their role, benefit, or rationale. In the KSA, where education focuses on rote memorization, there is no need for such directions, since the only thing students have to do is memorize.

The picture became even clearer to me the following term when my future dissertation director invited me to observe her teaching an advanced writing class. It was a great experience in which I had the chance to get a different perspective, the perspective of a teacher. Also, as an observer, not a student, I was liberated from any concern about homework or grades. As a result, I was able to see the whole picture.

The second aspect of the writing program in my new environment which took a while to adjust to was peer workshopping. Although I had read about writing collaboration, during the first term, I did not take advantage of peer workshops. I did not give my colleagues feedback or take theirs seriously. Only when my teacher directly drew my attention to the value of peer feedback did I start applying it and realize its significance.

I learned more about the new process and that writing is more than an error-free product when working with a partner on one of the projects for the second term in the program. We met to prepare for our next presentation. I came prepared with my laptop to write what we would present to the class. But what actually happened was that we mostly discussed what we planned to present without writing anything down. At the end of the discussion, my partner said, "Great, we are done." I did not understand how we could be done when we had not written anything down.

Not only was the idea of peer workshops vague to me, but also the idea of teacher conferencing. In my previous teaching and learning experience, teachers' feedback was limited and consisted of error correction or praises. Suggestions were not part of what teachers gave; they had no place in my mind. As a result, I fretted when preparing for my first teacher-student conference to discuss my first term paper. I thought I should have something memorized and prepared for the meeting. I did not know that the conference was a chance for me to talk about my ideas and to discover and discuss them; therefore I panicked. I had the impression that she expected me to know everything and to have the right answers and the topics of my article clearly stated and finalized. Instead, I found after meeting with her that she had steps for me to work on and to follow in order to discover what I would be writing about.

Once I realized the problem, it took time to develop a solution and to conceive of writing as a longer process. The biggest challenge I faced was writing the dissertation, and yet it was my opportunity to exercise new ways of thinking about writing. The habit of relying on memory took its toll on me. Still influenced by long years of teaching and learning writing by memorization, when I first started reading other dissertations in the field, I was inclined to memorize and follow the research methods, questions, etc. in the dissertations that I read. Because that would not work, I became frustrated. Although I had transcribed all the interviews and collected all the artifacts for my study, I was unable to start writing. After discussing my troubles with teachers and friends, I took their advice and started reflecting on my own data, believing that I had a lot to say, and that all I had to do was start to write. Since I had no other options, I started grouping data from the interviews by themes. Once the major themes started to emerge, an outline became possible and I started writing.

Teaching in the US

My experience teaching in the US in 2012, following a totally new pedagogy for which I had little preparation, resembled Robert Connors'¹ experience in the mid-1990s. Connors writes, “[f]rom classical rhetoric and its picture of balanced arguments through the student-centered dialectic of process-oriented teaching, questions of masculinity and the teaching issues that surround it were omnipresent but hardly mentioned (139).

The dominant cultural issue during the first few weeks in my experience was the fact that I was teaching male students for the first time. All schools, including colleges, are segregated in the KSA, with separate campuses for male and female students. I learned and taught on girls' campuses. In the VTLCI, I taught male students for the very first time. My previous teaching experience, in which I had dealt solely with female students, did not prepare me to immediately be comfortable teaching male students. In the first week, I was very conscious that I, a female Saudi, was standing in front of male Saudis and lecturing them. Similar to Lee et al.'s experience, “I was juggling the previous social message about women in power which socialized me to expect myself, a female, to defer to male authority instead of being an authority myself In that situation” (Bell et al. 476). Only after a few days was I able to see my male students as “students,” not as “authority sources,” the way I used to see them in my previous experience teaching in the KSA.

Adding to my anxiety at first, I learned from the teachers at the VTLCI that some Saudi students still yearn for sex segregation. During my course work, I wrote a couple of papers about the ESL students in the WC at Virginia Tech. I learned from my visits and interviews with the director of the WC that some male students insisted on working only with male tutors, while

¹ For more discussion on the issue of teaching writing and sex refer to Robert Connors, “Teaching and Learning as a Man.” *College English* 58.2 (Feb. 1996): 137-157.

some female students wanted only female tutors. During the pilot study in the VTLCI, some male Saudi students approached me to talk about some of their academic and cultural issues and ask for my help in passing their concerns on to the VTLCI administration. Even though there was always a male and a female representative from the Saudi Club at the VTLCI, male as well as female Saudi students would come to me asking for consultation. That experience gave me confidence that the male students would accept me and see me as one of them. So I went on with my plan of teaching and researching.

My attempt to teach Saudi students following a new pedagogy in the VTLCI differed from all of my previous teaching experience. In the KSA, I was a Saudi teacher teaching Saudi students following a Saudi pedagogy. Here I had the chance to discover and apply a new pedagogy, while at the same time employing the students' language, culture, and background.

My teaching experience the first term was full of challenges. Those challenges came from two sources: my new experience as a student of rhetoric and writing, and my old experience learning and teaching writing in the KSA. As a student of rhetoric and writing, I was used to focusing on issues and concerns very different from those in ESL. While scholars in rhetoric and writing are mostly concerned with reading and thinking critically, scholars in ESL, as well as the teachers at the VTLCI, are more concerned with how students learn to write in English. During the initial teachers' meetings at the VTLCI, I observed that the teachers there addressed the students' learning process and their language more than their ideas. I had to adjust my thinking and draw more from my previous knowledge in linguistics than from rhetoric and writing. I had to look back at issues of morphology, syntax, contrastive grammar, and language transfer and interference, while at the same time taking care of generating ideas.

In addition to my baggage as a student in rhetoric and writing, I also carried with me my old teaching practices. Instead of realizing that I was now in a PhD program teaching Saudi students again but in the new American way, I subconsciously followed what I was accustomed to doing, the old way. It was difficult to follow a new approach in teaching while simultaneously reflecting, taking notes, gathering data, and observing. So I had to put my research on hold for a term. I first had to bridge the two environments myself in order to be able in the following term to help the Saudi students do that for themselves.

In addition to embracing a new pedagogy, I had to adjust to new administrative requirements, which were far fewer in the KSA than in the VTLCI. As a teacher in the KSA, I was used to a general meeting with all the other teachers at the beginning of the semester, during which we would be given the student rosters, the book to teach, and the syllabus. A second meeting took place at the end of the term and was mostly a social gathering to celebrate the end of the semester. To my surprise, there were weekly meetings during the first term at the VTLCI and the administrative requirements were much more overwhelming. Although the syllabus is the same for all sections, I was required to submit a detailed pacing guide, to learn and use the Engrade system to electronically submit daily grades and evaluations, and to write a final evaluation and attendance report for each student. On top of that, the daily emails and updates from the VTLCI administration demanded my response. At first, as someone coming from an oral culture, whenever I had a question about logistics, I found it easier to go straight to one of the VTLCI teachers for help instead of searching the VTLCI database to find the answer for myself. One encounter that accelerated the shift occurred when I was using the photocopy machine. I was used to an administrator who would take care of copying my teaching material and maintaining the photocopier. In the first week, I was using a huge photocopy machine and

got a paper jam. When I asked the administrator for assistance, she helped me but not before informing me that next time, I would be responsible for taking care of such matters myself.

My academic duties at the VTLCI were different and much more extensive than those I was used to. For the first time, I was teaching intensive reading and writing as one integrated course in which I would not be lecturing about effective writing, but guiding students and showing them how effective writing is accomplished. Since the course was intensive, it included reading five long chapters from the textbook, plus a novel. The writing component included weekly journals, weekly in-class writing (timed writing), and four essays. While I was used to preparing an hour before class and an hour after class in the KSA, in the VTLCI, I would spend about four hours daily preparing and correcting my students' writing. The other major challenge in the new environment was not only to learn about all the new forms and checklists for the different writing activities but also to apply them. The four-page course syllabus, the two pages of editing symbols, the timed and process writing evaluation checklists, the four different process writing assignment descriptions, the peer editing workshop checklist, the four different cover page checklists for the process writing submissions, all were new to me. Needless to say, those forms were all new to the Saudi students as well. Every time I asked the Saudi students to refer to one of those forms, I got both verbal and nonverbal signs that the students did not know which forms I was talking about. I had to show them the form while repeating its name.

In the midst of all of those overwhelming new requirements, I failed to take extensive notes and to keep up with my research. I had to take care of my own teaching before I could take care of my studies. Although I took some notes during the first term, I could not establish the background needed for my research. I did not open nor organize the folders needed to sort out the different data I would be gathering.

In the first term, influenced by the old practices both as a student and as a teacher, I followed methods I felt more comfortable with. Most of my previous experience in teaching writing was limited to teaching paragraphs, not whole essays. Although I had a clear syllabus and detailed lesson plans, several times during the first term I would find myself drawn to teaching grammar, as I had in the KSA. In the VTLCI, grammar is taught in a different class than listening and speaking. But because every reading unit contains a section for grammar, I would spend the whole period teaching grammar, since doing what I already knew and had mastered gave me satisfaction and confidence. I was also drawn more to whole-class discussions than to small-group work. Being conscious about making spelling mistakes, I rarely wrote on the board during the first term. After the level coordinator observed my class, she recommended that I use the board more often. Before learning about the ready-made achievement tests found in the teacher's manual at the end of every unit, I would construct quizzes similar to those I was accustomed to, using fill-in-the-blank formats and focusing on grammar and vocabulary. When tutoring, I neglected to read the student's whole paper before starting to give him/her feedback. I would read and correct the local issues. I felt that was what I had to do. I also found teaching a novel for a Reading and Writing class an unfamiliar challenge. In my experience, novels were part of literature courses, independent from the Reading and Writing courses. Therefore, although I had read and prepared the novel assigned in the syllabus, I had a hard time fitting it into the course. Throughout the term, although I scheduled an hour for discussion of the novel on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I would always feel that there was something more important to do. So, after a brief introduction to the assigned part in the novel and a short class discussion, I would move to a grammar or writing activity.

The first term gave me a chance to observe myself, to apply what I had learned about writing pedagogy, and to push myself to shift from telling students what and how they needed to learn to assisting them to find that out for themselves. After experiencing all the new logistics and methods, in the second term I had the confidence to apply the new method and to pursue my research. In the chapters that follow, I describe the research that grew out of these experiences.

While Connors, after a shocking experience of rejection by one of his male students, became interested in focusing on his relationship as a male teacher with his male students, I became interested in focusing on my relationship as a female teacher with male students. Connors describes his relationship with his male students as “the complex relation of power and knowledge” (139). Mine was more complex because it was new to my male students and to me. Kareem, as well as the other Saudi male students in class, were being taught by a Saudi female teacher for the first time. And for the first time, I was teaching male students. On top of that, all the Saudi students were in a mixed-sex educational setting for the first time.

Chapter Four: Teacher's Authority

“Writing courses can be among the most empowering courses for students because writing allows them to move from ‘silence’ to finding voice” (David et al. 528).

The empowerment that students can experience in writing classes as they find their own voices has been discussed regularly in composition scholarship as a result of a pedagogical shift that occurred in the 1970s. In the previously followed pedagogy, teachers had all the power; in the new student-centered pedagogy, students started taking charge of their own learning and their own development. That shift, however, did not happen in the KSA, where teaching has remained teacher-centered. In a teacher-centered pedagogy, the instructor holds the ultimate authority in the classroom. The instructor speaks and students listen; the instructor chooses topics, evaluates, monitors and corrects students' language forms and structure. This is the experience of students in the KSA. On the other hand, in a student-centered pedagogy, the students are the focus. Students' voices emerge through their in-class participation individually, in pairs, and in groups. While the instructor acts as an information resource, students voice their choices through picking topics, participating, and evaluating their learning. Students who are not used to actively participating in their learning process face some challenges when required to do so. This is the common experience of Saudi students in the US.

This chapter has two major purposes: (1) to explore the experiences of Saudi students learning high-intermediate-level academic writing in preparation for college admission with a focus on their relationship with and to the teacher as an authority, and the role that this relationship plays in their critical thinking as displayed through class discussions, teacher-student

conferencing, and writing; and (2) to identify the sex-related difficulties that a Saudi male and a Saudi female student face while confronting new academic expectations in language and writing. In this chapter, I look at how the male and female Saudi students in particular progress through stages of perception of the teacher's authority while learning high-intermediate-level writing at the VTLCI.

As a teacher-researcher, I collected data using the following qualitative methods: classroom observations, interviews with students and teachers, and students' writing samples (reflections, assignments, tests, journals, process and timed writing). I analyzed field notes from observations and interview transcripts to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' voices and their perceptions of the teacher's authority while learning high-intermediate-level academic writing at the VTLCI.

While in Chapter Three, I described my research methods for the entire study, this chapter will start with a quick overview of how the idea of teacher authority and its relationship to critical thinking has been explored. I then present an overview of what inspired the questions, followed by the theories of Perry and Belenky et al. as my chosen framework, as well as the type of discourse analysis I used to analyze students' writing. I will then more generally present the students, the classroom, the students' seating, and the sex differences in the students' daily commitments. In the rest of the chapter, I will take a closer look at data on two students in particular, Fadia (female) and Kareem (male) to more clearly show the contrast between the two students and suggest how the differences are related to their sex. I expand my previous two questions to better flesh out the relationship between teacher authority, critical thinking, and sex by exploring the following questions:

1. How do Saudi female and male students respond differently to a teacher's authority?
2. How do Saudi female and male students' difference in responding to a teacher's authority affect their development as writers and critical thinkers?
3. What are the reasons behind the Saudi students' different perceptions of and responses to their teachers' authority?
4. How do Saudi students grapple with the issue of diversity among themselves?

Before focusing on my study, it is helpful to review previous explorations of authority in the classroom and critical thinking development. Perry describes the typical process of a male college student's intellectual development, beginning with the dualism in which the student believes that there is a single right answer to every question that the teacher, not the students or their peers, knows and has the authority to provide (xxxii). While Perry's study focused on male college students, Belenky et al. studied female students and how they respond to the teacher's authority. Sometimes the authority of the teacher and that of students' home culture were in conflict, a problem that neither Perry nor Belenky et al. discuss; however, I did see evidence of this in my data. In such conflicts, as we will later see, cultural authority often overrode the teacher's authority.

In my study, I observed significant differences in the way males and females responded to the teacher's authority. Most of the female students seemed committed and motivated to perform well in class—they consistently participated in class writing activities, and completed and presented their homework because they respected the teacher's authority. The male students, however, seemed less committed and motivated to write—they often picked what work to complete because they did not respect the teacher's authority. For instance, male students rarely completed their homework, read the assigned reading, met writing assignment deadlines, or

followed the directions for assignments. In this chapter, I show how Saudis students' cultural training affects their perception of the teacher's authority, which in turn affects how they progress.

According to both Atkinson, and Atkinson and Ramanathan, the emphasis of US composition programs differs from that of other countries. American universities put a strong emphasis on the development and use of students' critical thinking skills that show individual autonomy, rationality, analysis, originality, decontextualization and objectivity. That emphasis does not work well with the ESL students who come from Eastern cultures, including the Arabic cultures, which require each person to occupy a certain place in society and behave accordingly without disturbing the social order. The approach that encourages ESL students to take a side on an issue and to analyze the situation critically "have frequently been found to be problematic for ESL writers from more interdependently oriented cultural backgrounds" (Ramanathan and Atkinson 61).

One of the conditions that significantly affects Saudi students' ability to learn critical thinking and writing in English is the often contradictory cultural roles and expectations that critical thinking and writing in an American writing classroom requires of them. When conducting cross-cultural studies, scholars have often classified different cultures on the collectivistic-individualistic continuum (Triandis). This continuum looks at the individual and collective identity, individual perceptions of the self and his/her roles in society, and measures of success. The KSA is categorized in the collectivistic category where people highly value the traditional customs and social values (Long). In Arabic culture, fear of social judgment and a desire to maintain social harmony influence how students think, behave, and learn. In 1999 Vai Ramanathan and Dwight Atkinson assert that the notion of individuality varies substantially

across cultures. Western culture encourages independence, while other cultures, the Arabic culture included, encourage interdependence. Students who come from a non-individualistic culture that emphasizes interdependence see themselves “as part of an encompassing social relationship and [recognize] that one’s behavior is determined, contingent on, and to a large extent, organized by...the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in [a] relationship” (Markus and Kitayama 226-227). Canagarajah states that students’ ability to write critically is affected by more than just the language or internal characteristics of texts such as the author’s and story’s context— their societal and historical contexts play a role in students’ interpretations of texts (*Critical Academic Writing*).

What Inspired the Questions?

As Diane Belcher says, there is a lack of attention to sex as a cultural factor in L2 research and highlights the fact that “L2 writers do have sex” (68). In this study, I help to fill that gap by focusing on sex and teacher’s authority in the ESL composition classes. Most studies of Saudi students focus on either male or female students because, in traditional Saudi culture, they are on separate campuses. At the VTLCI, however, (as is typical in most American universities) students are not separated by sex. As the Saudi students found themselves in this new coed setting, the issue of sex kept presenting itself as an influential factor during all stages of the study: before the pilot study, during the pilot study, during the field work, and in the drafting stage.

Even before the study took place, a female VTLCI teacher described to me a perceived lack of seriousness towards her authority from male Saudi students and asked whether this might be because of her sex. The behaviors that the VTLCI teachers described became apparent immediately after the first week of my teaching and the first round of student interviews: female

students' reactions to the teacher's role and authority differed from male students'. Female and male students also exhibited different behaviors in regards to speaking out during class or group discussions. Graduate female students refrained from voicing their opinions in group work specifically because they wanted to preserve group harmony. Fadia, a Saudi female undergraduate student, whose work and interviews I will look at more closely later, hesitated to voice her opinions in class, in groups, and to me; she instead expected me, the teacher, to act as the classroom authority who offers answers. Fadia expressed in the first interview that she considers strictness to be what determines whether a teacher is "good," which also demonstrates her view of the teacher as an authority figure. On the other hand, Kareem, a Saudi male undergraduate student, whose work and interviews I will also examine in detail closely later, was clearly very comfortable speaking out (but only articulated his opinions through speech, not writing) and relied on his own authority to draw conclusions. Rather than viewing the teacher as the classroom's source of knowledge and authority, he considered himself—and his cultural background, which he was always ready to present, preserve, and defend—as authority figures.

Framework

The studies by Perry and Belenky et al. of the critical thinking development of American college students offers a framework for understanding how, as students' perception of authority in the classroom changes, they develop increasingly sophisticated critical thinking skills.

Discourse Analysis

Instead of looking only at the nature of discourse when doing discourse analysis, James Kinneavy started looking at the function or aim of discourse. Kinneavy defines discourse as "the full text, oral or written, delivered at a specific time and place or delivered at several instances" (Kinneavy 297). He defines the aim of a discourse as "the effect that the discourse is oriented to

achieve in the average listener or reader for whom it is intended” (297). Kinneavy documented four specific types of discourses: referential, persuasive, expressive, and literary. In my analysis of the students’ writing, I follow Kinneavy’s model of discourse analysis and focused on students’ aims and the effect they expect their oral and written discourses to have on the listener and reader. I look at how they are writing about the issues as well as how they speak about them. I also follow Kinneavy’s model in looking at the “full text” of students’ writing, not at individual words or sentences. In specific, I look at the following:

1. What type of discourse are the students using?
2. What issues are they talking about and in what way do they look at those issues?
3. What aspects of what they are talking about receive the most attention?
4. How are they evaluating reality and things? Are they evaluating things in a black-and-white or relative mentality?

The Students

Ten students participated in the study: six females and four males. All of the females were graduate students except for Fadia, who was an undergraduate student. All of the males were undergraduate students except for Hassan, who was a graduate student. As mentioned in the introduction, because of the wealth of data I collected on the ten students, I will focus on specific data from two undergraduate students: Fadia and Kareem. I chose these two students because I wanted to use one female and one male student, and also because they were particularly articulate in describing their experiences. I will also use Basma, Hana, and Salma to reflect female graduate students’ perspectives; Majed for additional reflection of male undergraduate students’ perspectives; and Hassan to reflect a male graduate student’s perspective. These students exemplify all of the participants’ categories: graduate/undergraduate, male/female,

repeating the level voluntarily/repeating the level compulsorily, and participated in one term/participated in two terms.

The following table summarizes the seven students' information under study, which reflects their diversity:

Table 3 Student Information

Student Name	UG/G	Sex	Repeating the Level	Number of Terms Participated in the Study	Number of Tutoring Sessions in the 2nd Term
Fadia	U	F	Not Repeating	2 terms	3
Kareem	UG	M	Compulsorily	2 terms	3
Basma	G	F	Compulsorily	1 term	3
Majed	UG	M	Voluntarily	1 term	3
Hana	G	F	Not repeating	2 terms	3
Tarik	UG	M	Not repeating	1 term	3
Salma	G	F	Compulsorily	2 terms	None

While the students in the study share a common background—all are Saudi, were educated in Saudi schools, and were science majors—each of them had a different perception of the teacher's and peers' authority when beginning the course. This chapter focuses on these participants, their varying perspectives regarding the source of knowledge and authority, and

how those perspectives affected their writing and learning processes. In this chapter, I focus on what I observed during case study research, rather than trying to make generalizations about the students or their experiences.

In the following part, I present a description of Classroom One, where the case study took place, and the daily activities. That is followed by the two major parts organized by the two major students, Fadia, (female) and Kareem (male). Each part starts with a portrait of the students, followed by the student's perception about writing, teacher-student conferencing, followed by student's perception of teacher's authority, then the student's positionality, and a writing piece that demonstrates the student's voice. I conclude each of the two major parts with supplementary support from the other Saudi students of the same sex. I end the chapter with a brief conclusion.

Classroom One

The study took place in four different locations: Classroom One, the tutoring center, the conference room, and different cafés chosen by students as interview locations. The class sessions observed for this study took place in classroom one during both terms, Spring I and Spring II. Classroom One is located on the second floor of the VTLCI's main building. Upon first entering, the classroom seems small and crowded; although only 18'x16', it holds eight large multi-student desks of 6'x 1½' each and sixteen seats, two at each desk. The desks are arranged in two rows of four, which leaves a small passage for students to squeeze themselves in and out of the room. In the front of the classroom is a large whiteboard with a digital clock at its right bottom corner. To the right of the board is the teacher's desk and seat, which are similar to the students'. The teacher's desk is contiguous with the front right student. To the right of the teacher's desk, a small row of shelves holds a tape recorder, a couple of dictionaries, and a cup

for pencils and markers. The classroom has three windows: two at the back and one on the front right side next to the teacher's desk. The back windows overlook the playground of the neighboring nursery. On many occasions, when weather permitted, the students would open the windows. Unfortunately, though, the sounds of the children playing served as a distraction in the classroom, especially when students were quiet and taking tests or writing during timed exercises.

Student Seating

In the mid-1990s, Ira Shor wrote about his experience applying critical pedagogy. Among the most remarkable phenomena he describes is the seating of the students there, which he calls the Siberian syndrome. Shor explains that,

As is their habit, most students typically filled the two far corners of the room first, farthest from where the teacher sits. While a few students sat near the front, the decisive majority of both men and women preferred the two classroom territories I fondly call "Siberia, East and West," as distant from me the teacher (the center of authority and academic discourse) as they could be. (*When Students Have Power* 12)

Shor interprets the Siberian Syndrome as "one form of student agency in the contact zone of mass education. It is a defensive reaction to the unequal power relations of schooling, which include unilateral authority for the teacher and a curriculum evading critical thought about the history, language, and cultures of the students" (*When Students Have Power* 13).

