

The Journey of Learning a Second Language: A Case Study of International Students Residing in the US for the Purpose to Learning English and Undergo Culture Shock

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Abstract

The study at hand analyzes the results from a study using a Qualitative method. The study made use of recorded interviews of 4 second language learners of English from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia who had attended language courses in various parts of the United States. The data displays several themes that are carried throughout the interviews confirming specific expectations prior to their arrival and clash with American culture, while then displaying discrepancies in what was expected and symptoms of the phenomenon known as “Culture shock”. The research conducted aims to generate and analyze the themes the participants expressed in their experiences and interactions with the new culture.

Keywords: Culture, Culture shock, Second language acquisition, American culture, Cultural expectations

1. Literature Review

Oberg (1954) reported on the first documented case of culture shock. The research encompassed Oberg’s own life story as he and his family immigrated to the US and faced several hurdles in their attempts to fit in, learn the English language and acquire stable jobs. Juggling between these tasks is no easy endeavor, especially for international students who are expected to acquire the new language in order to learn the ways of the C2 and more importantly, maintain a well-balanced GPA in order to continue their education abroad. Ellis (1985) has also contributed research to the acquisition of a second language and attributes culture shock as one of the main physiological reasons that prohibits learns from achieving their goals.

Since English language learning has become a critical aspect of global education, I decided to narrow the study to focus on the experiences of international language learners within the US. In his research of culture shock, Oberg (1954) believed that the phenomena can be described much like an illness that infects an individual who is placed in a situation where he/she must now reside in an unfamiliar country, with unfamiliar customs and abide by them. Bochner and Furnham (1986) later expressed their own views on culture shock, noting the extreme stress that an immigrant learner would experience while attempting to fit in. Other views include a study by Decapua & Wintergerst (2010), in which his description of culture shock in learners entails an individual with different cultural backgrounds, ideas, and worldviews that are unknown to the C2, resulting in the learner submitting to a sense of anxiety and refusal to learn the required subject matter. Additionally, as cited in Ward, et al. (2008), Fowers and Richardson (1996) place an enormous emphasis on the concept of multiculturalism when deal with culture shock, the term describes a form of multicultural contact in which different society groups interact with one another. Similarly, Ellis (1989) recommends this type of interaction between foreigners of different corners of the world in order to better benefit their language learning experience. Xia (2009) also listed the stages of culture shock that language learners undergo, the stages display the emotional journey that the learners undergo, beginning with their initial expectations, to different discrepancies, and ending with integration if the learners are able to successfully adapt to the culture.

Through the use of a phenomenological study, an interview was used to gain an in-depth perspective to the experiences and interactions an international language learner residing in the US might undergo when experiencing culture shock. In doing so, the study is designed to explore the following questions:

- How do second language learners experience culture shock?
- What cultural features most stand out to the learners?
- What beliefs do the learners hold of culture shock being a contributing factor to their academic performance in learning a second language?

2. Method

Qualitative Approach As the narrow focus of the study is veered towards the experiences and interactions of the learners within language programs in the US, the qualitative research conducted primarily focused on a phenomenological method. On this basis, utilizing a phenomenological study would prove to be the most ideal method to ensure findings that would explore the experiences highlighted in the study, with regards to the cultural interactions the learners adhere to in their language institute. Husserl (1970), in an early attempt at bringing light to phenomenology, describes it as the subjective interpretation of an experience by and individual.

However, the true essence of the phenomenology methodology extends beyond that of what Husserl describes, Van Manen (2007) for instance, builds on what has been established about phenomenology and calls it a project, one that can be driven by interpretation and his/her own fascination, similar to how a reader is swept by a novel's spell, and with that comes the

fascination of meaning. The aim of a phenomenological study is to primarily focus on the phenomenon at hand and the unique experiences of the individuals involved with the research, it would examine their worldviews that would coincide with the phenomenon at hand. In Van Manen (2007) entails that with phenomenology comes the immense reward of seeing meanings in moments that others experience, he compares the imagery used in a phenomenological study to a poet in his method of deriving attention towards the origins of meaning. The goal of such imagery is to draw the reader of the study into the experience, by letting go of his/her own life's individual experiences and attempting to give new meaning to the ones described by others, in the hope that the new meanings presented may touch the reader and lead to new venues of analysis and exploration.