For the Saudi students, the Siberian Syndrome is not sitting away from the teacher, but from the other sex. The students' physically segregated seating directly reflected their mental and cultural attitude towards each other. Although the students shared the same nationality, college

major, and culture, they had previously attended sex-segregated schools and experienced different academic writing programs. As a writing teacher, I recognized that these adjustments might pose a challenge to their ability to learn to think and write critically because they might hesitate to expose themselves to new people and ideas.

Knowing that it is not culturally acceptable for Muslim girls or boys to touch or be touched by a non-immediate family member of the opposite sex, I realized that I had to take my time before asking the students to move around the room and work with different people. I wanted them to be comfortable but still prepare for the kind of mixed classrooms they would experience in American colleges. The Saudi female and male students do not socialize outside the classroom. At VT, there are two different clubs for the Saudi students, one for the females and the other for the males.

The complexity of diversity and non-authenticity the Saudi students experience becomes most clear when they are required to think and write together. Clarke, in support of ESL students, calls teachers to assist students in creating authentic experiences. The mixed-sex classroom setting where Saudi students experience diversity is an artificial setting. In the VTLCI, for the first time, the Saudi students shared the same classroom with Saudi and non-Saudi students of the opposite sex. Where the students sat showed how little female students trust working with Saudi male students. All the female students cluster on one side, leaving the opposite side of the room to the male students. On the first day of the study, Fadia sat next to Hana in the right front row. Right behind them, Salma and Falwa sat in the third row. Majda initially sat alone (and stood out as the only female Saudi student completely covered except for her eyes and palms). In the front row on the left side of the room, Hassan sat alone. Boyand and Yue, two Chinese students, sat behind him. The Chinese students came into the classroom right

before class started and all sat in the last rows on the left side of the room, except for the only Chinese female student, Leisly, who sat next to Majda.

This seating arrangement mirrored the students' experience in the KSA. In every public lecture I attended in the KSA where Saudi men and women were in the same room, women, whether they liked it or not, were directed to the back seats. In all of those lectures, the main entrances to the halls were in the back. By sitting in the back seats, women were not only protected from the curious looks of men but had easy access in and out of the hall without having to unintentionally touch a male student. Since Classroom One's door was located in the front of the room, the Saudi girls automatically and voluntarily chose to sit in the front of the classroom. By doing so, they limited the chance of accidentally touching a male student as much as possible.

For the rest of the term, the students kept the same seating arrangement. The girls, including Leisly, stayed on the right side of the room and the boys stayed on the left side. Hassan was the only Saudi male in the beginning of the term. He sat alone in the front left row until the third day of the term, when Kareem joined the class and immediately sat next to him.

During the ten-minute break, most of the male students, both Chinese and Saudi, would carefully exit the room (so as to not touch any of the female students) and gather in the lobby in front of the classroom while the female students stayed in their places. Fadia and Hana in the front row would turn around and form a big group with the other girls behind them in the second and third rows and start chatting in Arabic. In many instances throughout the term, other female students from KSA or Kuwait would come in during the break and join the female students to chat.

The small passage between the rows made it almost impossible for students to move around freely without touching each other, especially when the class was full, which was most of the time. The Saudi students' persistence in creating their own sort of sex-segregated classroom would probably not work well in other American classrooms in which male and female students do not maintain such divisions. That was a challenge I wanted to help them with, one that they would need to overcome in order to be comfortable in their forthcoming classes on campus, where they wouldn't have to touch each other but would have to sit and interact with the opposite sex.

For the first two weeks, whenever there was a small-group activity on the schedule, I directed the students to work with their neighbor on the same row. When the activities were for bigger groups, I would ask the students sitting in the first and third row to turn around and work with the students in the rows behind them. For the group activities that took place during the first week, Majda did not turn around to work with the boys behind her. Even when Leisly turned and talked to her male friends behind her, Majda would try to engage only with the girls in front of her. Knowing that Majda had spent four terms in the VTLCI where the environment is mixed-sex and teachers require students to work in groups, I had not expected that she would have a problem working with male students. When I noticed that she was not working with her assigned group, I reminded her that she was supposed to work with the group behind her. After a few seconds of silence, Salma, the student in front of Majda, stated "She can be part of our group," to which Majda immediately replied "Yes." Right away, I recognized that Majda was not ready to work with male students. During my first and second interview with Majda, I had the chance to learn exactly how she felt about working with Saudi and Chinese male students. I learned that, if it was absolutely required, she would work with Chinese male students, but out of respect to her

culture's norms and values, she would never work with Saudi male students. After her interviews, I put her mostly with female students.

During the second term, Tarik, Majed, and Basma joined the class and took the place of Shawowy, She, and Leisly, three Chinese students who were registered for a different section. On the first day of the second term, Hana sat in the first left row with her sister Basma, taking Hassan and Kareem's place from the previous term. Hassan, the only male Saudi graduate student, and Kareem moved to the second front left row. Tarik and Majed, the other two male Saudi undergraduate students, sat in the third left row, and behind them sat two male Chinese undergraduates, Shasha and Yuan. In the front right row, Falwa, the only female Kuwaiti undergraduate student, took the place of Hana, a female Saudi graduate student, next to Fadia. Since Leisly, the only female Chinese undergraduate student, had moved to a different section, Majda moved from the third right row to the second right row and sat next to Salma, a female Saudi graduate student. All of the six Saudi females sat in the front two rows and the second right row. In the first interview, only Fadia and Majda expressed reservations about working with Saudi male students. On the other hand, none of the male students objected to working with Saudi female students. The male Saudi students said that they themselves do not mind, but they know that the female students do. Hassan, the only graduate Saudi student, who is married to Majda, did express his reservations about having his wife working with any of his male Saudi friends.

Following is what Sam (pseudonym), a language instructor at VTLCI, says about his experience dealing with sex issues when seating the Saudi students in his class, a RW class at the high beginner level 250. Most of the students were Saudis: five females and thirteen males, and four Chinese students. Sam said,

Since the majority in my class was males, they scattered in the whole classroom while the girls chose to cluster in the right corner at the end of the classroom. The girls were uncomfortable working with Saudi boys. Fortunately I had enough Chinese boys for the Saudi female girls to be working with....Sitting in the far corner, the girls would be easily distracted. They spend a lot of time chatting in Arabic...when I approach them trying to get them to stop talking, they would for very short time, but they would go back to chatting... Approaching them was not easy on me. I could not be in the middle of them. I am a man. It feels like a stigma, the same thing the Saudi boys might be feeling. I felt as if the Saudi females had built a wall around them, a wall similar to that they describe they have around their houses in KSA. I could not pass that wall.

Sam also shared with me what a few young Saudi males told him about how they feel when seeing that the Saudi females prefer working with a Chinese student rather than working with them. The young Saudi male students expressed their annoyance that the Saudi girls work and communicate comfortably with the Chinese students but not with them. That made them feel as if the Saudi girls were trying to make them jealous.

Sam shared the discussion between teachers and administrators from different institutions during the 2013 South East Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages Conference (SETESOL) about the way they deal with the sex issue with Saudi students. He learned that when there is a balance in population there is no problem, since instructors can group Saudi female students with non-Saudi males. The problem occurs, as in Sam's experience, when the class is mostly Saudis. Institutions deal with the problems differently. Some have rigid rules that they force Saudi students to follow, believing that they are preparing them for college; others are more lenient. They think that college will impose fewer restrictions on Saudi students, and

female students will be both used to working with males and have the chance to be with many non-Saudi students.

Sex Differences in Daily Commitment

Kelly Belanger studied the relation between gender and teaching academic discourse. She learned that the way teachers perceive themselves influences which aspects of their courses they emphasize and focus on in their teaching. In my study, I looked at how sex influences the way the Saudi students respond to teacher and peer's authority and what aspects of the writing course they focus on.

Sex plays an important role in how students respond to teachers' authority and how committed they are to daily in-class activities and assignments. Except for the only graduate Saudi male student, who is repeating the level voluntarily, the Saudi male students rarely did their daily reading/writing assignments or met deadlines.

The way that Saudi students assert their voices and react to the teacher's authority appeared to be strongly influenced by their sex as well as their level of education. What was common between the two groups is that they mostly did not take notes during class, neither when the teacher talked nor when their peers spoke. From my personal experience as a Saudi student myself, taking notes is not a very common practice in the Saudi classroom. Most of the lectures are strictly oral and taken from the assigned text books. A typical practice of a teacher-centered approach is an authoritative teacher presence, as opposed to what is practiced in the American classrooms where students are expected to voice authorial presence and autonomy in their thinking. Students feel that they do not need to rewrite what has already been written in the book.

The only part that students usually write is the assignment, which the teacher usually writes on the board.

When looking at sex differences, the field of Applied Linguistics uses discourse analysis to see the differences each sex use in their writings. In the field of Rhetoric and Writing, the research on sex-or-sex-related patterns of language use looks at the different methods and patterns each sex uses. Beverly and Walters say that “males may feel it is their responsibility to contribute by speaking, even if they seem to dominate, whereas females may see their responsibility as being sure that they do not speak too often lest others not have the opportunity” (432). Beverly and Walters’ observation was verified by the way both male and female graduate Saudi students behaved during whole-class discussions.

Following Belenky et al.’s investigation of the differences between male and female students’ relational capacities and intellectual development, Flynn (1988) looked at male and female students’ narratives in first-year composition courses, and found clear differences. The narratives of female students included “stories of interaction, of connection, or of frustrated connection. The narratives of the male students are stories of achievement, of separation, or of frustrated achievement” (554). When looking at the relational capacities of the Saudi students, I noticed some major differences between the two groups.

The Female Students

The female students’ awareness of their audience often stood in the way of their critical thinking. Typically, with an academic audience speakers or writers are as direct and clear as possible in order to better persuade their audience. In the KSA, however, females are taught to follow many written and unwritten public and social codes that are addressed specifically to

them (Le Renard 2008, 629). In the culturally charged environment of a mixed-sex classroom containing male Saudi students, female Saudi students held fast to the belief that avoidance and indirectness would protect them from offending an audience who might hold an opposing opinion. Not always voicing their opinion did not signify a lack of intellectual development, though. The female students in my study were not very different from what Diana George wrote about when examining ways to empower students through writing: “[t]he best talker was not the best student; the most quiet student was not the alienated students” (313). Accordingly, she recommends that in order to empower students they “must not be judged by the loudest voice but by a multiplicity of voices and ways of speaking, listening, and writing” (313).

In the following section, I focus on the female student Fadia. I start with a portrait followed by her perception of writing, a discussion of our teacher-student conferencing, her perception of teacher’s authority, her positionality, and finally a writing sample. I conclude with supplementary support from three Saudi graduate female students: Salma, Hana, and Basma

Fadia: A Personal Portrait

“It is impossible to write a good essay from the first time. Our mistakes give us the opportunity to write better and to have more success. Our ideas is the treasure in our writing and we have to be careful while we’re using them [*sic*].” --Fadia

Fadia is a typical Saudi girl who was granted a scholarship through the KASP to pursue higher education in the US. Fadia, 18 years old, grew up in the KSA in a large family. Both of her parents completed high school and her mother stayed at home to care for the children. Fadia, like her parents, attended public schools. Her husband is an undergraduate student at VT. They live in the same apartment complex in Blacksburg with Fadia’s brother-in-law and his wife, who

are also students at VTLCI. The two families are very close and spend weekends and holidays together. While Perry found that dormitory living was very important for helping students move out of the lower levels of their intellectual development, this was not culturally acceptable for Fadia. By being limited to the same home culture and perspectives without getting the chance to be immersed and exposed to new experiences and prospects, she misses an influential factor that, according to Perry, helps students progress intellectually. She not only cannot live in a dorm, but she is also expected to apply to VT, the same university her husband attends, or at least a school in the same or nearby city.

Second-language literacy is often tied to literacy skills in an ESL student's native language. Fadia did not write much in her primary or secondary schools, even in Arabic, and the kinds of writing she did do mainly focused on writing down existing texts, not creating ideas or critically thinking through writing. Fadia learned Arabic writing in the KSA from elementary through high school. Her Arabic writing education, however, was limited to taking notes and writing letters and speeches. In secondary school, she continued practicing the same genres with little progression in vocabulary. She learned by imitating the writing samples provided by her teachers. During high school, she wrote short stories in her spare time, but did not receive creative writing instruction in school. Saudi Arabian students do not learn how to develop original ideas through writing or discussion: the Arabic writing curriculum does not include writing argumentative or opinionated essays or participating in group work. The other female Saudi students in the VTLCI had experienced a writing education similar to Fadia's.

Not only was Fadia's writing education in the KSA very different from writing education in the US, but also the classroom environment at the VTLCI was very different. For Fadia and most of the other female Saudi students, taking courses at the VTLCI was the first time they had

shared a classroom with male students or had a male teacher. This new experience causes distraction at multiple levels; a major one is how they look. Unlike the male students in the KSA, whose school uniform outside and inside the school is the same, Saudi female students cover up when they are in a mixed-sex environment. So female students must always ensure that their appearance is decent when they are in an environment with male students. The other major distraction is how they are perceived by others. In addition to paying attention to their modest and decent attire, i.e. covering their bodies except for their faces and hands, females, as we will later see, are more conscious about what to say and how to behave in public. That alertness will take its toll on their intellectual development.

Fadia covered her hair, as did all the other Saudi female students in the study. Although many female Saudi students in the VTLCI chose to wear the traditional abaya (black robe-like dress) and some also covered their faces, Fadia did not wear an abaya. Many of my non-Saudi friends have commented to me that the first thing they noticed when visiting the KSA is the black-and-white divide, how in public all women wore black abayas, while all men wore white thubs. In the US, though, Fadia wore colorful though modest clothes. Fadia's clothing is an example of her progression as a critical thinker who finds ways to voice her personal choices. While the traditional clothing of Saudi women in public is a black abaya and black head scarf, which many Saudi females wore in the VTLCI, Fadia, while preserving decency in her clothes, felt free to pick colorful clothing that represented her, not only her culture. Although I conducted two interviews with all the participants, with Fadia I conducted an extra one. In the third interview when I asked her about her decision not to wear the black abaya, she said,

In Saudi Arabia I wore black because all women wore black in public, and I did not want to look odd. But here, I feel I do not like to wear black because if I do I will look odd

here when everyone is wearing colorful clothes. Plus it is not against our religion for women to wear colorful clothes, it is only a custom. I had enough from black when I had no other choices but here I have other choices.

Although Fadia was the only female Saudi undergraduate student, she best represents her culture and a clear transformation and growth in critical thinking among the female students. Fadia consistently participated in class, asked thoughtful questions, and was prepared and alert. When she first joined the VTLCI, she was placed in level 300, which is an intermediate level. This was her third consecutive term of formal English language instruction at the VTLCI.

When Fadia first came to the US, she felt unable to communicate in English. She described her experience, stating, “In the beginning it was very difficult for me to talk; I had a problem with listening and speaking.” Immediately after joining the VTLCI, Fadia learned about the free conversational sessions offered by the Writing Center (WC) at Virginia Tech, which she started to attend regularly. She became friends with the tutors at the WC and would go shopping with them to try and immerse herself in English. As a result, her conversational skills improved, but she faced new challenges. She explained, “When I first came [to the US], I had no problem with reading and writing. Now the problem has been reversed. Now I am good with listening and speaking but weak in reading and writing.” Despite her difficulties, Fadia began to read English books for recreation after joining the VTLCI. Fadia plans to major in computer science once accepted to college.

During both terms, Fadia sat the closest to me. She always occupied the front desk. Shor describes students who occupy such places “as ‘scholasticons’ because they identify with school discipline while expressing their own novel forms of resistance” (*When Students Have Power*

12). Fadia was a very committed and serious student. She was the first one to turn in assignments and journals, and even reminded me to collect them when I forgot to do so. Taking full advantage of every minute assigned for timed writing exercises, Fadia was always the last one to hand in her paper. She wrote all 48 journals required during the two terms. In the first term, her journals were half a page, but in the second term they were much longer and better developed. Yet, in the absence of required reflections (and following the example of her former Arabic writing composition prompts), most of Fadia's journals were narratives or descriptions of things she liked. For instance, she described the snow, her favorite restaurants, meals, movies, activities, holidays, book, and cities—she did not write any strongly opinionated entries. Despite limits in the subjects she covered, her writing was clear and very well-articulated in most of her journals.

Perception of Writing

Perhaps Fadia's writing took a new direction towards the end of the second term because of her new perception of writing. By the time she was enrolled in my class, Fadia had become aware of writing as a tool for critical thinking; however, she was still unaware of the value of her own voice. She often demonstrated her grasp of the role of critical thinking in writing through her statements to me and in class and her assignments. When describing her strengths as a writer, Fadia wrote, "I like to write logical ideas and points." In another instance, she wrote, "I love writing journal [*sic*]. It makes me think." In one of her reflections, in which she was asked to define good academic writing, Fadia wrote, "it is a way that the writer can reflect his/her ideas or believes [expresses ideas] in a logical way that attracts the reader."

Fadia expressed her liking for “logical” (instead of opinionated) writing in other instances. At the end of term, when responding to a question about the most difficult thing about writing, Fadia wrote, “I think sometimes it is difficult to find the proper words that should help us to reflect what we have in mind, especially during the time[d] writing in a short period it is hard to write logical and proper words with strong supporting details [*sic*].”

Fadia’s perception of her society certainly influenced what and how she wrote. Although she demonstrated awareness of the importance of including rational ideas in her writing, her fear of the audience’s reaction inhibited her from directly stating what she believed in or asserting herself. She also described a specific experience that made her feel unable to express her own ideas—a female classmate once stopped talking to her because they had disagreed during a class discussion. Fadia’s experience with her friend caused her to feel self-conscious when writing about controversial or sensitive issues. She made this clear during the first interview:

Fadia: Sometimes, I open a subject dear to my heart, but find out that others have a different opinion, totally different opinion, which leads to a clash. I had a personal experience once a friend of mine and I was talking with her. She did not like what I was saying and became upset and raised her voice. I said why? That is my opinion and you should accept it. But after that I started avoiding saying my opinion in controversial issues because I learned that some people won’t accept my opinion, some people will be mad. They take the issues very seriously and not as an opinion.

Maggie: It is your right to give your opinion, [and] Do you think you will able to give your opinion when writing in college?

Fadia: Yes, as long as I can stay out of trouble. But if I am not sure that a certain person would not accept a different opinion or is not open-minded, I would be careful with that person.

Fadia further demonstrated her self-consciousness and self-criticism in a journal that she wrote at the end of the first term, in which she was asked to reflect on what she had learned during the term:

This term is a new experience for me. I've learned a lot and I've gotten much valuable and new information. I've learned that it's important to ask myself the WH- questions while I'm writing my essays, to ask myself what's my point? Why do I want to say that? Where's that happened? That was really helpful and I see that developed my writing. I also learned that it's impossible to write a good essay from the first time. Our mistakes give us the opportunity to write better and to have more success. Our ideas is the treasure in our writing, and we have to be careful while we're using them [*sic*].

Here, Fadia reveals her awareness about the process of writing as well as the value of her ideas. What her reflection also and most importantly shows is how cautious she is when writing or voicing her ideas. We will see in the following chapter how that extra caution she describes slows her down when writing.

Teacher-Student Conferences

Perhaps the best time for every student to be the center of the teacher's attention is during the teacher-student conferences. There the teacher is able to focus on the individual student and on his/her development and progress, to follow North's recommendation to "begin from where the student is, and move where the student moves" (439).

During the teacher-student conferences with Fadia, she exhibited the same sense of caution. While Fadia had a clear sense of critical thinking through writing and a somewhat complicated sense of her own voice and her own authority in writing, her perceptions of teacher-student conferences and my role as her teacher were clear—the teacher-student conferences were an opportunity for me as her teacher to approve or disapprove of her ideas and to correct her writing.

In the second week of the first term, I explained to the students the importance of coming for tutoring and the kind of help they would get. I also handed out a table with the students' names and times for them to sign up for their tutoring sessions. Since all of the Saudi students took classes from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., they all picked the 1:00-1:30 slots. But the students did not show up for their tutoring sessions. When asked why, they said that after five hours of studies at the VTLCI, they cannot wait to get home. Many of them were riding with a family member whom they didn't want to keep waiting.

Fadia came to tutoring once in the first term and once in the second term, before the third process paper was due. The assignment was to write an essay in which they argue for who should control what people eat, the government or the family. The topic was discussed in class. Before leaving the classroom that day, Fadia asked me if I was available at 1:00 for tutoring. She came prepared with her draft and a pen and sat down. When I asked her what exactly she was looking for, she told me that she was there for me to correct her mistakes. I asked her to read her essay. She would read a sentence at a time and then wait for my approval or immediate feedback at the end of every sentence.

Fadia's behavior is consistent with Ilona Leki's observation of ESL students. Leki was among the first wave of scholars to claim that what worked for the L1 does not work for ESL students. She explains that ESL students come to study in the US with the desire to quickly perfect their English, especially grammar. The ways they expect to perfect their English are very similar to their previous ways of learning it. When faced with new and conflicting methodologies, such as valuing content over form, or working with issues that may challenge their perspectives, students get slowed down and discouraged. Fadia expected that during the teacher-student conference, my job as an authority was to approve her ideas and correct her writing.

Teacher's Authority

Perry established a relationship between the teacher's authority and intellectual development. At the early stage (dualist), students view education as a process of teaching the right answers and think the teacher has the authority and access to the right answers or Truth. Because the teacher knows the absolute truth, students are not expected to question their teacher's authority (Perry 66). As college students are exposed to pluralistic views, they start comparing their beliefs to those of others, only to learn that absolutes do not exist (relativism). The more students are able to examine, evaluate, and synthesize issues, the more they demonstrate critical and independent thinking and autonomy from their teachers. They start abandoning their total trust in their teachers' authority and become able to include their own self-examinations based on what is convenient relative to them (commitment to relativism).

When reflecting on Perry's work, Bizzell elaborates on the connection Perry makes between culture and education and says that "the ends of education are strongly culture-bound" (305), which was clear in how Fadia perceived the teacher's authority. Although Fadia held a

positive attitude towards learning English, her cultural background and her perceptions of a teacher's authority stood in the way of her asserting her own authority. In order for her to represent her voice in her writing, she needed confidence that she was allowed to assert authority. Thus, for Fadia and the other Saudi students, learning English writing is about more than just second-language acquisition—it is also about learning to think critically.

Ruth Spack says that ESL students who come from a schooling system which is based on teaching students to regurgitate others' ideas instead of developing independent viewpoints need to develop the ability to acknowledge the points of view of others while at the same time being able to critique established authorities ("Initiating ESL Students" 103). Saudi students who join a Western university bring with them the same attitude of respect and of expecting total authority in their teachers that they had at home (although male Saudi students may not see female teachers as legitimate authorities). A student's attitude towards the teacher's authority plays an especially important part when the student is learning a second language. In *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, Brown explains that students' attitude "towards the members of the cultural group whose language they are learning" significantly influences their learning of the language and a negative attitude could result in the loss of the motivation needed for successful learning (181). Social psychologists support Brown's statement, explaining that "attitudes of the learner towards the target language, its speakers and the learning context play an important role in succeeding or failing to learn a language" (Gholami et al. 75).

Leki believes that what works for L1 learners does not work for L2 learners, who come with an urgent desire to "perfect" their English as quickly as possible. One of the reasons Leki presents relates to the potential conflicts between the L2 learners' expectations and what they encounter in writing classrooms in the US. One such conflict arises from their previous training

and their unwillingness to share their teachers' belief about how to enrich, improve, and perfect their writing. While Saudi students come with the belief that the writing teacher will help them improve their writing by telling them what to write and correcting their grammatical and spelling mistakes, they find that the teachers do not always do so. Instead, teachers are more interested in developing the students' ideas and training them to take charge of their own thinking and writing.

At the beginning of the first term, Fadia gave ultimate authority to a strict teacher. She believed that teachers should enforce their authority for the students' sake, and that students should simply obey. During her first interview, when asked to describe how she learned English in school in Saudi Arabia, Fadia said,

From the beginning, I loved English. Teachers have a strong influence on the students and how students will love or hate the subject. In my middle school I had a fantastic teacher. More than fantastic. Her explanation was so very clear. She was strict. Every day she makes us memorize a list of vocabulary word and write them on the board. That what made me memorize the words and know their spellings [*sic*].

Maggie: What do you think made you learn from that teacher? Is it because she was strict?

Fadia: Yes, because she was strict. If she was lenient, we would have not learned many words or took the subject seriously or learned every word. We had to study every day, because we were worried about the grade. There were always graded exams. She would control the class. In her class it was very silent. Everyone used to be afraid of her. She had a strong personality. Even the girls who did not get along with her were afraid of her.

Fadia's answer demonstrates her passivity and full submission to the notion of received knowledge coming from an authoritative teacher. At this stage, and influenced by her culture, Fadia believes that what gets students to learn is not something they have, but something the teacher has: a strong personality. The teacher's authority, not the students' cognitive or personal authority, is what students need in order to learn. As we will see later in this section, Fadia's perception will change, but at this stage it stays the same.

During her first interview, I asked Fadia if she was willing to write about topics like the Arab Spring countries (a media term for demonstrations, protests, riots, and civil wars beginning in 2010 in Arab countries) or boys and girls dating. She responded, "I wouldn't know what the teacher's position on that issue is. She may have a different opinion and then she will be upset. So I prefer to avoid issues like that." She also stated that if required to express her opinions in response to a writing prompt, she would do so, but only if she knew that she wouldn't offend the teacher. She said, "In that case I would say my opinion, there will be no problem at all." Fadia's response is not very different from those of L1 students. Belenky et al. talk about L1 female students' inability to express opinions because they do not want to offend their teachers. In *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* Belenky et al. warn that "reliance on authority for a single view of the truth is clearly maladaptive for meeting the requirements of a complex, rapidly changing, pluralistic, egalitarian society and for meeting the requirements of educational institutions, which prepare students for such a world" (43).

Positionality

Fadia showed evidence of beginning to negotiate her authority and voice through her ability to change opinions. That change in opinion, though, was limited to topics related to Western culture. Fadia clearly articulated her opinions about controversial issues in Western

culture, but remained silent on Saudi cultural topics. In one session, a unit entitled “Dying for Their Beliefs” included an article, “Christian Scientist Parents,” that presented a story about parents who were on trial for not administering medicine to their dying daughter because they believed that prayer alone could save her. I asked the students to reflect on the parents’ attitude and behavior. Fadia stated her opinion very clearly:

I think her parents responsible for her death. I agree with them when they prayed for her and they ask God to cure her, but they didn’t give her any kind of medicine, and that’s wrong. I think if they gave her a medicine that’s won’t effect on their prayers. I don’t want for them to be punished because she’s their daughter and they are responsible for her. However, they might not realize that give the sick person medicine not wrong even if they are scientist. Also, God will bless them if they work hard to cure their daughter [*sic*].

Fadia’s journal shows that although she does not agree with the parents’ behavior, she can see and express the reasons why they parents behaved the way they did. She is also able to offer a solution that would help the parents to understand that while preserving their beliefs, they can take good care of their daughter. Fadia’s journal shows “multiplicity.” Her dualistic view (all right or all wrong) has given way to her increased awareness of the perspectives of other cultures. She suggests what the parents can do to save their daughter while at the same time preserving their cultural belief by praying. This position, according to Perry, is called multiplicity.

I wanted the students to be able to connect the topic to their lives. As I am Saudi myself, I have learned in school and in society that the left hand should be used for ablution and the right hand for eating. Good Muslims should not use their left hands when eating. Without expressing

my opinion about the issue, I asked the students to reflect in one of their weekly journals by taking a stand with or against parents who force their left-handed children to use their right hand when eating even after science has proven the genetic influence for handedness. In her journal, Fadia wrote,

My little brother who was four years old was using his left hand for eating, and my parents didn't realize that until he get used to it. So it was challenging for my parents to convince my little brother to eat with his right hand. They kept telling him that is not good and it's better to use the right hand for eating. When he didn't respond my parents told him that the evil is the only one who eats with his left hand. And God wants us to eat with our right hand because good people eat with their right hand. After that, my little brother became careful about the way he eats. In every time he forgets to eat with his right hand, we remember him. Now, when he see any child eats with his/her left hand, he tried to explain to him/her that this is not the right way to eat [*sic*].

With this entry, Fadia demonstrated her agency by ignoring the response's requirement to take a side. One might think that she cannot express her voice clearly because she seems unable to challenge the authoritative idea about a topic related to her culture (the way she did in the previous entry about the Christian Scientists). While one expects Fadia to demonstrate the same relativism she expressed in her journal about "Christian Scientist Parents," and clearly state her opinion, she instead retreats to silence. She is unable to clearly say what she truly thinks or believes. She goes on narrating what happened without strongly condemning or praising. Unsure about my position, she does not want to risk offending me, while at the same time the voice of her culture is very loud in her head. In the process she lost her voice.

Fadia struggled to face what Canagarajah calls the negotiation model. He explains that this model “requires that students wrestle with the divergent discourses they face in writing to creatively work out alternate discourses and illiteracies that represent better their values and interests” (*Critical Academic Writing and Multilingual Students* 219). Fadia indeed tried to find the discourse that presented her values but without offending her culture or any other person’s (teacher, students) values. She could not.

The other instance in which Fadia asserted her voice and in which she demonstrates a slight move from a basic dualistic position to multiplicity took place at the end of the second term. The novel assigned in the second term was Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*. For half an hour every Tuesday and Thursday, we discussed the novel. For the first ten minutes of discussion, we talked as a whole class about the novel, after which the students got into groups to discuss the weekly novel questions. Every other week, I gave the students an in-class short quiz on the novel. On the fifth week, the first discussion question was on the following quotation: “It’s not a battle of good against evil. It’s a war between forces that are fighting for the balance of power, and, when that type of battle begins, it lasts longer than others—because Allah is on both sides” (101). Immediately after distributing the discussion question, I stopped at the first pair-group where Fadia and Falwa were reading the quotation. Fadia looked at me and said, “What exactly does this quotation mean?” I gave her the following examples: “For instance, the Middle East crisis between the Palestinians and the Jews, between mothers and fathers, between best friends. When those people fight, it is not because one of them is bad and the other is good, but because each party is trying to control the other.” Fadia immediately said, “No, that is not right, the Palestinians are good, it is not about power.” Falwa asked, “Now from all the examples you got, the only thing you would pick and cannot agree with is the Palestinians and Jews example?”

Fadia responded, “Because it cannot be, the Palestinians are right.” I spent the following few minutes discussing the idea with them, but Fadia did not appear at all convinced that the Palestinian and Jewish conflict could be anything other than a matter of right versus wrong. This incidence shows that, although she was still unable to quickly abandon the black-and-white mentality, she was able to assert her opinion to both her teacher and her colleague.

On the next novel quiz, the first question required students to reflect on that same quotation, followed by the prompt: “In your discussion, relate the message in the quotation to any of the battles in our modern time.” Fadia completely avoided the question and simply described the harmful effects of battles, the same way she described the way her brother learned how to use his right hand. In refusing to respond directly to the question, Fadia demonstrated agency for the first time by not discussing an issue in which she might offend her culture.

In her second interview, when the power issue discussed in the novel came up, Fadia expressed her desire to further discuss the issue. I asked her whether she had changed her mind about the Palestinian and Jews issue. For the first couple of seconds, Fadia kept quiet. Then she said, “This example I cannot think about. I can’t think of many things. There is not a lot to think about this. Maybe I can if you have any other examples maybe. Maybe what you said is somehow is right.”

Fadia’s response is very significant and relates to her development. She took her time to reflect on the idea before accepting or rejecting it. Her words—“I cannot think... I can’t think, there is not a lot to think”—demonstrate the deep reflection that she is going through before taking a position. She concluded her comment with a clear hint (“somehow is right”) that she

does not totally reject this new idea. Fadia seems to be trying, at least a little, to conform to my view as her teacher.

Towards the end of her second interview, I asked Fadia a direct question about the teacher's authority. I asked her whether she saw the teacher as an authoritative figure that holds the source of knowledge, or as a facilitator or helper who guides students to find knowledge for them. She responded, "As a helper—almost all people differ. Each one has a different logic and different ideas. Students are not obliged to believe everything the teachers say. The teacher can give ideas or she might give me examples to make it easier for me to understand. Just as a helper." I reminded Fadia about what she had said in the first interview about her admiration of a strict teacher. First she laughed. Then she said, "I still hope that she is still teaching my younger sister because she is really amazing teacher and she is strict and meaning it is not that I only function by fear."

We both laughed. Then she explained:

Because she used to give us more push and motivation - especially in spelling. She used to make us go to the board in front of the whole class to test whether we learned the new words and their spelling. If we misspelled a word, we would be punished by spending the rest of the period standing in front of the whole class. That was embarrassing. Although I used to pay more attention in the past about what my colleagues say about me, now, I give my best and I love it when they criticize and when they argue with me. I love that.

Fadia seems little by little to be taking control of her life. She had clearly matured into a stage in which she considered herself (and not just the teacher) an authoritative figure—a

significant progression from the beginning of the term. She does so while at the same time giving value to her peers' opinion, the subject of the following chapter.

Writing Samples

In this part, I present four samples of Fadia's writings: two journals, one from each term, and two final drafts of a process writing during both terms. The purpose of these samples is to show how Fadia's writing progressed from the mostly literary journals to the more persuasive journals in which she reflects, evaluates, and argues.

The following entry, which Fadia wrote towards the end of the first term, exemplifies her journal entries in the first term:

Panera bread

I think it's crazy how much I love Panera bread. This restaurant is the best for me because I can go there in any time and for any meal. I go there to have breakfast. I go there to have lunch. I also go there to have dinner. Their meals is for all the day and for anytime. They have a great meals and tasty beverages. I go there ever week and sometimes everyday or twice a day. The reception know me because I go a lot. Because there are two Paneras in Blacksburg and Christiansburg sometimes I go to Christiansburg instead of the one in Blacksburg. So the reception asked me "where have you been?" I like it because it is a quiet place even in the crowded. I like their soft music, and I like their decoration with the colors as well. It's a nice place to eat, to read, and to chat with friends [*sic*].

Towards the end of the second term, some of Fadia's journals exhibited some analysis and synthesis. While during the first term, only two of Fadia's journal entries were reflective, in

the second term, Fadia wrote seven reflective journals. The following journal, in which Fadia reflects on one of the in-class discussion questions on the novel and which she writes towards the end of the second term, exemplifies her reflective journals.

Reflection

There's no need for iron to be the same as copper or copper the same as gold. Each perform its own exact function as a unique being." I agree with what the alchemist said. It is true that God create everything with its benefit. All the kind of animals, bugs, plants, and human are important for the environment, and we can't live without these things. Everything in this plant have its own value and we can't compare apple to orange, because as much it is important to eat apple, it is important to eat orange, both of them are good. However, it is sad how some people are still can't understand this. They don't understand that we can't live without an engineer, and we can't live without a farmer. It has nothing to do with position. They are both important. I think the king said something related to this to Santiago, when he said that the bakery has his own home, but the shepered hasn't home, and he is traveling from place to another, and Santiago was sad and thinking that his lover will prefer a backery to marry her, the shepared. However, we must not compare ourself to other people, and we have to accept ourself so the other can accept us, or if we want to change something that we don't like, it is always good to change [*sic*].

Contrary to most of her journal entries in the first term, in this entry Fadia goes beyond description to exhibit her understanding of the excerpt and identifies the cause and effect relationship. She uses analogy to further demonstrate her understanding, showing how gold and

copper both are different yet important, the same way apple and oranges are different and important.

Through the two terms, Fadia has slowly transitioned from seeing the teacher as the sole authority who should be feared, to one who can help in generating ideas. She has also grown from being hesitant to voice her opinion to being more assertive with original ideas. For the last process writing in the first term, I asked students to write a compare-and-contrast essay on a topic of their choice. The rough draft that Fadia submitted was good in terms of grammar and spelling, but lacked her opinion/voice although that element was clearly stated orally in class and included in the assignment description. The following is what Fadia wrote in her rough draft, which included the date, assignment name, and title and was written on a full page of a notebook paper.

The Weather

There are many differences between Saudi Arabia and United States. One different is the weather. There is such a big different in the weather in Saudi Arabia and the weather in United States. The nature has a big effects on the weather, and Saudi Arabia is almost desert so the weather is hot and humid almost all the year except in the winter season. There are two seasons in Saudi Arabia which they are Winter and Summer seasons. However, United States rich of nature. So, the weather is nice and not hot comparing to Saudi Arabia. There are four seasons in Untied States which they are Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter [*sic*].

In my response to her first draft, I wrote, “What I need to learn from your thesis statement at the end of the introduction is your attitude “opinion,” i.e. which one do you think is

better?” In the second draft, Fadia still failed to voice her opinion. Only towards the third draft did she add an opinion in the conclusion: “In my point of view, I prefer the weather in United States, but I like the social system in Saudi Arabia.”

Although I had to encourage Fadia to clearly state her opinion in her writing, I did not need to remind her to follow and apply the specific format requirements. Since towards the end of 400 levels students are gradually introduced to APA, in the assignment description I had asked the students to incorporate some APA format in terms of font type, margins, spacing, and indentation. Fadia incorporated all of the APA requirements for that assignment in her second draft without being reminded.

Other Students

Fadia was the only undergraduate Saudi female student in the group. All the other female students were preparing to join a graduate school. In the following part, I will show how Salma, Hana, and Basma’s perceptions of teachers’ authority affected their positionality and how, as older female students, they were less hesitant to voice their opinions. I start with a quick personal portrait of each and then look at how they perceive teachers’ authority and how that influences what and how they write.

Salma is twenty-five. She earned her Bachelor’s degree in Microbiology and finished practicum training in four months. She is aiming to pursue graduate studies in the same field. All her school years were in public school. Although she started at the VTLCI at the 350 level, after nine months she had advanced only to the 400 level. She told me her story with frustration. Instead of being in my class at the 400 level, she was supposed to be in 500. She had taken levels 350, 400, and 500 and was supposed to be promoted to 550. Unfortunately, the VTLCI did not

offer a 550 course that term. She could not be promoted to 600 before finishing all the 500 levels. In order to keep her visa valid, she had to stay enrolled in the VTLCI, leaving her two options, either to go to 400 or to 500. Because she did not want to repeat the same subject and materials two terms in a row, she decided to take 400 in reading and writing, while at the same time taking 500 levels for grammar, listening, and speaking. Salma was part of this study during both terms.

When talking about her experience with Arabic writing teachers, Salma says that she had the privilege of having different kinds of teachers. With the more learned ones, Salma was free to articulate her opinion, while with the strict one she was not. This is how she puts it:

It depends on the teacher, whether she is willing to listen or not. Each one has her own point of view and strategy. Sometimes argument takes place. Many times teachers do not care about our opinion; they even sometimes do not allow us to talk in class. Some teachers allow different points of view some don't. It depends on the teacher. I have seen both types...some teachers make you feel that you made a big deal when you make a mistake, they even make us feel that if we just move our heads or just look around, we might get punished. Other teachers take it easy. They make you feel that you are normal. I had a great teacher in high school that would let us pick the topic which leads me to write something I did not believe I could write. That teacher digs the information and put it on the surface.

Although Salma mentioned that what she writes depends on what the teachers might think, she was not really concerned about my position and felt free to express her opinion without reservations, unlike Fadia. Salma did not hesitate to talk about the Arab Spring with me

during an interview, even though she did not know my position on the issue. She said, “I started by believing that Mubarak was a good man. But since I had many Egyptian friends who told me how they saw Egyptian people being abused and showed me pictures about that, I changed my mind.” In response, I asked, “How do you know whether your friends are telling you the truth or not?” She replied, “I have different friends of different lines and they all agree on that point.”

Salma’s responses shows two things: first, unlike Fadia’s, her opinion is not limited to what the teacher thinks or believes but is also affected by the thoughts and opinions of her peers—an issue I will address in the following chapter. Salma’s response demonstrates multiplicity, where she accommodates an increasing awareness of other people’s diverse opinions and multiple perspectives, where she is not limited to the teacher’s authority but feels free to trust her opinion based on her own experience (Belenky et al. 9).

The other Saudi graduate female student is Hana, twenty-three and in her second term at the VTLCI. She hopes to enter a graduate program in marketing. After spending her elementary and secondary years in public school, she attended a private high school. Both her parents have college degrees. Her mother, like Salma’s, is a housewife. Both she and her sister Basma were offered scholarships from the Saudi government and were taking English while applying for admission to graduate school. Because both Hana and Basma are single, their brother accompanied them.

Hana sees the teacher as both authoritative and facilitative. She says, “I think we need both. We need someone to teach us. But at the same time gives us space to learn on our own.” When she writes, that feeling is translated into the freedom not only to learn, but also to express herself and take positions. In contrast to Fadia’s passivity, Hana clearly articulated a culturally

subordinate opinion about using the left hand. She did not simply view the issue through a black-and-white prism. On using the left hand, Hana wrote,

People are not the same. They are different in many details and ways. One of these differences is that some of them are lefted. Although, we used to see most people use their right hands in writing, eating, drinking and holding things. In my culture, we prefer not to use our left hand. Also, in our religion Islam, the prophet Mohammad recommended of using our right hands. But if someone couldn't use his/her right hand, there is no problem in that. I have a lot of friends who are lefted hands. I don't think that is right when some people say that the lefted people are smarter than other people or that they are clever. Nothing proves that. If there are smart or clever lefted hands, there are geniuses of people who use their rights hands, too [*sic*].

Instead of simply describing what people do in her culture, the way Fadia did, Hana attempts to use an analytical, evaluative approach to the problem she is asked to respond to. Although Fadia and Hana are both at the same linguistic level (high intermediate), academically they are at different levels. Fadia is applying for undergraduate school, while Hana is applying for graduate school.

Unlike Fadia, who revealed a black-and-white mentality and an over-awareness of other's criticisms, Hana demonstrated flexibility and did not hesitate to think or write critically. Hana's writing shows a more nuanced mentality:

I don't know why people are becoming orthodox in their perspective though they are young like me which is why I think that they should be more flexible than anyone else.

Accepting points of views around us, talking about them, and sharing the ideas, that is the

beautiful thing in the life. It doesn't mean you have to agree with others but respecting their opinions and giving space to talk and understand each other, this is the important thing. Life is about sharing even in the idea.

Twenty-four-year-old Basma, Hana's older sister, offers another example of a female Saudi student learning to think and write critically. Midway through the term, Basma was admitted to a Master's program in Northern Virginia. In different journal entries, Basma demonstrated yearning for her cultural customs, especially when it comes to sex segregation. Basma writes, for instance, "the nicest thing in this trip is that it was girly trip." In another journal she writes, "One of my favorite trips is the trip for lack that was today, we were thirteen girls in the boat. One of the girls derived us on the lake. There were just girls. We danced a lot, we opened our scars and we took million pictures. I was really happy [*sic*]." Journal 4/14/2012)

Basma prefers a teacher who, instead of being the sole authority in class, will "let us learn by ourselves to discover things on our own. It is a great feeling when I get it by myself." She criticized not only the authoritative teachers back home, but also the authoritative culture as a whole. Basma's good oral skills helped her during the first interview to clearly articulate her opinions about herself and her culture. However, like Hana, Basma's cultural awareness interfered with her ability to learn English writing in the VTLCI. Although she exhibited a clear voice, she still struggled with feeling that she was defying her culture by expressing her own opinions. She still felt unable to free herself from cultural restrictions when voicing her personal views. She did not yet possess that "freedom of thought" about which Diana George says, "Freedom of thought, the freedom to hold and express opinions, is integral to the development of independent thinking" (315). When I asked her in the first interview why she thought Saudi students struggled with learning writing in the VTLCI, she said,

We are not flexible with ourselves. We need to take it easy to be clear with ourselves first. My generation is trying to be direct. But the majority of the old ones are not like that yet....As a result we stay frustrated... We have many limits and restrictions. We feel like we are screening ourselves. We are always told ‘don’t do this or that, maybe someone will see you.

At this point, Basma was at a “them” (Saudis from older generations) and “us” (young Saudis) stage and deciding that she did not want to stay silent. She moved from passively accepting the perceived the authority of her culture to protesting against that same culture. She also moved from a black-and-white mentality, in which “any position or act must be either right or wrong” (Perry 71), to giving room to multiplicity (an increasing awareness of other people’s diverse opinions and multiple perspectives), made clear when she said, “We don’t expect the other to be different. We are intolerant.”

In her new mindset, Basma tried to negate the outside authority which her culture supplied and assert her own. She wrestled with this shift, though, because she was aware that she had been influenced by her culture and that she had become like the people she was criticizing, constantly monitoring what she says and does, although at this stage she knew that she did not have to. Yet, influenced by long years of dualistic thinking, of seeing right and wrong without any room for relevance and shades, she could not smoothly get rid of those old mental habits. The rest of the interview demonstrates her dilemma:

We are programmed. I swear, we are like that because we are very critical of each other... So we are always alert and expected to be criticized. So we refrain from saying anything because we know that the other will not tolerate our different opinion... We

keep thinking should I say or should I not before knowing the other person. We are not direct people and those things come to the surface in places like writing and interviews for college admission... We keep convincing ourselves to leave things unsaid for later [*sic*].

Although Basma had been learning writing in the VTLCI for several terms and was required to write critically and offer her own opinions, she still struggled to project her own voice out of fear of rejection or criticism. Her fear of rejection or of poor grades (as we will see later with Kareem) is a different issue than her intellectual development. Students' concern with acceptance and grades is not limited to ESL students but characterizes American students as well. When discussing issues of collaboration in the writing classroom, Gergits and Schramer say that students perceive their teachers the way they perceive their parents, "as authority figures who can hurt people. Students neither want to be 'hurt' by a poor final grade nor want to hurt one another" (195).

The personal screening that Basma constantly performed stunted her creativity and self-expression. The following example shows that she was aware of the heavy weight and sometimes negative results of the war going on inside her head between what she wanted to say and what she felt she was supposed to say:

Late December, I met an American friend who was so open and told me everything about her studies. As for me I was debating with myself whether I should be open with her the way she was with me. I ended up telling her something that I was not supposed to tell her but was too late to retrieve. What usually happens is when I go home I start telling myself 'Why did I say this or that?'

Saudi female students' perception of the teacher's and the culture's authority affects how they develop as critical thinkers. Unlike Fadia's hesitancy, Basma's words demonstrate assertiveness. The older these students get, the more they are able to assert their opinion, regardless of whether that opinion matches that of the teachers. Teachers tend to mistakenly equate assertiveness with intellectual development. Although assertiveness and intellectual development might be interconnected, teachers need to acknowledge that assertiveness could be the result of the extra years that exposed the students to multiple situations and equipped them with a wider range of knowledge.

The other issue is the question of whether expression affects thinking. "Following the Western assumption that talking is connected to thinking" (828), Heejung Kim conducted a study to test whether it is safe to assume that when Asian-American students talk in class, it means they are thinking. Among the different findings his study revealed was that "[t]alking impaired Asian Americans' performance but not that of European Americans" (828). That led the researcher to highlight the role of culture. Therefore, teachers need to keep culture in mind before assuming any cause-and-effect relationship between expression and intellectual development.

The Male Students

Unlike Fadia, who is quiet and started by giving full authority to her teachers, Kareem, who is fully articulate, gave himself the authority to question the teachers. In this section, I focus on Kareem. I start with a portrait of him, then discuss his perception of writing, our teacher-student conferencing, his perception of teacher's authority, his positionality, and finally include a writing sample that shows his voice in writing. I will conclude this section with supplementary support from Hassan and Majed, the other Saudi male students.

Kareem: A Personal Portrait

“The most interesting thing I learned this term is how I manipulate with idea and how I make the right idea wrong and the reverse. [*sic*].”

During the third day of the term, the Assistant Director for Academics at VTLCI told me about Kareem, an 18-year old Saudi man. She showed me one of his papers: a barely legible essay full of disconnected sentences. She told me that concerned teachers at the VTLCI had split into two groups based on their suggestions for Kareem’s future—one group thought that he would benefit from repeating level 300 in order to build a better and much-needed foundation; the other group thought that it would be better for him to be promoted to 400. The Assistant Director’s opinion aligned with the teachers who thought promoting him to 400 would be best, especially if he was put in my section, where he would have the opportunity to be tutored and helped by a teacher who understood his language and culture.

I agreed to give Kareem a second chance by taking him in my class. On his first day in class, I welcomed him and introduced him to his new classmates. After a quick scanning of the whole classroom, he sat in the front row next to Hassan, the only other male Saudi student. Within a few minutes of entering the classroom for the first time, Kareem started raising his hand and quickly became the most active class member in the whole-class discussions. He responded to every question I asked, sometimes before knowing what part of a chapter we were doing. Before we left on his first day, I gave him a copy of the course description and directed him to the point we had reached.

Nineteen-year-old Kareem was enrolled in private school in the KSA. After high school, he had taken about five months of conversation courses in a private English language institute in

his home town, Jeddah, in the KSA. His father was an engineer and his mother, although she had a Bachelor's degree, chose to be a housewife to take care of her family. Kareem is single and lives with Tarik, but is planning to move and live with an American family (home stay) to increase his exposure to English and to the American culture. Although Kareem is a sophisticated, spirited, influential, rational, and cogent talker in class, his biggest problem is that he has "no access to his thoughts or personal style through the medium of writing" (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 15). Also, because he did not fully commit himself to reading and writing the assigned tasks (whether in or out of class), he could not get his writing "to the point that it approximates his skill as a talker" (33).

Unlike Fadia's background in Arabic writing, which extended from elementary school to freshmen year in high school, Kareem's background in Arabic writing ended in elementary school. Kareem described how he learned Arabic writing by saying,

In KSA they did not teach us academic writing. All they taught us was how to write a letter. From the 1st year to the last year of elementary school... We took no composition in middle and high school. In Secondary school we took only dictation... we never learned how to build a paragraph. Only how to start a letter and how to conclude a letter.

Kareem's writing background could have played a major part in affecting his commitment to writing and the ability to develop his English writing skills.

Kareem had a good self-awareness and agency in his literacy development. He joined the VTLCI in summer 2012 and was immediately placed in level 300. Unfortunately, after four terms, he was still unable to pass and continue on to the 400 level. When I asked him to explain why he could not move on to the 400 level, he said, "I took 350 and went to 400 but failed. So I

took 400 a second time. The problem is if I go to 300 that will be a waste of time. I can tell what sentence is right and which one is wrong but I don't know what the adverb, adverb adjective are. These things are confusing." Kareem describes his English skills as "reading excellent, listening excellent, and speaking excellent. Maybe writing. The idea and how to arrange the idea is the toughest thing... also I get confused when different teachers say different things." When asked to explain, Kareem expressed his frustration because two teachers in the VTLCI gave different explanations about when to use the progressive tense.

Kareem is very sociable and technologically savvy. During his studies at the VTLCI, he was a member of the Saudi Male Club in Blacksburg and helped with all the social activities. When I mentioned during one of his tutoring sessions that I had difficulties accessing the Arabic font, he was quick to offer his help and to download it for me on my laptop. As a result it was much easier for me to type the Arabic words the Saudi students used, whether in class or during the interviews.

During both terms, Kareem was committed, respectful, and enthusiastic. However, while the female students gave ultimate respect to their teachers and community and cared deeply about the opinions of others, Kareem did not follow his teachers' authority and instead, relied on his own. Kareem's voice dominated not only his Saudi peers, but his Chinese peers, too. His voice was almost the only male voice heard unless I explicitly asked other students to participate. When referring to studies on sex differences in the use of language, Belenky et al. explain, "the world is commonly divided into two domains: speaking and listening...it is the men who do the talking and the women who do the listening" (45). This proves especially true in the KSA, where men usually make the rules and women follow them. As a male, Kareem assumed that he retained all authority. He gave himself the right to decide what was important to him and what

was not, including completing assignments. Unlike the Saudi female school curriculum that includes the teaching of Arabic writing through the freshman year of college, the Saudi male school curriculum stops offering Arabic writing courses in the secondary and high school. Consequently, not only Kareem, but all the male students in the study seemed to have learned from their previous schooling that writing is not important. Therefore, while the female students had to progress from having no authority to having the authority to express their own ideas, the male students had to progress from believing that they had all the authority to recognizing the teacher's authority.

Kareem enjoyed not only debates but also whole-class discussions and group work, whether with male or female classmates. When working in groups with a female student, he showed ultimate respect (according to Islam) by avoiding direct eye contact and keeping a distance. He, however, always took the role of the reporter and never the note-taker, demonstrating his belief in his own authority. In the beginning of the term, when I reached his group and was about to assign roles, he was quick to pick the reporter's role. Even when later I would suggest him taking another role, he would insist on being the reporter. His peers were always supportive of him and glad that he would take that role.

Perception of Writing

Kareem believes that writing skills are not as important as oral skills. That belief, coupled with his reluctance to abide by the teacher's authority, creates a major challenge in his learning of writing, as we will later see. He seems reluctant to do what it takes to transform his oral strength to writing. Although, as will be clear in the following chapter, he is aware of the difference between oral and written skills, until he actually commits himself to doing the writing assignments, he will keep struggling with academic writing. Shaughnessy, when describing the

problems of what are called basic writers, says that part of their difficulties in writing relates to their continuous attempt to write the way they talk, “the correspondences between spoken and written English” (*Errors and Expectations* 291). In their article “Rethinking Diversity: Axes of Difference in the Writing Classroom,” Beverly and Walters explain that “because large group discussions are in many ways ‘public’ forums, males may feel more comfortable contributing to them than females; similarly, males may be more comfortable than females with interactions that resemble debates or arguments” (433). Kareem certainly demonstrated comfort with speaking out in class, but his oral competence far surpassed his writing abilities. He demonstrated a clear awareness that writing relies on one’s own ideas in the end-of-term reflection. In his response to a question that asked him to describe the activity that he loved the most and would like to do more of, Kareem said, “Speaking during class argument because it helps students to form their ideas.” Although he was aware of the importance of speaking during discussion in order to generate ideas, by refusing to abide by the teacher’s assignments and complete his reading and writing tasks, he failed to put that realization into action.

Kareem was the most active student in class and group discussions. He was the first, if not the only, student who was quick to represent Saudi society and its culture. He constantly contributed to class discussions and volunteered to read in class. At the end of the first term, to prepare the students for the argumentative essays of the next term, I asked the class to form two groups to debate whether or not ESL students should use dictionaries during their writing activities. When determining roles for the group, Kareem chose to be the speaker without hesitation and made it clear that he did not want to be the note-taker (another example of him asserting his authority). When observing him, I heard him telling his group members that he

prefers to be the speaker since his handwriting is hard for them to read. During the discussion, he effortlessly defended his team's position.

Kareem's active participation during the second term was no different from the first term. When students were grouped by nationality on the last day of the second term, Kareem spontaneously became the voice representing the KSA to his Chinese classmates. Students were asked to take turns asking and responding to the following three items:

1. One thing you would like to know about the other culture
2. One thing about the other culture that impresses you the most
3. A stereotype you have about the other culture

Again, Kareem was the leader of his Saudi peers. He asked most of the questions and did most of the talking. He was, however, clearly more interested in talking about his culture than in asking the Chinese about theirs. In the second half of the discussion, I reminded the Saudi students not only to talk about their culture, but also ask the Chinese students about theirs. Kareem ignored my reminder and continued to elaborate on Saudi culture. In the last five minutes of the activity, I was adamant and stopped Kareem from talking and asked him to read the three responses his group had prepared, which he did.

When asked about what he did to improve his writing, he said, "I am trying to be proactive. I listen to a lot of movies. I also joined a language institution." He seemed to be affected by the prevailing belief in the Saudi culture that if one speaks English fluently, he or she is competent and is assumed to know the language very well. He expressed frustration that his oral skills could not substitute for his inadequate writing skills.

In “Reading an ESL Writer’s Text,” Matsuda and Cox explain ESL students’ struggles with the difference between their writing and speaking competencies. They say, “The ability to speak English does not necessarily correspond directly with the quality of texts ESL students produce” (41). They add that “some students are more fluent in spoken English, but they may still produce texts that do not seem to reflect their high level of their spoken fluency” (41). Matsuda and Cox refer to the fact that many ESL students have been schooled in educational systems that did not focus on composition. Shanti Bruce joins Matsuda and Cox in saying that many ESL students have been schooled in an educational system that focuses on speaking, listening, and reading, but not on writing (152).

During Kareem’s first interview, I praised his oral competence and asked him to reflect on why he thought he was unable to write as fluently as he spoke. He was quick to refer to the difference between speaking and writing to which one of his previous teachers at the VTLCI had drawn his attention. He said, “Now I know that if I speak the way I write, my writing will be discontinuous because when we speak, we digress and that is not good in writing.” Yet, after receiving a low mark on his first process writing at the beginning of class, he complained, saying, “I participate in class all the time. Why do I still get low marks?”

Confident in his oral capabilities, Kareem, like the other Saudi students at the VTLCI, preferred to take the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam, which had a major listening and speaking component, as opposed to the Test of English as a Foreign Language exam (TOEFL), which had a major written component. The first IELTS exam in the VTLCI occurred during the second term of my study. During one of the teachers’ meetings, the IELTS coordinator told me that all the students who registered to take the IELTS were Saudi.

When students pass the IELTS and earn admission to a college, their trust in oral skills over written skills is reaffirmed, which is exactly what happened with Kareem. During the middle of the term, Kareem took the IELTS test and told me that he earned a high score. Although he did not pass the portfolio requirement in Reading and Writing 450 in Spring II, by fall 2012 he was already admitted to an undergraduate program in California. His admission to a university temporarily strengthened his belief in his friend's message that he did not need to pay much attention to the work that the teachers in the language preparatory programs assign.

Teacher's Authority

In the first two weeks of the first term, not only Kareem, but the other male students, both Saudis and Chinese, seemed doubtful of my authority. Specifically, when I mentioned that in writing courses, they needed to pay more attention to ideas than correctness, the male students expressed doubt. The best example in which Kareem exhibited a shaky trust in my knowledge took place when I wrote on the board in class, "Good writing is error-free writing" and asked the students to tell me whether or not they believed in that statement. Immediately after reading the sentence, Kareem asked, "Is this sentence correct?" He wanted to know whether the way I had written the question was proper English. I responded by asking him, "Had I been American, would you have asked me this question?" Hassan, the Saudi graduate student next to Kareem, jumped to his defense and said, "He does not mean that you did not say it right. He simply did not understand the statement."

Kareem had little admiration for his English teachers who taught him in the KSA. The following is how he responded to a prompt asking about the teaching of English in the KSA:

I had many teachers who taught me English in Saudi Arabia. And if you ask me about his level I won't put him above 300. What the teacher does is read the briefing, grammar briefing and just explain. All he knows that we first put the subject and then follow it with the verb. And most teaching was about grammar. Teachers back home confused me and are not qualified. They cannot explain why certain structure is the way it is I had many different teachers and they did not explain why we use certain ways but not other. They all tell us "that is how things are, just memorize it" teachers are not qualified; they simply read the rules and explain the rules. They don't know how to explain. It is very hard to memorize.

This lack of trust in an English teacher's competence led Kareem to dismiss many assignments. He rarely turned in required assignments on time. He had to be reminded repeatedly to turn in his assignments and to come to tutoring.

Kareem seemingly carried his impressions about his Saudi English teachers' authority and role with him to the VTLCI. Instead of obeying the teachers telling him what he needs to know, Kareem gives himself that power and judges what should be done:

I feel that the way grammar taught in VTLCI is wrong. In two days they cover a whole chapter. It is very hard and unrealistic. I tell my teachers "don't you refer to the book because teaching us the grammar of your own language"... I already have the basics he, she, it, now we are in the complicated part. My understanding for the new stuff is not that good. I follow what I hear. I like it if the teachers tell me exactly what my mistakes are. Teachers refuse to correct grammatical mistakes for me that am already learned in previous levels. So is it logical that teachers expect us to go all the way back to level one

to learn the grammatical rules? We already know the pronouns now we need to learn the more complicated things.

Kareem further demonstrated that he did not think highly of what he was learning in the VTLCI by stating that does not benefit from his studies in the VTLCI except for writing. He added, “What else do I need? English is a sea. It is hard to teach all the students everything about the English language... In college they will teach you what you need about your field.”

In addition to his own authority, Kareem valued the voice and authority of his friends over that of his teachers. During in-class readings, Kareem did not read, but instead tried to chat with his friends. Kareem gave himself the right to decide which assignments to complete and which assignments to ignore, in addition to giving himself the right to participate in class even when his answers were not relevant (he rarely read the assigned novel or assigned chapters in the reading text). Among the 24 journal entries that were assigned during the first term, he wrote only two, and only after several reminders. Because he had failed RW 400, at the end of the term, he was put under academic probation. According to the VTLCI rules, students who fail their classes in any given term will be placed on academic probation for the following term. Students on academic probation for a second consecutive term will be expelled at the conclusion of that term if they do not show evidence of progress. In the second term, during which he was under probation, he wrote only ten journals, and most of them seemed to be compiled from paragraphs he had written during previous terms.

Bizzell says that as the student moves from the dualist position where he relied on the teacher as the authority, the student’s “self interest becomes the basis for each individual’s decisions” (298). Kareem reacted to the learning of writing by disregarding the teacher’s

authority and not doing the required assignments. Instead he did only what guaranteed his enrollment in the program until he is able to find college admission.

Teacher-Student Conferences

In the first term, Kareem never came to tutoring. In the second term, he came to tutoring once to discuss a timed writing. Because in the second term he was on probation, he was assigned a special tutor to go to regularly. In the beginning of the term, he failed to commit to tutoring. After I met with the assigned tutor, we agreed that I would inform her about the assignments Kareem was required to do, while she would tell me whether he came to tutoring. Unlike Fadia, who came to tutoring after having written several drafts and was looking mainly for “corrections,” Kareem came with no drafts and looked for step-by-step assistance. He expected assistance for the global as well as the local issues. Even after brainstorming and discussing the assigned process writing in class, when he comes to tutoring he expects to start with the teacher from scratch.

During the tutoring session in the second term, he was expected to bring a first draft of the assigned process writing and the timed writing with my feedback. He did not have the first draft for the process writing. When asked why, he said, “Can I talk about the structure today? Will be writing essay so I will have something to write about. I started thinking about the ideas now I started focusing on the ideas more in you classes; I started giving the ideas more attention than the actual writing.” Although we had done whole-class brainstorming for that process writing, because he did not take notes, he was not able to write a first draft. About the timed writing, he started by very diplomatically commenting on my handwriting, saying, “Praise God professor, your writing is clear, but I have hard time with the cursive writing.”

Patricia Bizzell says that “for the student Dualist, education is a process of finding right answers (correct applications of Absolutes), with the help of the teacher (Authority)/ The student Dualist resists exploring academic problems that have no one right solution, and prefers teachers who supply answers and disciplines in which answers can be securely quantified” (298).

That is clear in what Kareem exhibits and expects during the tutoring sessions. When I was tutoring him during both terms, Kareem always expected me to correct his local as well as global mistakes. He wanted me to tell him exactly what to do and how to do it even when he was able to do it himself. The following statement clearly shows how he still believes that there is a single right way to write a thesis statement: “I feel that you give some attention to some specific students...As for me you tell me ‘rewrite your thesis statement.’ I know that my thesis has some defects, but I don’t know exactly how to fix it.” While Kareem is quick to advance his thoughts in class discussions and interviews, he is almost paralyzed when it comes to writing down those thoughts. He is hesitant to write and discover for himself the effective way to preserve his ideas. He does not seem to believe or to trust that writing is really important.

Positionality

Kareem has resisted changing position. Perhaps the best example of how he remained stuck in the basic dualism stage (black-and-white mentality) appears in his end-of-term reflection. He wrote that the most interesting thing he learned about writing was “[h]ow I manipulate with idea and how I make the right idea wrong and the reverse.” Kareem still sees things as right or wrong, not as relevant or contextualized. His statement demonstrates not only a dualistic mentality but also a sense of authority. He feels confident that he has the power to change things. Having power is important for his intellectual development. When students are empowered and have agency, they are better able to question, reflect, and as a result grow

intellectually. Kareem's reflection reveals a major difference between his writing and that of the Saudi female students that illustrates Elizabeth Flynn's observation that while the female students' stories reflect interaction, connection, or frustrated connection, "the narratives of the male students are stories of achievement, of separation, or of frustrated achievement" (554).

Kareem believed that he alone knew exactly what he needed and wanted, and where he should go to get his information. He did not believe that he needed what he was learning at the VTLCI, especially since he was a fluent English speaker. According to his friends, all he needed to do in order to succeed in college was to learn the language of his field:

He wrote:

A friend of mine told me that all I need is the language of the field I will be studying. A friend told me that all I need in college is the terminology of engineering (my future field) I am scientific. I don't need linguistics [in college]. I will have friends who will be native speakers, unlike it here...in college I will not write and give the professor I will have someone to check it for me....After one or two semester I will be great. I will learn English with practice. Not by object, subject with which I get lost. Even in TOEFL and IELTS I get better marks than the VTLCI because the teachers in the VTLCI ask for instance, ask: use the present progressive, perfect....I think once I get an admission I won't need what I am learning here.

Kareem's understanding of what he needs to succeed in his field is not very far from Cummins' description of academic proficiency as "the extent to which an individual has access to and command of the oral and written academic registers of schooling" (*Language, Power, and Pedagogy* 67). Kareem seems to believe that his conversational skills, together with a realization

of the importance of learning the language of his future field, could suffice to grant him success in college.

Writing Samples

The following is the first draft of Kareem's last process writing in the first term, which he submitted on less than half a piece of white paper without his name or a title but which clearly included his voice/opinion:

Blacksburg is wonderful place for studying. I love Blacksburg and I think it's one of best places that I've visited before. However, the life in Jeddah is better than Blacksburg. Because Jeddah is very big city and there are a lot of places that the people can have fun. I liked the weather in Blacksburg, because it is worm in the summer and nice in the winter. Unlike Blacksburg, Jeddah is hot and humane. [*sic*]

Unlike Fadia who is hesitant to voice her opinion, Kareem states his opinion, as seen in his second sentence. Although he does not write much and makes a lot of mistakes, his voice is loud and clear. His writing demonstrates oral characteristics; he writes the way he talks.

Having limited experience with writing and unconvinced of the value of writing, Kareem did not write journals in Spring I. In Spring II, he wrote eight half-page literary journals. It is hard to evaluate his progression based on those limited journals written in only one term.

Other Students

Kareem was not the only undergraduate Saudi male student in the group, although he was the only undergraduate male who participated in my study during both terms. Majed and Tarik are the other male undergraduate Saudi students who took part in my study, together with

Hassan, the only male graduate Saudi student. In the following section, I show how Majed and Hassan perceived teachers' authority and how that affected their positionality. I start with a quick personal portrait of each and then look at their intellectual development as writers.

Hassan, 30 years-old, was married to Majda. He was the only male Saudi graduate student in the group. He had a Bachelor's degree in architecture and six years of work experience in the KSA. When he first joined the VTLCI, he was put in level 350.

Like the undergraduate male Saudi students, Hassan has had very limited experience in writing in either Arabic or in English and does not think that writing is important for his academic life. Like the female graduate students, Hassan in different instances acted as a harmony preserver. The first instance in which Hassan put community above himself was when he responded to a question about why he did not participate much in class. He said, "I do not like to participate if there are many students raising their hands." The second time was when he acted as a moderator to save face for Kareem.

Hassan pays close attention to how his peers perceive him. For instance, when I asked him about the best in-class activities, his answer was "the poster session where we were asked to present our outline to the whole class. The reason why it was in my opinion effective was that we had to push ourselves to present something good in order to 'save our faces.'"

The other undergraduate male Saudi student, whose behavior in terms of his commitments to class assignments was similar to Kareem's, was Majed. Like Kareem, Majed did not consider following the teacher's assignment. During the first interview, Majed admitted that he did not read the assigned novel and did not care about composition. When asked why, he said, "I really don't know I am not used. To me reading takes a long time and frankly I get bored

easily from reading at least 50 pages.” When told that later on in college he would need to read extensively, he replied, “Seriously? Maybe, when there is a serious requirement, I will read it. But I won’t like to.” Majed’s response exemplifies the Saudi oral culture.

I had the chance during my study to meet with John (pseudonym), a tutor at the writing center at Virginia Tech who had worked with a number of Saudi male graduate students studying architecture design. John’s impression of the Saudi students was that “they had a sense of what was important and what they needed and did not need to know and do. They acted as if they had classified things between: 1. this is important, 2. this is not.” That description fits Kareem and Majed very well.

Conclusion

Because the female Saudi students trusted in their teacher’s authority from the beginning, they were willing to move through each process that learning to write critically required. The male students, however, because they relied on their own authority, were unable to see writing as a process and therefore remained stuck in the early stages of learning to write and think critically. I am their teacher, but I am a woman. The male students are not used to having Saudi women teaching them. That fact may have created a tension for them.

Fadia has progressed from silence to perceived knowledge, whereas Kareem started off in multiplicity and stayed there. He did not move up in terms of learning English writing. Fadia and Kareem’s backgrounds in Arabic writing are very different. While Fadia had better preparation and practice, Kareem wrote and learned very little. How easy is it to start analyzing if one does not understand the need for and point of what one is learning? The female students’ positive attitude towards both the teacher and the need to learn helped them progress, not only in terms of

language acquisition as Brown described, but also as critical thinkers. The male students, on the other hand, even though they demonstrated some critical thinking skills, missed the chance to develop them further because of their negative attitudes towards the teacher's authority and learning. Kareem failed the level for the second time.

While teachers might expect the male students to progress faster because they begin with more self-confidence in their own authority, the female students actually progress faster. The female students' practices enabled them to develop as independent, critical thinkers who are able to express their ideas in writing.

Fadia clearly developed an active voice and no longer remained passive and silent during discussions with the teacher or her peers (as we will see in the following chapter). She also moved to relativism, where she realized that the "meaning of an event depends on the context in which that event occurs and on the framework that the knower uses to understand that event" (Belenky et al. 10). She succeeded in passing the high intermediate level. Kareem, however, only progressed through the early stages of Perry's positions. Although he started off at multiplicity, where he relied on his own authority and voice, his over-reliance on his own authority and limited compliance with the academic authority prevented him from passing the level.

Unlike the case in the KSA where Kareem was taught by male teachers, in my class, Kareem was taught by a female. It is reasonable to assume that Kareem's cultural background, which gives superiority to males, played a role.

While in this chapter I looked at how Saudi students respond to the teacher's authority, in the following chapter, I look at how they respond to their peers' authority.

Chapter Five: Peers' Authority

“It does not occur [to the teacher] to consider the competing logics and values and habits that may be influencing his students, often in ways that they [the students] themselves are unaware of” (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 291).

Unlike the individualistic culture of the US, the culture of the KSA is collective. In a collective culture, individuals are expected to look after the well-being of the whole group as opposed to their individual well-being. Additionally, authority structures are much more rigid and much more respected in a collective culture than they are in an individualistic culture because, in a collective culture, older members and authority figures usually hold the power, including decision-making power, and because preserving harmony is more important than individual accomplishment. Therefore, group work in the KSA is not highly valued because the teacher is regarded as the one who has the knowledge, not the students. Such cultural values clash with American values that emphasize individual achievement and a more relaxed power structure. Saudi students who come to the US to study encounter group work for the first time, as well as the idea that the teacher does not hold all the knowledge. They are also in a mixed-sex classroom for the first time. Unlike most ESL programs in the US, which follow the coeducation system, EFL programs as well as all the educational institutions in KSA are single-sex. Teachers in the US may not realize that the Saudi students who join an IESL program may be encountering group work and a coeducational system for the first time. Teachers may not be aware that students are learning new techniques and approaches for English writing at the same time they are wrestling to reconcile the values of their home culture with those of their new learning environment.

The major purpose of this study is to look at how Saudi students' sex differences affect their perceptions of teachers' and peers' authority, and in turn, how those perceptions affect their development as writers and critical thinkers. In Chapter Four, I presented an overview of the ways in which past research has explored the concepts of intellectual development and authority in college classrooms. I also presented my research framework, described the classroom setting, and took a closer look at data on two students in particular, Fadia (female) and Kareem (male), and five other students in general. I analyzed how they responded differently to the teacher's authority, the positional reasons for those differences, and how those differences affected their development as writers and thinkers.

In the first part of this chapter, I present Perry's framework of peer authority, followed by the connection between group work and writing. Then I present an overview of Saudi students and group work. I designate the second part of this chapter to describing how the two major students in this study respond to group work.

Data in this chapter is taken from the students' first and second interviews, teachers' interviews, tutoring sessions, students' papers (timed writing, process writing, journals, reflection, assessment tests), and researcher's field notes. Following the definition of critical thinking as "[t]he intentional application of rational, higher order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, problem recognition and problem solving, inference, and evaluation" (Angelo 6), I intend to see how much analysis, synthesis, problem recognition and problem solving the Saudi students applied to their writing after group discussions.

In this chapter, I analyze how Saudi students perceive their peers' authority and how this relates to their development as writers and critical thinkers. Specifically, I will analyze data from the same two students, Kareem and Fadia, to answer the following questions:

1. How do Saudi female and male students respond differently to their peers' authority?
2. How do sex differences in responding to peers' authority affect the Saudi students' development as writers and critical thinkers?
3. What are the reasons behind the Saudi students' different perceptions and responses to their peers' authority?

Students' perception of authority is an important piece of their development as critical thinkers; however, the literature on ESL writing that focuses primarily on peers' authority does not pay much attention to sex. In this chapter, I will use the work of Perry and Belenky et al., who discuss how perceptions of authority affect American students' writing, in order to discuss the different ways in which male and female Saudi students respond to peers' authority and the effect on their intellectual development. By doing so, I intend to broaden our understanding of how Saudi students learn writing in new environments such as a coeducational setting.

After stating Perry's framework for peer authority, I talk about group work and its connection to writing. I then present the Saudi students' experience with group work in the writing classroom, and analyze the cases of two major students, Fadia and Kareem. I conclude with a brief explanation of the analysis.

Framework

In his study, Perry looked at students' views of their peers' authority during their learning process. He classified those views according to four different stages:

Dualism: At this stage, peers are not considered a legitimate source of knowledge or learning. While still at the dualistic position, students see the world as divided between right and wrong. While all problems are solvable, there are right solutions and wrong solutions. In school, only teachers have the right solutions because they are the source of knowledge and have the true authority; therefore, students adopt their teachers' views without questioning or referring to their own voice. Students at this stage do not see their peers as a source of knowledge or as having the right answers; they refuse to discuss their ideas with peers, and reject their peers' ideas without analyzing them.

Early multiplicity: Peers at this stage are considered to have more legitimacy, especially in contexts like small-group discussions. Students are interested in their peers' different perspectives, but still consider the teacher as the final authority. At this stage students begin to acknowledge that ambiguity exists, especially in the liberal arts realms of knowledge. Instead of viewing all problems as solvable and solutions as either right or wrong, students start classifying problems in two different ways: (1) those problems whose solutions they know, (2) those problems whose solutions they don't know yet. While still believing that the teacher has the final say, students start reflecting on and considering their peers' contributions, especially during group work.

Late multiplicity: Peers are considered a legitimate source. In a "new dualism," peers replace friends and family. Still, students may not pay real attention to their peers or other friends or family members since "everyone's opinion is just as good (or bad) as everyone else's" (Perry xxxii) At this stage, peer input becomes more valuable and a legitimate source of knowledge, as well as a source of knowledge exchange and support. As a result, students are "relatively receptive to team-based activities" (Felder and Brent 271). Students do not feel that they are

obliged to consider their peers' input since, at this stage, all students' opinions are seen as having equal value.

Contextual relativism: Peers are legitimate sources of learning as long as they use the correct rules and perspectives. Students at this stage start to take an interest in others' diverse opinions and experiences. For students at this stage, it is the process, not the position, that determines legitimacy. Students at this stage consider their peers' input as valid as any other authority as long as they have the right qualifications and background. Instead of seeking conformity, students start enjoying the diversity of opinion and experiences of those who differ from themselves. At this stage, students are more interested in the way people reach a certain position than in the position itself.

In this study, I looked at how Perry's stages applied to Saudi students in the US writing classroom. Perry's study was based on American students, whose education typically includes collaborative and group work. I am interested in how these same stages apply to Saudi students, whose typical education does not include collaboration, as they acclimate to a US classroom.

Group Work and Writing

According to Perry, in college, not only teachers affect the ethical and intellectual development of college students, but so do peers through different forms of collaboration. At the turn of the twentieth century, traditional writing classrooms in the US were "teacher-centered rather than student centered, focused on the product rather than process," and were "oppressive rather than liberating" (Brooke 150). As more teachers became interested in the student's role in writing, the focus of English teachers shifted from product to process. That shift brought with it an emphasis on invention, revision, and formative feedback. Rather than just a means to record

ideas, writing came to be seen as a means to create and form ideas (Raimes), a means for learning, not just a means for demonstrating learning (Emig, “Writing as a Mode”). That learning takes place as a result of providing students with the “context, preparation, feedback, and opportunity for revision” through which to engage them in the discovery of meaning (Raimes). In contrast, students in the KSA are not taught that writing is a means of creating and forming ideas.

The pedagogical shift in the US also recognized that knowledge is socially constructed. What students know is influenced by what they hear and learn in their communities, homes, classrooms, and gatherings of their peers. That realization led to changes in the way reading and writing were defined and taught in the US. Influenced by the work of scholars such as Kenneth A. Bruffee, Lisa Ede, and Andrea A. Lunsford, who called for collaborative learning, writing teachers started engaging students in group work where students converse as often as possible during the writing and reading process (Santos). Although group work has limitations, the advantages it contributes to the learning process include “increasing student motivation; development of individual responsibility; coconstructing knowledge as a result of member interactions that produce new viewpoints; improving democratic skills and citizenship education; and improving skills for communication, organization, presentation, leadership, and so on” (King and Behnke 58).

In collaborative learning, group work is distinguished from simply working in groups by “[t]he group’s effort to reach consensus by their own authority” (Weiner 54). The teacher’s role is to introduce the task, making sure it is an open-ended one (i.e. with no set answer or pre-conceived result) and then to get out of the way to allow each group to work cooperatively. The

ideology is the shift of power from the teacher to the students, and a product arrived at through negotiation and consensus within a group (Santos; Trimbur).

Working with peers, whether in whole-class discussions or in small groups, enhances critical thinking. Liu and Hansen see that the benefit of peer responses in L2 writing classes is in forcing the students to apply their cognitive processes to reach new concepts, instead of passively receiving information from their teachers (7). Yang et al. studied the effect of peer feedback on Chinese EFL students and concluded that peer feedback can promote the development of critical thinking. Catherine Berg also found that peer feedback encouraged critical reasoning. Berg writes,

The student cannot just take the advice as given and make the change, as is likely when the expert (i.e. teacher) provides feedback. Instead, the student will need to consider the advice from a peer, question its validity, weigh it against his or her own knowledge and ideas, and then make a decision about what, if any, changes to make. (232)

In other words, working with their peers requires students to engage on multiple intellectual levels.

Depending on students' prior experience with peer response, Liu and Hansen categorize ESL students' perception of their peers' responses in three categories: positive, negative, and a combination of both. Students who have a positive experience with their peers' responses value their peers' input and as a result become more involved and productive (14). Among the other factors that affect ESL students' perception of their peers' responses and activities, Liu and Hansen explain that cultural backgrounds are "salient with regard to how these activities are actualized and what consequences they will result in" (19).

One of the challenges that Saudi students face when coming to the US is that the KSA writing pedagogy has not experienced the same shift to centering on the student that American pedagogy has. Saudi students join writing classes in the US with little to no experience with group work or whole class discussions, whether in Arabic or English writing classes. Instead, in Saudi classrooms, the teachers were the sole and ultimate authority who corrected the students' writing. Since composition classes in the US focus on the idea and the process of writing, at the VTCLI the Saudi students experienced for the first time exposing their ideas in public and being exposed to their peers' input.

The two major studies that looked at male Saudi students' perceptions of their peers' feedback in the KSA were written by Al-Hazmi and Schofield, and Hamouda. These studies revealed that Saudi students do not take seriously the feedback they get from their peers. In an attempt to find some answers to that problem, I extend the conversation that was limited to how students respond to small groups to how they respond to whole class discussion. I also wanted to look at how the sexes differ in their response to peer authority and how that affects the students' critical thinking.

Shor believes that the American students who are products of a schooling system that considered teachers the unilateral authority in class, come to believe that being in school "means to be enveloped in didactic teacher-talk. A real class is one where the teacher does most of the talking... students have little to teach each other" (Shor, *When Students Have Power* 27). As a result, students stop speaking and listening to their peers in class as a source of knowledge. That was true of the Saudi students, especially at the beginning. They perceived group work and what it entails much like the students George Hillocks, Jr. studied, for whom group work "often means sitting in a small group but working independently" (26). During the first week of the first term,

when for the first time the Saudi students were asked to work in groups on one of the reading exercises, the students in two groups started working together, while those in the other two groups chose to work individually. The same was true for the Chinese students. I had to repeatedly remind them to work with a partner. At first, they would not budge. They listened respectfully to me, said, “OK,” nodded their heads to signal that they heard me, and moved a few inches close to each other. Then they went on finishing individually what they had started. After they finished, they compared their answers with their neighbors’ instead of working together all along. Since these students were not yet accustomed to working with their peers, comparing their answers was a small step towards more frequent and longer group work sessions.

The way both the Saudi and the Chinese students behaved when working on the reading exercise resembled how they behaved when asked to read each other’s first draft of the first essay. Most students wanted me, not their peers, to read their drafts. In the first peer-editing session, Fadia was the first to come to me asking whether she should consider the feedback of her peers as reliable or instead wait for my feedback. When asked why she did not want to consider her peer’s input, she said, “Because ahhhh when the professor looks to my paper, ahhh mmmm I will be sure that she will give me the right things that I did not paid attention to.”

The students did not accept the idea of working in groups at the beginning of the next term much more readily than they had the first time. The first week of the term, every time I asked the students to work with a partner they started working individually. Only after I reminded them to work with their neighbor did they move to work with peers. In the following part, I take a closer look at how Fadia considered her peers’ opinions and contributions in the reading and writing class.

Fadia

The negotiation of power is, in itself, a teachable moment. Calhoun and Elledge (2008, p.29)

With the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered pedagogy comes a shift in power. Unlike in a teacher-centered pedagogy where the teacher holds most of the power, in a student-centered pedagogy, the teacher takes the role of a “coordinator or cultural circle,” who, through structured questions, empowers students and gives them the opportunity to voice their opinions and to take charge of their learning when working individually and with their peers (Wallerstein 41).

In the following section, I describe how Fadia and other female Saudi students responded to their peers’ authority, whether during whole-class discussions or small-group and peer-editing sessions. I start by elaborating on peers as representatives of home culture and briefly describe the unique status of the Saudi females to show how that status might affect how they see themselves and their peers in a mixed-sex classroom. Then I present a description of group work and peer editing, a description of whole-class discussions leading to writing, then one of Fadia’s writing samples followed by elaborations from other female students.

Peers as Representatives of Home Culture

Women in Saudi Arabia

The government of Saudi Arabia is organized in accordance with Islamic ‘Sharia’, which does not allow inter-sex mixing and gives both dominance and responsibility to the males, who are required to lead, support, and protect women. In the KSA, men exercise their authority over women in all areas of decision-making in both public and private spheres (Kucinskas; Metcalfea; Moaddel). That dominance leaves women with fewer rights and more restrictive laws and

barriers when participating in the public sphere. Female Saudis, especially in the capital, “are rarely visible in ‘mixed’ public places” (Le Renard 612), and when they do, they have to follow many written and unwritten codes addressed specifically to women (Le Renard 2008, p629). Given this specific cultural context, it is relevant to look at how the Saudi female students view and interact with their peers in a mixed classroom. Later in this chapter, I discuss how Fadia experiences working in a mixed-sex classroom.

Because in the KSA, education is organized on strictly segregated lines, where male and female students go to separate schools and universities (Albers), when there is a shortage of female teachers at the university level, female students join classes through closed-circuit televisions which have existed since the 1970s. The mixed graduate classes that took place until 1995 were later “replaced by videoconference” (Le Renard 616). Only recently did the country commit to reforming sex relations in education. One of the universities now permits the opportunity for a mixed-sex learning environment (Metcalf 141). The other place where Saudi female students receive equal educational opportunities is through King Abdullah’s scholarship program to study abroad. Most Saudi students want to go to US universities, which are mostly mixed-sex.

Assumptions about Perfection

When looking at the cross-cultural aspects of second-language writing, Ulla Connor (1996) finds that different linguistic and cultural assumptions about the purpose of written texts can transfer from one language to another. Unlike US students, who are taught that writing is a means of thinking, Fadia was taught that writing is a means of perfectly presenting what she had learned.

Because the teaching of Arabic and English writing in the KSA followed the “product not process” approach, writing teachers at all levels focused only on grammar and dictation (according to what all the students said). After many years of such education, students start to believe that these are the only elements required for good writing. And because there is only one correct spelling or grammatical structure, when writing, female students put all their effort towards getting those elements right. Another reason that could underlie their obsession with perfection is, according to Shaughnessy, their fear of their “inadequacies” (*Errors and Expectations*). Coming from a school system where teachers kept marking the errors for students rather than training them to see mistakes for themselves resulted in self-doubt. That creates situations where “[t]he student lacks confidence in himself in academic situations and fears that writing will not only expose but magnify his inadequacies” (85).

Fadia’s assumption about how outside authorities will judge her writing affects her practices when writing as an individual. That assumption is solidified by her previous literacy practices, which did not incorporate revisions and depended on only one single draft. As a result, she believed that she ought to perfect her first draft, missing the purpose of writing several drafts; therefore, she fell victim to her worries about making mistakes (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 79). As a female trained to follow her collective culture’s authority, which defines actions in dualistic terms, right and wrong, when writing Fadia carries with her the message that her culture is the source of authority, and tries to meet its expectations. Cultural training that put her under constant supervision and scrutiny has led her to believe that she needs to be perfect. That sense of perfection got extended to the way she approaches writing. She feels that whatever she writes has to be perfect, even at early stages.

During the first interview, one of the questions I asked Fadia was about the most difficult task she faces when writing. Without any hesitation, her answer was, “Introduction, how to start the introduction.” So I said, “You mean you have difficulty in writing the introduction or your difficulty is with starting to write in general?” She responded, “The introduction in general, the introduction of a paragraph, or essay or anything in writing. How to write the introduction. I have difficulty with introductions.” When asked to explain why she thinks she feels this way, her answer was, “Because if you start something you have to start it right. If you start right, the rest will be right. If you start wrong, the rest will be wrong. If my introduction to the topic is correct, the whole topic will be correct.” She added,

I put a lot of effort. Once I get the introduction, the rest will be easy. I will have the idea and have prepared everything I need to write. When writing an essay at home. The first thing I would be thinking about is how to start the introduction, which takes the whole day, when I am walking, riding the bus, at home.

I told her to try not to worry about starting with the introduction or about being right in the first draft, but to just go ahead and think on paper and write freely whatever came to her mind without worrying about spelling or grammatical mistakes. Fadia looked stunned, as if she could not believe that her teacher was telling her it was okay to have mistakes. Our conversation continued as follows:

Maggie: What do you think?

Fadia: I have never tried thinking on paper. What I think about I leave in my head.

Maggie: Are you willing to try to think on paper?

Fadia: I think if I think on paper it will take longer.

Maggie: Why?

Fadia: Maybe when I think first without writing, it will be easier because when writing I will be going through two stages: thinking and then moving it to the paper, but when I start with the paper there is nothing to move.

Being myself a product of the Saudi schooling system, I knew that writing freely and writing several drafts were not common practices for the Saudis. I tried to help the students resist focusing on the product while writing their first drafts. During the brainstorming stage, both in class and in the writing lab, I asked students to write freely without worrying about spelling or grammatical mistakes. I repeatedly explained the importance of their ideas over their correct product. I shared with them a personal piece from one of my free writings to encourage them not to be afraid of making mistakes when writing freely. Unfortunately, Fadia did not try free writing.

As a result of her previous literary experiences, Fadia, like the basic writers in Shaughnessy's 1997 studies, came to believe that good writing means correct writing ("Diving In" 8). I encouraged her to try at least once to write without worrying about spelling, so that she could then compare this new technique with the old one in which she spends a lot of time worrying about starting and writing perfectly. Fadia laughed and promised to try. The next week I observed that while brainstorming in the writing lab for PW2, Fadia continually checked her spelling as she wrote. When she noticed that the software underlined a word in red, she stopped and fixed it before even finishing the sentence.

Fadia demonstrated the need to be perfect not only in the writing lab, but also during tutoring. In many instances during tutoring, I pushed her to take notes on what we were discussing and would ask her, “Do you want to write?” She would start writing slowly and expressed concerns for correct English instead of the logical progression of the sentences.

The following week, I spent 10 minutes of class time talking to the whole class, encouraging them to write freely and not to worry about spelling mistakes when writing their first and second drafts. I wanted to check how willing the students were now that we were near the middle of the first term. That week I had introduced the Descriptive Essay assignment. In class, I asked them to brainstorm about what they wanted to describe. Other than the name of the place, person, or thing, most of them, including Fadia, had written nothing in class. In my reflection that day I wrote, “All students are not comfortable with free writing. They are hesitant to just start writing.”

Fadia could not stop worrying about starting right with the introduction, even in the second term. In my observations I wrote, “Fadia is taking her time before starting to write. She then started with a title and three lines of the introduction, but as usual, she keeps going back and forth to the prompt, reading it. Fadia stopped writing, reads her introduction for few minutes.” My notes during the second week were not very different from those of the first week: “Fadia is taking her time thinking, writing the title and the first line in the introduction.” Fadia’s actions illustrate what Shaughnessy says about the basic students who “tend to think that the point of writing is to get everything right the first time and that the need to change things is the work of the amateur” (*Errors and Expectations* 79). Shaughnessy stresses the misconception some basic writers, as well as ESL students, have about the process of writing. These students still have not grasped that through interaction, writing, and rewriting, ideas get developed; therefore, they keep

waiting for their ideas to generate spontaneously, instead of to develop. They think that ideas are there in their heads, just waiting to be written or articulated. They do not know that their ideas form and evolve through communication. Because of her previous years of product-focused education, Fadia not only lacks an understanding of the writing process, but cannot easily believe that she will not be punished for making spelling or grammatical mistakes, even in a first draft. It would not be easy for her to see her paper filled with red. She wants to make a good impression on both her peers and her teacher.

Like Shaughnessy's students, Fadia is a stranger in the writing classroom, unacquainted with the rules and rituals of the process of writing. She is now in the VTCLI for one reason: to learn English in order to be accepted to an American college, after which her life will improve and be better than that of her parents. How to learn writing is not yet at all clear to Fadia, but she has a strong faith that she will be able to learn the skill.

There are multiple other intersecting causes for Fadia's behavior. In addition to these major educational and cultural influences, Fadia is also concerned about passing the level, taking the TOEFL test, and applying for college, so she can get her degree before her husband finishes his studies at Virginia Tech and she has to go back to the KSA.

Group Work and Peer Editing

Culture helps us to know how far we can go as individuals and what our responsibility is to the group. While some similarities exist in how Saudi and other ESL students view peer authority, the similarities are somewhat obscured by the differences created by cultural and sex issues. When in a US writing classroom, Fadia is not only expected to work in groups, but also to work with peers of the opposite sex, two things for which her culture did not prepare her. As a

result, she is not eager to do either. In the first interview, when I asked Fadia about her willingness to work with male students, she answered, “No problem if the boys are Chinese. But if the boys are from Saudi Arabia, I might be shy because of the culture.” When asked to explain the difference between the two, she explained that first, she would be shy out of lack of practice; second, a Saudi male would be friends with her husband, which would put both her and her husband in an awkward position.

In the US, writing is taught through dialogues not only between the teacher and the students, but also between the students themselves. In their formal education, Saudi students did not experience class discussion and their classrooms had “usual asymmetrical arrangements with the teacher on one side, talking and the students on the other, listening” (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 83).

In addition to the assumption that what they write should be perfect, the Saudi female students have specific assumptions about their peers’ authority during group work. When describing the stages college students go through in terms of how they perceive their peers’ authority, Perry (as previously explained) identifies four stages: dualism, early multiplicity, late multiplicity, and contextual relativism. In those stages, the perception of peers’ authority ranges all the way from being of no value to being a good and legitimate source of knowledge. Belenky et al, when talking about the developmental stages of female college students, present four stages: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge. In the first two stages, silence and received knowledge, the female students depend on external authority for truth and information even when they are themselves capable of reproducing them. In the VTCLI writing classroom, that external authority is represented by both their teacher and their peers. Because they are culturally trained how to

listen to external authority, the Saudi female students are able to enjoy and benefit from their peers' contributions, once they overcome the tension caused by having to work in groups with the opposite sex, which helps their development as writers.

During the first term, to help them get used to working in mixed-sex groups, I would periodically ask students to move around and form groups containing both males and females. Although I would ask them to keep these groups for the coming days, the next day they would go back to their original segregated places. To expose students to the ideas of classmates of the opposite sex without making them uncomfortable, I held whole-class discussions followed by small-group discussions in the second term. In the small-group discussions, students were allowed to choose the peers they preferred to work with. All the Saudi students almost always chose to work with peers of the same sex, except when I asked them to pick a peer of the opposite sex.

In the second interview towards the end of the second term, Fadia described the benefits of working in groups (as long as she was not with Saudi males) and whole-class discussion:

It was truly helpful. And like my last essay that was about Facebook, I have the ideas. And when I asked my classmates, what should I do? They recognized my ideas because I am confused and I am just thinking about Facebook and what should I say. I have the idea but I don't know how to recognize this idea and how to write it down. And they helped me with that [*sic*].

Her recognition that her peers' ideas are valuable was later confirmed in her end-of-term reflection. In her response to the question about the most interesting writing practice, Fadia writes,

The brainstorming and the drafting. It is very useful to brainstorm our ideas in the class where we can discuss our ideas with friends and class mates. So, we can get help from our friends to develop our points and ideas. Also, it is very helpful to make much draft so we can improve what we wrote in the first draft with better and more logical concepts [*sic*].

Although enthusiastic about the brainstorming activity, Fadia was less pleased with peer editing. In the same end-of-term reflection, she responds to the question about “a writing practice you think is unnecessary” by writing, “Sometimes peer editing with a class mate is unnecessary. Because some students just finish their draft and they are tired from doing their own draft. So, some might feel boring to edit another draft for another friend or classmates [*sic*].”

Although some issues with peer responses seem to be culturally related in Fadia’s case, others seem more universal. As discussed in Chapter Two, Linda Nilson (2003) found that even L1 students hesitated to judge their peers’ work, uncertain of their own competence to evaluate the work and fearing to hurt or offend their classmates. Furthermore, she noted that many were simply unwilling to put in the time and effort to give genuine critiques. (35) Students who themselves regard the instructor’s criticisms as the only feedback that counts, and who assume their peers share that view, may see little reason to do work that they regard as the teacher’s responsibility, not theirs.

Topping says that “peer assessment can also increase reflection and generalization to new situations, promoting self-assessment and greater metacognitive self-awareness” (23). Despite her own doubts about the activity, when editing her peers’ work, Fadia does not just fill out the

checklist, but generally gives extensive feedback similar to what I had given her on her writing. She writes to her peers phrases such as “give more details and examples,” and “you need to put the word ‘some’ instead of ‘all.’” She also writes encouraging notes like “good thesis, great topic sentence, great conclusion.”

Whole Class Discussions Leading to Writing

Although Fadia was fluent in English, she did not participate in debates or whole-class discussions unless I specifically asked her to do so. Despite the fact that she found it more difficult to express herself when writing than when speaking, she was still able to communicate her opinions in writing. However, she did not participate in a whole-class discussion during the brainstorming phase of any of the essays that she wrote.

In order to introduce the argumentative genre into class discussion and encourage students to voice their opinions, I used an issue that had incited passionate discussion in a previous class that I’d taught to female college students in the KSA in 1997. For the argumentative essay in that class, I had asked the students to write on the topic of women driving in Saudi Arabia. During a whole-class brainstorming session, the class divided into two groups: one for women driving and the other against it. Both groups used religious reasons to support their claims.

In this study, I wanted to see how, fifteen years later and in the United States, male and female Saudi students would approach the subject. Again, the class split into two groups: male Saudi students, who opposed women’s driving, and all the Chinese and female Saudi students, who supported women driving. Neither group used religious reasons to support their position.

During the break after this whole-class discussion about women driving in the KSA, the female students stayed in the classroom as usual. This time, instead of socializing, they continued the women's driving conversation among themselves. Basma angrily said, "The way the strict men in Saudi Arabia are refusing to let women drive is very similar to how those who are like them before like fifty years ago, refused to let women even to get education." Hana was quick to say, "It is really sad that back home women have their own cars but cannot enjoy driving them. The drivers do, but they cannot." Again, Fadia was quiet but very attentive. Before the end of break, I asked her why she did not contribute to the discussion. She replied that she always likes first to listen to her peers' opinions and then to present her opinion in a different way. Although Fadia easily contributes to small-group discussions, especially when working with female students, she does not do so in whole class discussions. That does not mean that she does not pay attention, reflect, or take an interest in the discussions, as her following essay proves. Acknowledging that there are diverse channels for critical thinking, Arleen Schenke, a scholar in critical pedagogy, comments on the complexity of silence in language acquisition and use. She believes that ESL students' silence does not always demonstrate passivity. Instead, in many instances it shows oppositional thinking. The silence that Schenke talks about is the silence imposed by fear. Fadia remains silent, on the other hand, not out of fear, but out of respect for her cultural values.

Writing Sample

Perhaps the best example of critical thinking in Fadia's writing in response to her peers' discussions can be found in her essay about women's driving. I chose this essay because the topic is especially conducive to critical thinking among the Saudi students. It is a problem that, as Ken Bain says, "will challenge [the students] to grapple with ideas, rethink their assumptions,

and examine their mental models of reality”(18). For Saudis, women’s driving is and has been a controversial issue, constantly discussed and debated in the media and in social gatherings.

By focusing on this controversial issue, I was following Ruth Spack’s advice that “[w]riting tasks should build upon knowledge students already possess but should also be designed to allow new learning to occur. Students can initially write about their own experiences or views, then read, discuss, and respond” (“Initiating ESL Students”103). Another reason for choosing this topic is that the women’s driving issue tends to hold a significant place in the public consciousness of the Saudi students, particularly when coming to the US where driving for women is not only accepted but expected. As the Saudi students adjust culturally to studying in the US, this is often a topic that re-emerges. Working with such a topic at such a time was critical because students’ prior knowledge and familiarity with the topic plays a major role in the thinking task (Kennedy, Fisher, and Ennis).

The first Friday after that discussion, the students wrote for an hour in response to the following prompt:

Write about one of the following topics:

1. The one-child policy in China has been controversial in the last few years. Write a five-paragraph argumentative essay in which you argue with or against the one-child policy in China.
2. The issue of women driving in Saudi Arabia has long been debated. Write a five-paragraph argumentative essay in which you argue for or against the idea of Saudi women driving.

Fadia’s scratched outline on the prompt reads:

1. Women have the right to drive their own car instead of their drivers
2. They have the right to go wherever they want
3. In emergency cases, they need to drive.

Following is her essay:

Saudi women driving

Driving is just for men. This is the rule in my country, which is Saudi Arabia. I am wondering why women cannot drive in Saudi Arabia. If there is anything wrong with this statement, the other Arabic countries will not allow it for the women in their country such as Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain as well. I am argue that Saudi women should drive for three reasons, which are: Saudi women have the right to drive their own car instead of their drivers, they have the right to go wherever they want, in emergency situations, they need to drive.

First of all, instead of the drivers, Saudi women can drive their own car. No one prefer to let others use his/her own things and he/she has the ability to use it by his/her own some people said that if Saudi women drive, there will be more crowed and more accident, However, I disagree with that because Saudi women already have their own car so there are nothing possible about more crowded. Also, most of the drivers are foreigner and when they come, they do not even know how to drive. Therefore, to make Saudi women learn how to drive their own car is better than to learn someone who is foreigner to use their cars.

Second, Saudi women have the right to go wherever they want by their own. One of the most common problems is that it is hard to find someone who is free to take the

women into any place they want to go to unspecific time. For example, sometimes I need to go to visit my friend but my dad is not available, and I do not have brother to let him take me to my friend. So, in this case the only thing that I can do is to wait until my dad become available, and most the time I do not go to my friend in the same time that she asked me to visit her.

Third, Saudi women need to drive in emergency cases. For example, one day my little sister broke her band and she began crying as loud as she could. From the pain, however, my mom and I were the only adult in our house, we tried to call my dad but his phone was not available. So we tried to call my uncle but he did not answer to. It was a hard day my mom and me did not know what to do and my sister could not hold the pain. So, my mom carried my sister by her own to the hospital where is it far way from my home.

As a result, Saudi women have the right to drive. There is no reasonable reason that prevent Saudi women from driving. Why it is allowed in the other countries to let women drive but not in Saudi Arabia? [*sic*]

Next week, I handed back the students' essays. As I was giving Fadia her essay, I asked her if she thought that any of her ideas in the essay were a result of the group discussion. She pointed to the first body paragraph in which she had written, "First of all, instead of the drivers Saudi women can drive their own cars. No one prefer to let other use his/her own things." She then added that she remembered how when she discussed the issue with her female friends, they all agreed that women back home have their own cars but cannot drive. She added a phrase that stuck in my head: "that is painful."

Fadia's essay demonstrates her ability to analyze and synthesize the ideas discussed in her group and to present them in an organized way. She also seems to exhibit a move towards early multiplicity where she considers her peers a legitimate source of knowledge with respect to processes like small-group discussions.

Other Students

In this section, I focus on three female Saudi graduate students, Hana, Basma, and Salma, to show how they demonstrate concerns about perfection and peer authorship when learning English writing. Although Hana, Basma, and Salma, like Fadia, are Saudi females, they have different perceptions of their peers and how to behave around them.

Elizabeth Flynn says that "feminist research and theory emphasize that males and females differ in their developmental processes and in their interactions with others" (551). She also refers to Belenky et al.'s suggestions that "[w]omen and men have different conceptions of self and different modes of interaction with others as a result of their different experiences" (552).

Belenky et al. say that the basic assumptions women make about the origins of knowledge, truth, and reality shape the way they perceive themselves and the ways they interact with the world around them, including teaching and learning. They also add that those assumptions affect women's perceptions of how much control they have over life events. (Belenky et al.), which means "women's ways of knowing are intertwined with self-concept" (Hofer and Pintrich, "The Development of Epistemological Theories" 94).

Because in the KSA women are constantly under men's authority and supervision, (as clearly expressed by Basma in the previous chapter), they are constantly aware of their own

behaviors. Basma demonstrates that awareness in one of her journals: “We have to make our family proud of us... I will try to make them proud of me. It will reduce the pain of being far away from them. I always think that I have to be really good to make them happy.”

When women are under scrutiny, they run a much greater risk by making a mistake. That translates naturally to writing. Hana and Basma assume that whatever they write has to be right and correct; otherwise they refrain from writing. Hana, for instance, expects that whatever she writes could and should be right immediately. When asked what worries her the most about writing, she said, “I always worry that the sentence is not well-structured. For instance, if I have a good idea, I stay worried that if I used the wrong verb tense. That leads to the lost of a good idea.” Even when I drew her attention to the fact that worrying about local issues at an early stage could inhibit her from generating new ideas, she stayed committed to local issues and said, “Yes, sometimes. I like to use the right tense. I always worry that the sentence is not well-structured... I don’t want to risk the wrong tense, I lose the good ideas. And because of that many times I change the idea.”

The Saudi female students’ concern to project a good image by perfecting their writing slows them down during the early stages of writing. The strain that Hana goes through is similar to what Bruce and Bnett describe in “ESL Students Share Their Writing Center Experiences” when talking about the struggle that ESL students go through in their writing and the reasons why they go to WCs. He quotes one of the students as saying, “Whenever I start a writing assignment, I have this difficulty of arranging my ideas, putting my main topic, supporting what I wanted to say. Really, I didn’t have that ability to write a good writing” (151). Hana also says,

I cannot write freely because I have to start with the introduction... I always start well and then go into another venue and then I get lost.I end up with a totally different idea than what I started with. Or I end up not serving the first idea well, even if the second idea ended up excellent, looks coherent with the rest of the writing [*sic*].

The field notes that I took during timed writing towards the end of the first term reveal that Hana is not yet ready to think on paper. After receiving the prompt, Hana read it over several times. Then she wrote the title and read it several times, with her pen moving back and forth over the title. Because she was right in front of me, I could see her lips moving and could hear her whispering to herself. She would write two lines, stop, think, erase, and restart. In my field notes, I wrote, “Hana is on her second page, yet she goes back and rereads the prompt. She spends more time reading than writing. Hana is in the middle of the second paragraph on p. 2, rereads, stops, rereads what she has written, and then writes two more sentences.”

In addition to being concerned about producing a correct product in class, Hana also worried about writing perfect journals. Although I repeatedly explained to the students that the purpose of writing journals is to increase fluency, and that spelling and grammatical mistakes are okay, Hana refused to turn in imperfect journals. All of her journals were well-developed and had no spelling mistakes. During both terms, students were required to turn in four journals every Thursday. On the fifth Thursday in the second term, and for the first time, Hana and Basma did not turn in their journals. When I asked them why, Hana said they wanted their journals to be perfect, that they had written the first draft but had not yet corrected the spelling and grammatical mistakes. At that time, Hana had been in the VTCLI three terms, during which she was always required to write several journals weekly. In my classes, I repeatedly told the students, both orally and in writing, not to worry about grammar since the goal in writing

journals is fluency. Yet Hana still felt that she had to write the four weekly journals the same way she wrote her essays.

Basma, like Hana and Fadia, was highly concerned with perfection. When I asked her what makes good writing, she answered, “It should be perfect.” (During the first interview alone, Basma mentioned the word “perfect” seven times.) I asked her to explain what exactly she meant by perfect. She said,

I feel that for each paragraph I need a perfect hook to attract the reader...I have difficulties with them. I want something perfect..., I want the structure of sentence to be perfect, and sometimes I try to come up with a variety. I either make it perfect, either I am creative and inventive or I don't write from the beginning... it should be grammatical correct [*sic*].

Basma's response indicates two important things: first, her dualist thinking when saying, “I either make it perfect, either I am creative and inventive or I don't write from the beginning”; second, her impression that she must be perfect at early stages: “I need a perfect hook... it should be grammatical correct.” I told her not to worry about grammatical mistakes when writing the first drafts, because at that stage what matters is the idea. Her answer was:

Basma: So the ideas are what matter? I have ideas. So that is what matters? So if I have that is that good or not?”

Maggie: You have what it takes to write a good essay. You have the most important thing: the ideas.

Basma: So I should let it out even if it is not perfect?

Maggie: Absolutely.

Like the other female Saudi students, Salma also expects herself to be perfect. Like Kareem, as we will later see, she considers what her friends tell her about college work. In the first interview, when I asked her how important she thinks writing is for her college years, she answered, “I need to be perfect in writing so I can write a thesis. Plus studying in the States is not easy. One of my friends told me that if my GPA gets lower than three I will be expelled. I have to be perfect.”

Although cultures are mainly categorized as either collective or individualistic, inside each person “there is a constant struggle between the collectivist and individualist elements” (Triandis xiv). People usually solve this conflict by choosing from their culture or what Triandis call the “tool kit” to meet their interpersonal challenges. Hana’s behavior is a clear demonstration of that struggle when working in groups.

During group work, Fadia was not the only female whose culture affected her responses to questions. Hana’s responses were influenced by culture, too, but for different reasons. Hana acted as a harmony preserver and was careful about criticizing others. Although Hana demonstrated a more nuanced mentality, her creativity suffered from interference by her perception of her culture’s authority. Hana clearly prioritized her cultural duties over her educational gains—she was especially concerned with group conformity. When talking about her experience working in groups, Hana said, “Sometimes I put my idea aside and use theirs, although sometimes my idea would be stronger. But in order to preserve the idea of group work I adopt their ideas.” In response, I asked her, “Why don’t you present your idea?” She answered, “I feel that my idea is very hard. They will think that I had overdone it (laughing), or they might

look at me as if they are saying ‘Come on, Hana, that’s too hard’ (laughing).” Hana’s ability to benefit from group work was limited by her consciousness of what others thought of her and her duty to maintain social harmony. As a result, she refrained from fully expressing herself and contributing to the group and, in return, involuntarily limited the benefits that she could receive from the diversity of opinions provided during group work.

Hana’s behavior in group work was also influenced by her age. At twenty-three years old, she was one of the oldest students in class (along with Basma and Hassan). Most of the other students were twenty-one or under. Hana seemed to feel torn between avoiding embarrassing younger students and wanting to take care of them. Her age-related compassion and empathy stood in the way of her creativity. Unlike most classes in which students are roughly the same age, classes of only ESL students often vary widely in age because they are placed according to their language proficiency. To avoid creating the difficulties that Hana faced, ESL students who come from collective cultures like the KSA will be better served if they are grouped not only according to their linguistic level—beginning, intermediate, advanced—but also with other students of the same age group.

Like Fadia, Hana, whether in whole-class or small-group discussions, participated actively and always supported her group members by translating Arabic words when needed, and provided extensive written feedback to her peers. Hana took full advantage of her participation in group activities. When I asked her about the benefit she sees in group work, she said,

It makes a difference. I always get the idea. When I speak with a partner the idea gets matured. Sometimes I add more to it. It is very good; when I speak with them I get to know how the whole essay will turn up to be. But when I am writing alone, I know only

the main idea, but when talking to them I get to know what will be in the first paragraph and the second paragraph. It is easier. .. It helps me develop my ideas... I might have had the ideas before the discussion but during the discussion I get the details.

During different conversations with Hana, she mentioned that coming up with details is the most difficult thing for her. Group work seems to help her overcome that obstacle. What helps Hana further benefit from group work is her willingness to work with students of the opposite sex and from different nationalities. When I asked Hana in the first interview whether she minded working with male students of different nationalities, she said, “Not at all. Last term all my classmates were Chinese male students. I was the only female in class. So I have been forced to learn how to deal with them.”

Yet, in the first term, Hana used to always sit with Fadia on the first right row and converse in Arabic even when repeatedly asked to switch to English. During the second term, when her sister Basma joined our class, they sat next to each other in the front left row throughout the term. Hana’s group-work behavior is affected by her cultural beliefs. Coming from a conservative culture, she seems to feel it is not appropriate to work with a male student if a female student is available. Since all the female students were Saudis in the second term, Hana could not resist switching to her native language during most of the group activities, like all the other Saudi and Chinese students.

Basma also recognized the benefit of group work, as long as it was with female students:

For instance if I went overboard the idea does not fit or not related to the point or, but maybe you should take this effect, they tell me no, but maybe you should take it. They help me stayed focused so always to look the things that you don’t see but the outsiders

can see. And once you say what you want they will tell you that this is related or not, so you give it a second look and see that there are right [*sic*].

Similar to her positive attitude to group work is her attitude towards whole-class brainstorming. Basma confirms that she benefits from brainstorming and from working in groups.

Unlike Fadia, Basma is almost always willing to speak and contribute to whole-class discussions. Towards the end of the second term, Dr. Morgan, one of the VTCLI teachers who had previously had Basma in a writing class, observed my class during a whole-class discussion. During that class, students brainstormed for their last PW essay. When I met with Dr. Morgan to learn about her impression, she started by referring to Basma's role. She said,

[Basma] very much you know just identified with your role as an authority and is excited to play that role in her small group there. So I thought that was really interesting. And the other three Saudi women were very content to have her be the queen and they were all content to take that role. And I noticed that the women did not interact with the men very much. Now there was one time umm, maybe two, when they gave men advice. I think that was Basma who did that. And maybe one or two.

Basma seems to be redefining the nature of authority from external to internal. Her discovery of her personal inner authority is giving her "a sense of voice" (Belenky et al. 68). That authority could stem not only from her age, but also from the confidence of having been accepted to college a couple of weeks before. When they are admitted to college, which is the main reason for being in the US and in the VTLCI, Saudi students are motivated and empowered.

Salma, another Saudi female graduate student, specifically and clearly attributed the discovery of many of her ideas to her classmates: “When we participate together, I discover ideas that would help me. Some ideas may be the main ideas of my essay.” Patricia Bizzell talks about how the pluralism which Perry calls for exposes the students to new perspectives that encourage them to compare their beliefs with those of “the others” (304). In the case of the Saudi students, “the others” represent the other sex when the female and male students are together in the same class the first time and hear what the other sex thinks. Salma is fascinated by the ideas of the male Saudi students. She specifically elaborates on her experience and the benefit of learning writing side by side with her male Saudi counterparts, saying,

Sometimes I discover that the others have great ideas, especially the boys. They are creative, in the actual writing they may not be so impressive but their ideas are create. As for us girls, our ideas are limited maybe because we do not go out as much as they do; we do not mix up with others like the boys in Saudi Arabia...when you discuss with boys you finds some ideas that are totally different. for instance we in Saudi Arabia, whenever we discuss with someone for sure they are all girls, so when I discuss some ideas with girls, I get ideas that are close and similar for sure for they are from the same perspective. But when I talk with boys, especially here, I see that their ideas are very much different. I usually do not get convinced easily by the boy’s perspectives, but here I like many of their convincing ideas. I have recently started to be convinced by their ideas. They are truly convincing. That helps a lot in writing. I can take some of their ideas and add them to my essay. Sometimes I take their ideas and refute them [*sic*].

Maggie: Do you mean boys as Saudi boys or are you referring to all the boys in class, the Chinese boys as well?

Salma : Umm, Saudis in specific. Umm, so the idea of editing, debating and chatting is very effective even when they tell me that I have mistakes in some places, you need to add something in a certain place, that feedback is very helpful to me. Sometimes they see things that I did not really focused on. They draw my attention to things that I missed. That is helpful to me and to the reader [*sic*].

Again, Salma's answer demonstrates confidence not only in her peers' input but also in herself. She is less concerned about her imperfect image than about doing the right thing.

All the female Saudi students expressed how much they value their peers' input. During peer editing, all four of them gave, received, and implemented their peers' written feedback. Because they did not take notes during whole class discussions and group work, though, they did not fully benefit from their peers. There are several reasons for their actions. They are not used to group and whole-class activities, especially with the opposite sex, and they are not used to taking notes. In all their classes in the KSA, including their English writing classes, they simply wrote down what the teacher wrote on the board or what they had memorized. The other reason is their concern for perfection. If they take notes, they may not have the correct spelling, or fully capture what their peers say. Additionally, coming from an oral culture, they may assume that they will remember what their peers say. However, capturing discussions in writing would allow them to profit more fully from those new class activities.

Kareem

“Culture influences whether learners are inhibited or not, whether and how much they practice and so on” (Finkbeiner 137).

While the Saudi culture does not inhibit male students from expressing their opinions, it does not prepare them to express those opinions in writing. Because the Saudi male students are also unaccustomed to peer work, they fail to take advantage of the benefits of the group work and whole-class discussions that take place in a US writing classroom. As a result, the extra oral power the male students have loses its significance because they do not transfer it to writing.

My data analysis shows that the male students value their male and female peers' authority, but because they do not give or take written feedback seriously, they fail to benefit from their peers' contributions to improve their critical thinking and writing process. Although they value their peers' input, they consider that their culture's authority comes first. Even if their peers make a reasonable and convincing argument, if that argument contradicts their cultural values and norms, they are reluctant to adopt that argument.

In the following section, I take a closer look at how Kareem is more influenced by friends and beliefs outside the academic culture than by the people participating in the academic culture. I examine how Kareem responded to whole-class activities, group work, and editing sessions. I then focus on Kareem's argumentative essay about women driving in Saudi Arabia, which he wrote towards the end of term after a whole-class discussion, and his comments about that essay during the second interview. After analyzing Kareem's response to his peers' authority, I consider how other male students interacted and responded to their peers' input.

Peers as Representatives of Home Culture

Unlike the cultural norm for the Saudi females, which is to be perfect and obedient both in school and in society, the cultural norm for the Saudi males is to blend in and to have a voice. Unfortunately, the male Saudi students do not take advantage of the practices that would help

them make their voice clear and comprehensible. Instead of targeting perfection and taking their time while writing in class, the male students do not give writing their best. In the first few timed writings, which were over 45 minutes, Kareem finished in about 30 minutes, submitted his paper, and put his head on the desk as if taking a nap. Even when I advised him to give his paper a second look since he had the time, he would not do so.

When the sexes are together in one class, these different cultural expectations become visible to students and teachers. During the interviews, the Saudi students articulated major differences in the male and female curriculum in the KSA, even though even both male and female students supposedly have the same curriculum. While female students take writing classes through the first year of high school, the male students stop learning writing after elementary school, and their teachers are not as strict as those in the female sectors.

In the previous chapter, Kareem mentioned repeatedly how he trusts his friends' advice about academic issues, especially those related to learning writing. In this chapter, I take a closer look at how Kareem perceived his friends' authority within the writing classroom. Like Fadia, Kareem values his peers' opinions but failed to take full advantage of their input because he did not take notes during small-group or whole-class activities. Unlike Fadia, Kareem is not highly concerned with perfection nor does he give or take written input seriously during peer editing.

Outside the writing classroom, Kareem seemed to highly value his friends' opinions, an attitude he demonstrate by saying, "A friend of mine told me that all I need is the language of the field I will be studying. All I will need is the terminology of engineering, my future field. I am scientific. I don't need linguistics." Yet, in the same interview, Kareem expresses how much he

values his friends' linguistic input. When I asked how much time he spends on homework, he said,

It depends. When I have an essay to write, I take a very long time. I had hard time to transform the paragraph into a whole essay. In speaking I make mistakes, but my friends sometimes correct for me, sometimes they don't. Like when I used to say 'it is mean,' but one of my friend drew my attention that the right way of saying it is 'it means'.

Kareem seems to highly value both his peers' input on what he studies and their linguistic feedback. He considers them a valuable source of knowledge that can contribute to his education.

Group Work and Editing

Culture plays a significant role in the way Saudi students interact among themselves and with the other sex. Male students avoid eye contact and exhibit greater politeness and thoughtfulness when dealing with the female students. For instance, while discussing the novel questions, Salma and Ying (a male Chinese student) were talking and looking at each other. Kareem, on the other hand, while working with Hana, kept his eyes glued to the paper. It seems that even when he is conscious about what is beneficial, right, and effective in the new environment, he is automatically drawn back to what he was used to—respecting and staying at a distance from the Saudi females.

Kareem's behavior in group discussions is incongruent with Shehadeh's findings when looking at the gender differences among EFL students during group work. Shehadeh found that male students "have greater and better opportunities to communicate, promote their productive skills, and progress than females" (260).

Although Kareem appreciated his peers' ideas during discussions, he was hesitant to write or to take their written feedback during peer editing. At the end of the first class, during which students were giving feedback to each other, Kareem asked me if he should consider his peers' feedback. When I asked him why not, he, like Fadia, said that he does not trust that his peers can contribute to his learning of writing.

Topping advises writing teachers to provide their students with “guidelines, checklists, or other tangible scaffolding. Some kind of written and/other pictorial reminders or clues to the process to be followed” (25). At the end of every process writing, I gave students a checklist designed to help them peer edit the assigned essay. My observations during the peer-editing sessions revealed that while editing each other's essays and using those checklists, male students were very comfortable filling in the forms and checklists that I provided, but were reluctant to add any extra information. Kareem, like all the other students, seemed comfortable writing when prompted to write in a workbook, and when he had explicit directions and spaces in which to write. When asked to take notes or respond to one another's papers, he clearly showed hesitation and resistance about where and what to write. The peer feedback form worked very well for the students, as it specifically prompted them with questions about peers' papers, focusing first on global issues and then on local issues.

Male and female students, being new to process pedagogy, referred to the peer-editing workshops as “correcting papers.” The male students were most comfortable with the checklists because they had not taken writing courses in high school, and the checklists may have been similar to the writing they did when responding to objective questions (yes/no and fill in the blank formats). The other reason could be that they are not sure about spelling, a concern obviated when they only had to check off items on a list.

In his end-of-year reflection, Kareem writes that the most interesting activity was “process writing, because process writing is very helpful to know my mistakes [*sic*].” As to the question about “the writing practice you think is unnecessary,” Kareem writes, “[T]ime writing is a good way to learn but it shouldn’t be graded because writing is a process [*sic*].” Kareem clearly has a voice and uses it to demonstrate an authority about what should and should not be graded. While Fadia and the other female students are consumed with perfection, Kareem is liberated to take part in the logistics, a role given only to men in KSA.

Kareem prefers giving oral feedback to receiving it. Unlike the female students, who came prepared with their drafts, Kareem rarely came to class with the required draft, except the final draft of the last essay of the term, which he planned to include in his portfolio. It is not that he does not consider his peers a source of knowledge when learning writing, but that he is convinced that learning writing is not essential for his future studies.

Whole-class Discussions

During class discussion, students are exposed to their peers’ input, which could later become part of their essays. To apply this input to their essays, however, students must consider their peers’ opinion as authorial. To assist students to display critical thinking in their writing, Paul Stapleton, who writes about the critical thinking of Japanese students, recommends that L2 teachers use familiar topics related to their students’ culture instead of blindly following the topics discussed in L1 writing classrooms. His arguments were borne out by both Saudi and Chinese students in my study. All students, Saudi and Chinese, male and female, are usually actively engaged during whole class discussions, especially when the topics involve cultural experience. They seem to be sincerely interested in learning from one another about proverbs, body language, and other customs. In response to the prompt, “the activity that you loved the

most and would like to do more,” Kareem wrote, “speaking class argument because it is help students to form their ideas.” About the most interesting writing practice, he wrote, “the brainstorming. It is very useful to brainstorm our ideas in the class where we can discuss our ideas with friends and classmate. So, we can get help from our friends to develop our points and ideas [*sic*].”

Mary, the teacher who was assigned to mentor Kareem after he was put on probation, thinks that what slows the Saudi students in general and Kareem in particular is that “they are accustomed to paying attention to each other.” Mary’s comment is incongruent with what Kareem says about whether or not he benefits from whole class-discussions: “Most of my essay I wrote after we discuss the topics in class. It helps me a lot to get the ideas to develop, and it also it helps you to think about the idea we argue. Some ideas are repetitive that makes me take aaaaa like I know what the good ideas are and how to tie them.”

During the heated side debate that took place between Kareem, Basma, and Hana about women driving in the KSA, Kareem was orally able to clearly articulate his opinion about women’s driving. He claimed that the country is not yet ready for women to drive. The reason he gave was that the country does not yet have policewomen to handle the cases of the Saudi women who commit traffic violations. For that week, I asked the students to write in class an argumentative essay in which they argued for or against the idea of women driving. (I will analyze Kareem’s essay later in this chapter).

From students’ writing on the women’s driving issue, I collected the following three unsupported claims that were included in Majed’s essay (the only student who wrote against

women's driving). Using data show, I projected on the board the following three unsupported claims:

Claim #1: If women are allowed to drive, the number of cars on the streets will increase drastically and traffic will be a big problem.

Claim #2: In Saudi Arabia most people die from car accidents. Men drive very fast. The government tried many times to put speed limit but men do not care about that. The most accidents in my country are from the young guys. So, if women drive, their lives will be in danger.

Claim #3: It depends on the government if Saudi women are allowed to drive or not.

As usual, Kareem was quick to participate orally in responding to all three unsupported claims. His response to the first claim was, "There are no statistics to prove these ideas. Also, they are assuming women are not traveling now. They are going everywhere." To the second claim and like everyone in the class, he laughed. To the third claim, his answer simply was, "Maybe it is culture that government will decide."

After Kareem's short answer, I heard lots of "yes" and saw many heads nodding and affirming his comment. Their verbal and nonverbal quick responses indicated the imperative and crucial role of culture in their lives and in their views. Even if the Saudi students have the knowledge about certain actions and procedures, they tend to strongly adhere to what their cultural norms dictate.

Writing Sample

In this section, I analyze Kareem’s argumentative essay about women driving in the KSA, and show how his essay, although it suffers from some organizational problems, demonstrates his strong oral skills as well as his critical thinking abilities.

In his essay, Kareem’s oral communication strategies clearly take the place of “the careful and economical expression of thought valued in academy literacy” *Multilingual Strategies* 40). In his essay, Kareem concentrates on presenting his argument without paying much attention to the structure. This is not uncommon among multilingual writers, whom Canagarajah describes as more focused “on achieving their interests in a functionalist sense.... they are more focused on their objectives of communication, and not on correctness” (42).

What is surprising in Kareem’s argumentative essay is the position he takes. Although when the topic was first brought up in class, Kareem took a strong position against women driving, when asked to write about the issue, he supported women driving. It seems that Kareem is conscious of my position on the issue, and consequently thought that his grades would suffer if he disagreed with me. His reversal is congruent with Gergits and Schramer’s belief that students’ perception of teachers’ authority and their fear of getting poor grades influence the choices they make.

Kareem's scratched outline on the prompt:

Yes,

No employee from outside KSA

Make it easier for man

Girls have the right to drive

No,

Women not prepared

Cultural issues

Crowd

Kareem's essay:

Most of countries allow women to drive except Saudi Arabia. There is a big debate about allowing women to drive. Although some people think that women should not drive for three reasons, some people refute their points, I think women should drive in Saudi Arabia "K.S.A."

First, there are some people think that women should not allowed to drive in K.S.A. for three reasons. Women are not ready to drive (not prepared). Next reason is our culture not allow women to drive and them say the man is responsible to take care of the women. Last reason is crowd. The roads and the parking design on old statistics so there are no place for women to drive.

Second, there are some people think that women should allowed to drive in K.S.A. they have three points to refute the reasons about women should not drive in K.S.A. first reason is if the womens are not prepared to drive we must open driving schools. Next point, the culture is our idea and we can change it, if half of our community "women" and some mens think that women should drive think why not. There is no religion or government lows mention women driving. The third point, crowed we have

more than 3 million drivers and some of them are bad people and our Islamic law not allow women to go with stranger man, we can replace them with the women driving.

Three, in my personal opinion I think women should allow driving for those reasons. First men are very tired because they do every thin. Second women have the right to drive.

In conclusion, there are a huge issue about women's driving. I believe that women should drive in K.S.A. women will drive sooner or later [*sic*].

Even though in his essay, Kareem shows some difficulty in properly organizing his argument, he displays his ability to think critically, analyze, and synthesize new perspectives. His essay, in which he takes a new position supporting women driving in the KSA, demonstrates what he has heard in class during the side conversations and class discussions.

His switch in position did not last long, though. A couple of weeks later, Kareem displayed two different positions simultaneously: a return to his prior position and a state of confusion. During the second interview towards the end of the term, Kareem went back to his first position in arguing against women driving. A week later, during the second interview, I asked Kareem how he sees himself developing as a writer:

Kareem: Sometimes like when the essay we wrote about women's issue and driving in S.A., I was maybe against my paper, but I don't have some strong points. So I go against myself because I have some points, so I said to myself: why I am going against my point?" because I don't have strong points so I go with the ideas that have strong reasons. So, I wrote an essay with good examples because this is a proof. I wrote that I was with

women's driving but in reality I am against it to happen now. (We both laughed). [It can happen] after many years to prepare women and the streets it is possible [*sic*].

Maggie: In your essay and after discussing the topic in class, has anything changed in your opinion?

Kareem: Of course.

Maggie: Like...?

Kareem: I think it is possible and normal to let women driving.

[We both laughed].

Kareem's response, which combines both the teacher's and peers' authority, is a demonstration of his cultural perspective. Although one can at first assume that he's either confused or still at the dualistic position, when keeping cultural influence in perspective, one can easily see his appropriation of his culture. A few years after the publication of his first study, Perry made significant changes to his original model, in part to accommodate the "cultural cues" of the international students. When talking about the first-generation Asian-American college students, Perry says that those students

often indicate a complexity of thought consistent with contextual relativism and at the same time use phrases of respect and adherence to learned authorities that have been associated with more dualistic or early multiplistic forms of thinking. In this case, such students are not dualistic, but are reflecting appropriate cultural perspectives. (xix)

Matsuda et al. may offer an additional explanation for why Kareem switched positions. When talking about the challenges of L2 writing, Matsuda et al. say that "They enjoy preferred

membership in specific communities, while their intent to join new communities is also often challenged. For many, their ability to shuttle between communities is achieved through intense struggle” (161). Kareem is clearly torn between his preferred membership in his Saudi community and the new community he is joining. He is in a transitional phase where he is unable to decide whether to give authority to his peers’ opinions or stick to his old convictions, or to find a middle ground. As a Saudi male, Kareem demonstrates in his response the culture which provided him with “the value, beliefs, and associated convictions” (Clark and Ivanic 1997 68). He is applying those convictions in the classroom context. But at the same time, “the product-oriented final-examination system” in the VTLCI, which requires that his paper will be graded by unknown instructors, “pressures [him] to adopt the safe approach of representing the dominant notions of the self in the academic context.” (Canagarajah, *Critical Academic Writing* 110). Kareem is finding his independent voice for himself, “rather than being silenced, accommodated, or rejected by the dominant discourse” (116).

His concerns about his grade led him to seek to make the right impression on the unknown teacher who will be correcting his paper, which might end up in his portfolio. Clark and Ivanic say that “writing is a political act in which a writer aligns him/her self with ideological positions available in the socio-cultural context, and takes up a position within the relations of power in that context” (158). That alignment is especially necessary for students who mostly aim at creating good impressions in the eyes of their teachers, even if their values do not align with those of their teachers. To do so, students have to predict what their teachers value “in order to appear to ‘belong’ to the same club’. Then they position themselves in this minefield as best they can” (144). The authors add that in their academic writing, students

often find themselves attempting to inhabit subject positions with which they do not really identify, or feel ambivalent about. This can sometimes involve some quite deliberate deception, when a writer tries to appear to be the sort of person they are not. Our tutorial work with students has led us to believe that this is one of the reasons why writers get ‘stuck’ with writing: subconsciously they are worried as much about the impression they are giving of themselves as they are about the subject-matter they are writing about. (144)

Another explanation for Kareem’s response might be that he is not completely resisting the female voice (including his teacher). That act itself could be evidence of critical thinking. Edwin Nevis points out that resistance is a creative way that enables people to avoid expected damage to their integrity (143).

Linguistic as well as cultural factors may explain Kareem’s new position, which may reflect his limited vocabulary, not a lack of critical thinking skills. It is clear in the previous dialogue that he can think critically but faces two challenges: he not only struggles to accommodate two different cultures, but also lacks the vocabulary necessary to support and develop his original position.

His attempt to switch positions may itself serve as evidence of Kareem’s ability to think critically. Although writing teachers value class discussions, what they grade at the end is the written portion. Kareem was clearly aware of that. He knew that the essay would be graded. His ability to pass the level depends on the essay grade, not on what he personally thought. He discerned what he needed to do, and weighed his perspectives and the teacher’s perspective, which he knew was to support women driving. Accordingly, he solved his problem by doing

what he assumed he needed to do, writing an essay in support of women driving. His action supports the notion that classroom writing is performative. As Canagarajah explains, “multilinguals focus more on achieving their interests in a functionalist sense In other words, they are more focused on their objectives of communication, and not on correctness (“Multilingual Strategies” 42). Canagarajah also says that “[w]riting is not just constitutive, it is also performative. We don’t write only to construct a rule-governed text. . . . we write in order to perform important social acts. We write to achieve specific interests, represent our preferred values and identities, and fulfill diverse needs” (*The Place of World Englishes* 602). Kareem’s writing what helps him move on without having to change his cultural beliefs exemplifies Canagarajah’s description.

When critiquing the discourses of critical pedagogy, Elizabeth Ellsworth says, “What they/we say, to whom, in what context, depending on the energy they/we have for the struggle on a particular day, is the result of conscious and unconscious assessments of the power relations and safety of the situation” (313). Kareem is clearly aware of the power relation, which is not in his favor, and wants to secure his transition to college by passing the level.

Getting college admission, a degree, and then going back to the KSA are the main motivations for Kareem as well as all the other Saudi students during their study of English, not “the mastery of form or cognitive control over the medium” (Canagarajah “Multilingual Strategies 34). Their priorities accord with Slimani-Rolls’ observation that “[p]articipants bring to the classroom their own relationships and expectations about how to achieve learning for themselves. Their agendas color automatically the cognitive and socio-affective climate which underlies their interactional moves and inevitably influences classroom events” (231).

In addition, the topic of women driving in the KSA is culturally sensitive. As I was drafting this chapter, the issue of Saudi women's driving was repeatedly in the news. Abdullah Al-Shihri writes on October 25, in the AP, "Saudi Arabia Warns Online Backers of Women Drivers." Al-Shihri explains that many Saudi women in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, had planned to drive on October 26, 2013. On October 25, the Saudi Interior Ministry spokesman issued a threat not only to those women who attempt to drive, but also to those online supporters of women driving. As a Saudi myself, I was not surprised by the reaction from the Minister. Kareem, as a Saudi, would also be aware of the probable official reaction. As a student benefiting from the government scholarship program, he did not want to take any risks. That does not mean that Kareem does not have critical thinking skills, but that culture is superior to learning language and in turn affects how he displays his critical thinking.

Other Students

The other Saudi male students that I focus on in the following section are Tarik, Majed, and Hassan. All of them repeatedly exhibit how they were influenced by what their out-of-class friends told them about learning English. As a result, the three of them agree about the beliefs their friends hold on the relevance of learning writing as well as on issues related to writing practices.

Contrary to Kareem's positive perception of his peers' input and willingness to adopt their ideas, Tarik holds a negative attitude and is unwilling or unable to incorporate the views of his peers. At two different times in the first interview, Tarik mentioned different opinions about group work. Although early on in the first interview, he said that he values group work, later he indicated his suspicion about its usefulness. When I advised him to take in-class group work

seriously, he said that he does not really like to work in groups because others' ideas might confuse him, since he does not have the language to articulate what others say. He added, "I think that alone I can find more ideas than with a group. Others' ideas differs from my own. Friends help in correcting my mistakes." When questioned, he elaborated on his doubts:

Maggie: Don't you feel that their ideas might be interesting?

Tarik: Those ideas will confuse me. Others' ideas differ from my own ideas.

Maggie: Don't you think that those ideas might benefit you?

Tarik: He might have an idea with its own dimensions. If I take the idea I will strangle myself (I will be trapped.)

Maggie: What do you mean?

Tarik: He has an idea and he knows how to develop that idea. He will be able to develop it. As for me, maybe I don't want to develop it the same way, or maybe I won't be able to develop it in the first place. I always like to invent my own idea because that is the only way to be creative.

It is not that Tarik does not value his peers' opinions, but his linguistic limitations prevent him from taking advantage of his peers' contributions. He does his best, though, to improve his linguistic abilities. During the term, Tarik repeatedly referred to how friends from different nationalities, especially English native speakers, enrich his vocabulary, which he needs for writing.

Hassan, like Kareem, values his peers' ideas but is suspicious about small-group discussions that are not under the teacher's supervision. In the second interview, he writes,

“Brainstorming as a whole class is very useful for me, but with peers it is not useful. I don’t prefer peer because the other student is like me. He does not teach me.” (Since I held a group interview with Hassan and his wife, while I was interviewing his wife, he was responding in writing to the list of questions included in the second interview.) Hassan does not really give authority to his peers and considers them equal to him, in part because he is used to seeing the teacher as the only authority in class. When I asked him why he does not take notes and why he thinks the other male students do not either, he said that they would write only what the teacher writes on the board.

Like Hassan, Majed found whole-class discussions useful, but did not take notes. He explains, “Of course, whole class discussion helps. Ahhhh I see other’s point of view and mine and the point of view of my colleagues for examples and see what is common and what is correct and something like that.”

Like Kareem’s, Majed’s writing indicated a lack of vocabulary, not a lack of critical thinking. That was clear during the teacher-student conference, during which Majed wanted help with the argumentative essay about who should control what we eat—the government or the family. When I told him that he always takes the side of the government, Majed laughed and said, “I am not totally with them, but that is what I can talk about easily because that is what we hear about.” Majed’s response clearly indicates his awareness of the presence of multiple options, including the less popular ones, but he is unable to articulate that opinion because he lacks the adequate exposure that would provide him with the required vocabulary.

Contrary to Kareem’s belief about the irrelevance of learning writing, Majed believes that writing is important for college. When asked how important he thinks writing is for his future

college life, he said, “I think it is very important. Every time I talk to a friend he tells me about research and writing research.”

Conclusion

Both Saudi males and females seem to be at the late multiplicity stage in relation to how they perceive their peers. They consider their peers a legitimate source of knowledge in the form of their opinions, input, and their out-of-class and in-class contributions. Both Fadia and Kareem used the group discussions to develop their ideas in writing. Fadia progressed faster than Kareem but did not necessarily become a better thinker. Part of her progression reflects the cultural divide: she had a better background in writing and was expected to meet higher standards. The difference between Fadia and Kareem is that Fadia is better organized.

Fadia and the other female Saudi students demonstrate more seriousness and have higher self-expectations; they usually meet the deadlines and come to class prepared. As a result, they are able to benefit from their peers’ input. The female students were also more serious about giving and receiving their peers’ input. Because Saudi students sit on different aisles, the male students do not benefit greatly from peer-editing workshops, as they partner with other males who don’t always come prepared and don’t give written feedback.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter is divided into four sections: a) a summary of the study, b) responses to the research questions, c) implications for teaching and learning, and d) implications and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

When joining universities in the US, Saudi students face two major problems: learning English and learning how to function in a new educational system that incorporates critical thinking. Contrary to their previous experience in an educational system that was sex-segregated and based on rote memorization of religious texts, in US universities, Saudi students are placed in a mixed-sex environment and expected to demonstrate critical thinking by questioning and judging the validity of ideas in written texts, as well as those of their teachers and peers. Historically, American scholars have studied the intellectual developments of American college students with a focus on their perceptions of authority. Two of these scholars are William Perry, whose study was focused on American male students, and Mary Belenky et al., who focused on American female students. In this study, I applied the frameworks used by both Perry and Belenky et al. to study the intellectual development of male and female Saudi students as influenced by their perception of their teacher's and peers' authority when learning writing at the high intermediate level in the VTLCI in preparation for college admission. In his attempts to identify teachable strategies for multilingual students, Canagarajah investigated the strategies used by an undergraduate female Saudi in her writing ("Codemeshing"). One aspect of his study revealed that "the feedback of the instructor and peers can help students question their choices, think critically about diverse options, assess the effectiveness of their choices, and develop

metacognitive awareness” (401). Canagarajah paves the way for ESL students to develop a critical voice and learn to critically evaluate the different class inputs.

My purpose in this qualitative study was to provide a detailed description of how a male and a female Saudi student respond to their teachers’ and peers’ authority and how any differences affect their development as critical thinkers. I conducted this study mainly to fill the gap in the research related to Saudi students in terms of both critical thinking and sex issues. First, most of the studies conducted on Saudi students’ writing focuses primarily on their writing process, not on their intellectual development. Secondly, most of those studies discuss issues related to either male or female students studying in a sex-segregated environment, as opposed to the co-ed environment at the VTLCI.

My qualitative study took place at the VTLCI in Blacksburg, Virginia from January 2012 to mid-May 2012. Of all ten purposefully selected participants, six female students (Fadia, Majda, Falwa, Salma, Hana, and Bodoor) and four male students (Kareem, Hassan, Tarik, and Majed), I mostly focused my study on two main participants: Kareem and Fadia. Nine of the participants were from the KSA, while one female student, Falwa, was from Kuwait. All students were enrolled full time in the VTLCI. They attended the morning classes from 8:00 a.m. to 12:50 p.m.

Participants in this study had been studying at the VTLCI from one to five terms, yet they were all in the high intermediate level in reading and writing. In the first term, only seven of the students (Kareem, Fadia, Hassan, Majda, Falwa, Salma, and Hana) were part of the study. In the second term, the other three (Basma, Tarik, and Majed) joined the study.

In my study, I used three methods of data collection: interviews with students and teachers, students' writing samples, and teacher-researcher's observations. Following a teacher-researcher method, I was able to get a holistic picture of the Saudi students' interaction and growth in class, in the writing lab, and during tutoring. I was able to get closer to the students and to identify their "characteristics as learners" (Berlin 9), and to have full access to all the artifacts available to teachers, such as the students' writings, exams, and reflections. Being the teacher also helped me get a daily and more detailed picture of how the male and female Saudi students interact with each other in class as well as during breaks. I was also able to investigate my questions and to systematically document students' behaviors, as well as my own reflections.

To gain a deeper understanding of the Saudi students' literacy backgrounds, beliefs, and attitudes toward writing, studying in a coed environment, and authority, I conducted two interviews with each student participant. The first interview took place at the beginning of the first term, the second interview at the end of the second term. I also interviewed five of the VTLCI teachers who had experience teaching the Saudi students reading and writing skills at different levels. I wanted to learn about their observations of the Saudi students' reaction to teachers' authority as well as to each other's authority, especially when working with the opposite sex.

The third and last data collection method I used in this qualitative study was an analysis of some of the students' writing samples. The writing samples were from both terms, mainly from towards the end of each term.

This qualitative case study was completed in five months with a focus on one Saudi male student and one Saudi female student studying reading and writing at the high intermediate level (RW400-450) at VTLCI during the spring term of 2012. The result of this study was presented in Chapters Four and Five. In the following section, I discuss the overall findings of these two chapters in an attempt to answer my research questions.

Response to Research Questions

In this study, I investigated how Saudi students' sex differences affect their perceptions of teacher's and peers' authority, and in turn, how those perceptions affect their development as writers and critical thinkers when learning writing at the high intermediate level at the VTLCI. The primary research questions were as follows: 1) How do sex differences affect the Saudi students' perception of their teachers' and peers' authority? 2) How do Saudi students' perceptions of their teacher's and peers' authority affect their development as writers and critical thinkers when learning in an intensive writing course at the high intermediate level? Secondary research questions included the following:

1. How do Saudi female and male students respond differently to a female teacher's authority?
2. How do Saudi female and male students' differences in responding to a female teacher's authority affect their development as writers and critical thinkers?
3. What are the reasons behind the Saudi students' different perceptions of and responses to their female teachers' authority?
4. How do Saudi students grapple with the issue of diversity among themselves?
5. How do Saudi female and male students respond differently to their peers' authority?

6. How do Saudi female and male students' differences in responding to peers' authority affect their development as writers and critical thinkers?
7. What are the reasons behind the Saudi students' different perceptions and responses to their peers' authority?

During the academic year 2011-2012, I spent three terms observing the behaviors of the Saudi students learning writing at the intermediate level at the VTLCI, in the first term as an observer only, but during the following two terms as teacher-researcher. During those terms, I noticed the same type of student behaviors towards the authority of their teachers as well as their peers. Many of the behaviors the Saudi students exhibited were also exhibited by the Chinese students. In my analysis, though, I focused on only two Saudi students Kareem (male) and Fadia (female) as they exemplify the common behaviors of most of the undergraduate Saudi students. My experience observing and teaching these students lead me to the following conclusions, which, while based on a small study sample, help to give concrete evidence to further the understanding of Saudi students studying in US universities. These findings and conclusions are presented below as the responses to my secondary research questions.

Summary Responses to Secondary Research Questions

Secondary Research Question 1: How do Saudi female and male students respond differently to a female teacher's authority?

The undergraduate female students complied more readily with the teacher's authority and conformed to what she assigned. They wrote the required drafts, writing assignments, and journals, and read and responded to the assigned novel chapters. The graduate female students

were more able to assert their opinions, regardless of whether these opinions matched those of the teacher. The undergraduate male students, on the other hand, did not obey the teacher's instructions. They rarely came prepared to class with the reading or writing assignments. Yet they always initiated oral participation in all class discussions, unlike the female students, who only participated when asked to do so. All students, male and female, valued process writing over the in-class timed writing because when writing several drafts they benefited from teacher feedback, which they called "corrections." All students chose to comply with the teacher's feedback related to local issues and to ignore those that related to higher-level issues

Secondary Research Question 2: How do Saudi female and male students' differences in responding to a female teacher's authority affect their development as writers and critical thinkers?

Despite previous findings suggesting that students may not move from one phase to the next within a single semester (Kloss), towards the end of the second term Fadia was able to progress and display a more assertive voice in her writing and to move from silence to perceived knowledge. Kareem, on the other hand, while starting with a stronger voice when orally participating in class, was unable to demonstrate their critical thinking in writing.

Secondary Research Question 3: What are the reasons behind the Saudi students' different perceptions of and responses to their female teachers' authority?

Three major reasons could explain the difference in students' perception of their teacher's authority: background preparation, motivation, and sex. First, the female students had a better writing background in both Arabic and English than the male students. The male students' case

is not unique; when describing the case of international students, Feris and Hedgcock say, “[S]ome international students may have never read or written more than a page or two in L2 at one time and thus may find the workload of an undergraduate composition or disciplinary course overwhelming” (31). In fact, the Saudi students, especially the males, had not written more than two paragraphs at one time in English. So one can imagine the tremendous overload they faced.

Second, the female students’ positive attitude towards both the teacher and the need to learn has helped them move up, not only in terms of language acquisition, but also in terms of critical thinking. The male students, on the other hand, even though they demonstrated critical thinking skills, were hindered in their progression by a lack of motivation and assumption that learning writing was irrelevant. Third, unlike the case in the KSA where Kareem was taught by male teachers, in my class, he was taught by a female. It is reasonable to assume that Kareem’s cultural background, which gives superiority to males, played a role. It liberated him from the female teacher’s authority. I am a teacher, but I am also a woman. The male students are not used to having Saudi women teaching them. That fact may have created an additional tension for them.

Secondary Research Question 4: How do Saudi students grapple with the issue of diversity among themselves?

The new diversity in the classroom made the Saudi students, especially the females, feel like a minority, a minority not only in the US but also in the US classroom. Group work is new to all the Saudi students, male and female. They all enjoy and appreciate their peers’ opinions, especially during whole-class discussions. While male students initiate and direct whole-class discussions, female students are more hesitant and reflective. During small-group work, all

students are more relaxed when working with peers of the same sex. That is consistent with Canagarajah's observation of multinational male students: "[in the] all-male group with students from Ghana, Pakistan, Bulgaria, and China, the students negotiated their differences better. Their group interactions were more equal and open" (*Critical Academic Writing* 203). While female students were supportive and gave elaborate written feedback, the male students, because they were rarely prepared, gave and took mostly oral feedback. Most of the feedback students gave each other focused on surface-level issues. Students preferred the teacher's feedback over their peers'. Even if their non-Saudi peers made a reasonable and convincing argument, if that argument contradicted their cultural values and norms, all Saudi students, male and female, were reluctant to adopt that argument.

Secondary Research Question 5: How do Saudi female and male students respond differently to their peers' authority?

The female students demonstrated more seriousness and had higher self-expectations; they usually met the deadlines and came to class prepared. As a result, they were able to benefit from their peers' input. However, their over-concern with perfection slowed them down during the early stages of writing. Both male and female students, though, are slowed down by not taking notes during peer workshopping.

Secondary Research Question 6: How do Saudi female and male students' differences in responding to peers' authority affect their development as writers and critical thinkers?

All Saudi students, male and female, join writing classes in the US with little to no previous experience with group work or whole-class discussions in Arabic or English writing

classes. Instead, in Saudi classrooms, the teachers were the sole and ultimate authority who corrected the students' writing. Since composition classes in the US focus on the idea and the process of writing, in the VTCLI, the Saudi students experienced for the first time exposing their ideas in public and being exposed to their peers' input.

In addition to being unfamiliar with working in groups, the Saudi students, especially the female students, are not enthusiastic about working with other Saudi students of the opposite sex. Working with the opposite sex brings with it uncertainty and tension. They are fearful of being critical of each other and of being criticized. That fear results in the lack of trust needed when working in groups.

Secondary Research Question 7: What are the reasons behind the Saudi students' different perceptions and responses to their peers' authority?

In the US, the Saudi students come face-to-face with sex diversity. They not only feel foreign in a new country, but also feel foreign when working with their fellow citizens of the opposite sex in the same classroom. This is especially true for the female students, who were used to being educated in campuses with "poured-concrete walls, iron gates, and padlocked doors," (McEvers) to separate them from men, but in the US, find themselves face-to-face with male colleagues. They dealt with that new diversity through avoidance. Avoidance may be perceived as a lack of trust towards the opposite sex, and it is an obvious possibility that male students from a patriarchal society may distrust their female teacher or their female classmates. However, it is also possible that avoidance instead signifies their fear that a female teacher or female peers might judge them in a different way.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

This study is not a controlled study. It is based on a few individual male and female Saudi students. The individuals I focused on seemed to me representative of other students of the same sex. Contrary to the philosophy of education in the US that is student-centered and encourages reasoning and critical thinking, the philosophy of education in the KSA as the birth place of Islam is teacher-centered, religious, and encourages loyalty and obedience. Recently, the Saudi government started modernizing the education system to meet more efficiently not just the religious, but also the economic and social needs of the country. To achieve this goal, the government has created ambitious programs inside and outside the country, including a very ambitious scholarship program which gives male and female students the opportunity to enroll in major Western universities. In preparation for university, Saudi students join institutions where they learn language skills, including writing that incorporates critical thinking.

Not only teachers in college affect the ethical and intellectual development of college students, but, according to Perry, so do peers. The previous analysis indicates that the male Saudi students think highly of their peers' authority and input about writing. What the previous analysis also shows is that the Saudi students exhibit critical thinking during group discussions. But because they lack the vocabulary and practices necessary to document their thoughts, they fall short when displaying their critical abilities in writing.

The ways in which the Saudi students view their peers' authority affects how they approach writing and critical thinking. Both Fadia and Kareem value and integrate their voices with what they learn from their peers; however, both male and female students are handicapped by not taking notes about what is mentioned in class.

My data analysis shows that the female Saudi students' cultural background actually made them better able to engage productively in peer review, once they accepted the concept of authority that is expected from them in the US. Even though, according to Belenky et al., women have to go through an additional, initial stage of silence, the KSA female students' cultural training prepared them to value their peers' feedback more readily, which in turn accelerated the development of their critical thinking and writing skills. On the other hand, while the Saudi culture does not inhibit males from expressing their opinions, it does not prepare them to express those opinions in writing, whether individually or in groups. Although the male Saudi students had extra oral power when working in groups, that extra power lost its significance when not translated into writing. Although elements such as critical thinking and self voice are not emphasized in the Saudi educational system, that does not mean that Saudi students cannot demonstrate those two elements in their writing (Barnawi, "Finding a Place"). The fact that the Saudi students, especially the male students, can express their opinions clearly about major issues in their lives proves their voice and critical thinking. Their cultural and literacy practices, however, influence the type of topics and the ways in which they chose to express their critical thinking, which differ from what is expected in US universities.

Belenky et al. revisited their study *Women's Ways of Knowing* and picked up "the narrative of how people know and come to think of themselves as knowers" (Goldberger 2). They asserted that the relationships between the ways of knowing, gender, race, class, and culture are complex. Culturally, writing requires more than language acquisition. For this particular population, writing involves preserving their cultural identity within the new culture. Therefore, teachers need to help the Saudi students find their voices so that they do not end up lost between their previous restrictive literacy practices and the new and challenging ones.

When investigating the intellectual and ethical development of American college students, Perry also asserts that the intellectual development process is dynamic and complex. The complexity for the Saudi students is even higher when considering their cultural backgrounds and literacy constraints, especially when keeping in mind that those students will return to the KSA and should be able to reassimilate with their communities. Therefore, it is important to consider students' literacy, social, and cultural factors, "especially when implementing social activities" (Gunn 76). By doing so, educators will be helping them preserve the nature of who they are – especially since most of them do not look for Western assimilation – while at the same time empowering them through their own independent voice "rather than being silenced, accommodated, or rejected by the dominant discourses" (Canagarajah, *Critical Academic Writing* 116).

In addition, teachers, following Canagarajah's advice, "must encourage students to stop focusing on writing as a narrowly defined process of text construction. Writing is rhetorical negotiation for achieving social meaning and functions... we do not write only to construct a rule-governed text" (Canagarajah, "Toward a Writing Pedagogy" 602). Therefore, teachers need to change the question they are asking themselves. Instead of asking how they can improve students' English skills, teachers should start looking for ways to assist the Saudi students to exhibit the critical thinking skills they already have to achieve their goals. They can do that by acknowledging the students' cultural experience and reflecting on it, in order to make students comfortable with who they are and help them be more willing to learn and become competent. Bringing cultural awareness to the classroom includes considering not only religious and social issues but also ways about how ideas are expressed. When demonstrating assertiveness, for instance, male students should not be considered rude, and when female students do not

participate orally in whole class discussion, they should not be assumed to have no voice. Those students are behaving the way their culture has prepared them to behave. ESL teachers should also recognize that there are differences in the Saudi students' literacy background: female students have a better writing background than the male students.

Learning to compose in a different language is hard. It is one thing to learn to speak, but to learn to compose presents much more daunting hurdles. To assist students in this endeavor, teachers need to change their focus from concentrating strictly on language issues to taking advantage of the whole life of intellectual and cultural knowledge that the students bring with them to the American classroom. Teachers "will do a disservice to our students if we do not help enhance the resources and strengths with which they come" (Canagarajah, "Codemeshing" 415). Criticizing those who do otherwise, Canagarajah says,

Given the tradition in L2 pedagogy of using written work to develop grammatical competence, teachers overwhelmingly view themselves as language teachers rather than rhetoricians. This mode of teacher response has many negative consequences for the literacy development and critical thinking of students... it fails to engage students in negotiating content and discourse ...students begin to focus only on an error-free final product. (*Critical Academic Writing* 194-195)

Kareem is orally competent in English, but writing classes value the words on the page. Although scholars in composition and writing stress the value of class discussions, students are evaluated on what they write, not what they say. Canagarajah says, "[W]e should reconsider the place of orality in writing. Oral discourse and oral traditions of communication may find a place in writing as they provide useful resources for narrative and voice for students from multilingual

background.” His reason is that orality can “expand the communicative potential of writing” (“Toward a Writing Pedagogy” 603).

Like most international students, the Saudi students’ purpose in learning writing is to master the content of their courses, not to build writing or composition skills (Ferris and Hedgcock). Thus, they expect their writing teachers to correct their written mistakes. While encouraging teachers to meet students’ expectations, Canagarajah urges teachers not to be at the mercy of those expectations. Instead, he recommends that while gradually training students to take care of their surface-level mistakes, teachers should also gradually encourage students to discuss issues critically, and to support them by critiquing students’ “essays frankly, while encouraging students to work out their own perspectives and interests”(*Critical Academic Writing* 197).

When Carol Severino reviewed the work of three major advocates of critical pedagogy (Alan France, Donald Macedo, and Maureen Hourigan), who all believed “that literacy teaching and political advocacy are synonymous,” she learned that those scholars could not agree on a single purpose for teaching composition (75). That realization led Severino to raise the following questions: Is the purpose of a composition course to help students fit into society or to convince them to change it? Should composition be a professional course that facilitates survival in academic and corporate communities? Or should it be a cultural studies course that teaches the critical skills and crucial facts necessary for political activism? According to Severino, France and Macedo, influenced by the Freirian school, believe that the critical literacy that students really need is the one that will help them change society, while Hourigan argues that what students need are “practical literacies that prepare them for the world of work” and to meet “their desires for vocational skills,” which will allow them to fulfill their American dream (75).

Severino concludes that composition teachers should “help students develop their selves as critical readers and writers precisely to enable them to choose the wisest course of political action” (Severino 76). By doing so, teachers will be providing the necessary tools while giving the students the choice to use what they need to use—and whether to use those tools at all.

Influenced by the work of Perry and Belenky et al., in 1986 Marcia Baxter Magolda interviewed 101 first-year college students to learn how their self-authorship emerges and influences their intellectual development. She learned that it did not take long for students to realize that the “authorities did not have all the answers, that some of what was to be known was still up for grabs. From this transitional way of knowing, participants realized that the search for knowledge was necessary in some arenas, but not having a process of their own to use they followed the lead of their teachers” (Baxter Magolda, *Making Their Own Way* xvii). That realization led Baxter to believe that “internal self-definition is crucial to balancing external and internal forces in knowing and relating to others.” (Baxter 2001, p. xvii) The Saudi students seem to have a very clear self-definition. What teachers can do is help them in balancing and relating to others.

There is a clear relationship between vocabulary and critical thinking. Students may have the critical abilities but lack the necessary vocabulary to express them. Both Kareem and Majed suffered from lack of vocabulary, not a lack of critical thinking. Critical thinking and student voice are always discussed together. In order to support multilingual writers in being creative and critically oriented, Canagarajah calls educators to value the strategies those students use and not to expect them to follow the same ones used by L1 students (“Multilingual Strategies” 45). Most Saudi students who come to study in the US aim to major in science and are more interested in writing in the genre of their major. Rather than limiting all students to identical

prompts, composition teachers can allow and encourage students to read and write on prompts related to their prospective fields. That would be in agreement with Perry's "Developmental Instruction" approach, which is designed to match the students' needs instead of making the students match the existent pedagogy, especially when those students are in transition, "in motion," and need "optimal conditions of growth" that suit them (xiii).

One way to foster such conditions is by developing "teaching practices from the strategies learners themselves use" (Canagarajah, "Codemeshing" 415). A practical way to combine what students already know and what they need to learn, while at the same time respecting their cultural values, is through the use of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). By using CALL, which "boasts collaborative and process-oriented composing possibilities," teachers will enhance students' collaboration while at the same time respecting the sex and cultural constraints on face-to-face meetings (Canagarajah, *Critical Academic Writing* 223). Through CALL, teachers can meet the special needs of the Saudi students who feel uncomfortable working with the opposite sex. Blogging and working in groups digitally allows them to relax and work together, while at the same time respecting their traditions. Being motivated to work with technology, male students will be less hesitant to write and the female students will be liberated from the discomfort that results from face-to-face communication.

While presenting at different conferences during my research work, I was approached by teachers from different high schools, language institutions, and colleges who remarked on the impact the Saudi culture has on their Saudi students. They repeatedly asked me whether they should force their Saudi students to work in mixed-sex groups. My study shows Saudi students work better in whole-class discussions than in mixed-sex small groups. In addition to using

CALL, teachers can take advantage of whole-class discussions to help students to share and learn from their peers while at the same time respecting their traditions and values.

Teachers can further support Saudi students in taking charge of their thinking by following Ira Shor's recommendation to structure "the class around [the students'] preferences" (*When Students Have Power* 129). Coming from an oral culture makes whole-class discussion a favorable activity. To engage female students who hesitate to participate in whole-class discussions, teachers can follow those activities with small-group discussions. To encourage students to take full advantage of their oral discussions, teachers could end every discussion with a few minutes in which students take note of what they had talked about. It is also important for teachers to give students authentic assignments. Clarke says, "Effective teachers have authenticity. Authenticity means that teachers present meaningful, authentic activities through which students can learn because they connect in meaningful ways with their experiences, needs, and aspirations" (Clarke 112). Thus, a culturally responsive teacher will give students authentic topics that are related to their culture and identity. In this way, teachers will contribute to helping Saudis students keep their Saudi identity, while at the same time preparing them for their goal of being able to compete globally.

As asserted by Murphy et al., motivation plays a big role in learning: "Learning is a dynamic process in which knowledge and motivation work in concert to influence achievement" (328). Canagarajah believes that the traditional ways of looking at students' motivations fall short in meeting the needs of ESL students. He argues that ESL students' motivations to learn English are not limited to integrative and instrumental, or intrinsic and extrinsic ones only. To be able to meet their communicative objectives, in addition to those types of motivations, ESL students are motivated by issues of power, the power to attain their own objectives (Canagarajah,

Critical Academic Writing 117). If their objectives are to gain conversational skills and the language and knowledge of their fields, then teachers need to respect that.

Following Kloss's advice, teachers need "to create environments and tasks that invite right/wrong thinkers [the dualists] to change for themselves" (153). They can do that through creating and proposing discussion topics that create multiple and conflicting points of views. Doing so gives students the opportunity to reflect and to see for themselves the possibility of accepting various perspectives. Another point teachers need to keep in mind when planning classroom activities comes from Renate Schulz, who advises foreign language teachers to keep their students' "beliefs or perceptions in mind ... given that teaching activities need to be perceived in the learners' mind as conducive to learning" (245).

Because students must be prepared for college where they will be required to write more, work in groups, and respond to their peers' writing, certain curriculum changes need to take place. There should be more in-class time dedicated to writing. One way to do this is to have part of the novel discussion take place via writing. Another way is to require students to reflect on the assigned reading for the week in one of the weekly journals. Finally, reading and writing should take place daily in the computer lab where students have the opportunity to write and work in groups with ease.

Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which the Saudi students' sex differences affect their perceptions of teachers' and peers' authority, and in turn, how those perceptions affect their development as writers and critical thinkers. In this study I did not intend to generalize my findings, nor did I try to find a quick fix.

I am only presenting my close observations of a small group of Saudi students. I intended to conduct a ground-breaking study to locate the important questions to ask about Saudi students learning English writing in the US. My aim is to discuss my observations in order to generate larger questions for a larger group of Saudi students. Such questions could help us to understand further the challenges of transitioning to a second language, especially the challenges related to the complexity of the hidden diversity issues that are relatively unique to the Saudi case.

My study generated implications that I can follow up with further research, as well as implications for ESL students and for the L1 composition classroom. The 1990s created a wealth of research on the linguistic and cultural diversity of ESL students. What research has not touched is the issue of diversity within a group of students, such as the Saudi students, who share the same linguistic and cultural background. Other studies with a larger sample of students should follow, and examine students at different levels. In particular, broader studies that examine and compare students in several different Intensive English programs might yield valuable insights. While my study was about a female teacher teaching male Saudi students, another study could look at the different perceptions the female Saudi students might reveal when being taught by a male teacher. Another possibility might be a longitudinal study that observes the Saudi students throughout their language learning terms, from the first to the last level. Also, a study in the KSA could focus on the reasons behind the difference in the teaching of EFL in the male and female Saudi schools.

Other research relates to curriculum design. When summarizing the research on second language writing and projecting areas for future research needs, Eli Hinkel notes that issues related to curriculum and instructional practices have long been neglected. Therefore, she urges researchers to conduct research that leads to the development of curricula that will better prepare

ESL students for not only their academic goals, but also their “occupational, professional, and vocational” ones (Hinkel 535).

I had the chance to meet and sit with Majda at the end of her freshman year. When chatting together and reflecting on her experience with writing at the VTCLI, she commented how naïve she had been when she was asked to write about technology, and she wrote only about the pros of technology, ignoring the cons. Therefore an interesting further study would be to look in depth at the experience of Saudi students after finishing their freshman college courses, to see the development of their critical thinking beyond the language year.

My study has some implications for L1 students, too. In the composition classroom, students do not all come from the same cultural background. In his article addressing the myth of linguistic homogeneity in US college composition, Matsuda states that myth “has serious implications not only for international second-language writers in US classrooms but also for resident second-language writers and for native speakers of unprivileged varieties of English” (68). Those students are considered L1 students, but the way they function in and out of class comes from their socialization at home. Their cultural assumptions about the teacher’s authority, which come from their own generalizations, may differ from what is expected from them. Composition teachers should keep this in mind when expecting those students to behave like all the other L1 students, especially in their assumptions about teachers’ authority.

Summary:

In my study, I argued that, although the Saudi students did not formally learn critical thinking, they are critical thinkers. Because their literacy background is sex-segregated and teacher- and product-centered, they do not fully grasp their roles in the activities that are part of

the writing process and the importance of their agency. Coming from an oral culture, the Saudi students exhibit critical thinking during group discussions, but they are not ready to document their thought process and the teacher's or their peers' input. Culture also comes into play in the way the Saudi students perceive and perform in mixed-sex group work. While working with Saudi female students does not pose a real problem for the male students, the Saudi female students are hesitant to work with Saudi male students. Sex and age differences also emerge in the way Saudi students respond to their teachers' and peers' authority. Unlike the Saudi male students, the Saudi female students are overly concerned with perfecting their writing. Another important sex difference is in their literacy background: female students had had more opportunity to write than the male students.

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