Selecting participants' is equally no easy task, and heavily depends on the study at hand as well as what it attempts to achieve "the criteria for participant selection grow out of different assumptions depending on the research paradigm and the kind of study" (Hatch, 2002, p.48). On this basis, the participants would ideally stem from second language learners of English who have traveled to the US for the purpose of language learning. However, Glaser (1978) explains that researchers typically will search for groups that would likely give the best possible outcomes for analysis in the study. The learners at the language center range from the ages of 18-20, and originate from different parts of the world where English is spoken as a foreign language. They hope to complete their language studies and enroll in their respectively desired departments of Kent State University and/or other universities within the US. Patton (1990) agrees that sampling should imply that the research make use of a relatively small group for the sampling process. Therefore, the number of participants would preferably not be large for the qualitative study at hand, between five to ten students would be adequate. The students who agree to participate in the study would be given a form of consent to preserve and protect their rights in the study, the participants who might not be able to participate for unforeseen reason or do not consent to the terms of the study may be replaced with other participants.

2.1 Participants

2.1.1 Participants Selection

Finding participants for the study was equally no easy task, and heavily depended on the study at hand as well as what it attempts to achieve "the criteria for participant selection grow out of different assumptions depending on the research paradigm and the kind of study" (Hatch, 2002, p.48). On this basis, the participants ideally needed to stem from second language learners of English who have traveled to the US for the purpose of language learning. However, Glaser (1978) explains that researchers typically will search for groups that would likely give the best possible outcomes for analysis in the study. The learners at the language center ranged from the ages of 18-20, and originate from different parts of the world where English is spoken as a foreign language. They hoped to complete their language studies and enroll in their respectively desired departments of Kent State University and/or other universities within the US.

I was able to correspond with a two colleagues who were teaching at the Kent language

center, and coordinate with them over the prospect attending a portion of their class to briefly talk about my study and recruit participants. In about three minutes time, I gave an overview of the study and the need to interview the students to gain a deeper insight to a language learner's cultural experience at Kent State University, as well as inquire to any culture shock experiences and/or interactions within the community. Additionally, I informed the students that I would send them an email that would reiterate the topic of the study, while also offering specific times and days of the week that I was available to meet with them and the specific area at the Kent State library that would provide an ideal environment to conduct the interview in. My first colleague, allowed me to attend the last few minutes of her morning class and the first few minutes of her afternoon class. I was asked to wait outside for a moment before entering the classroom of the second class, my colleague informed me that the second class consisted of an all-female class, some of which are Muslim and tend to pray together before the class starts, it is customary for men not to be present in the same area where female Muslims are conducting their prayers. I also came to realize that cultural and religious constraints might forbid the female learners in this class from meeting with me (a male researcher). After having met with the learners taught by my colleague, I received the email addresses of all the students in her two classes and sent out the invitation to join and participate in the study. Regretfully, as the dates I indicated in the email had neared, I received no replies from any of the students of the two classes, and decided to resend the email with the subject title "Reminder". A day before the first proposed date, one of the students had replied saying that he could meet with me, yet the student did not show nor did he send another email to reschedule. Another colleague was kind enough to offer me the chance to try again in his classroom. However, the results were similar, as none of the learners replied to confirm the appointment and meet with me for an interview. Finally, I resorted to finding language learners from the Kent language center through acquaintances, this method proved more effective in finding students to participate in the study at hand.

Patton (1990) agrees that sampling should imply that the research make use of a relatively small group for the sampling process. Therefore, the number of participants would preferably not be large for the qualitative study at hand, between four to eight students would be adequate. The students who agreed to participate in the study were given a form of consent to preserve and protect their rights in the study, the participants who might not be able to participate for any unforeseen reasons or do not consent to the terms of the study may be replaced with other participants.

The participants selected for the study are four, 2 male and 2 female second language learners of English from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They have all studied at language centers in the US for a period of at least one year, and have undergone different cultural experiences and interactions with native speakers of English in their respective cities of residence. The participants have obtained bachelor's degrees in different fields of study.

Participant 1:

A male graduate student, about 28 years of age. He has never left his home country nor interacted with other cultures before arriving in the US. Is a Bachelor holder of English

literature. In addition to being a student, he carries the responsibilities of being a husband and father, and intends to graduate from the Indianan university of Pennsylvania.

Participant 2:

A female graduate student, from Kent state. She has traveled to several countries before but never on her own. She holds a bachelor's degree in American literature and has an intermediate language proficiency level. She has done some traveling to other countries in the middle east, but never to the western regions of the world.

Participants 3:

A 25 year old male graduate student attending Kent State University. He received his undergraduate degree in business and administration. He is of intermediate proficiency language level, and has never traveled to or interacted with American culture prior to arriving in the US. In addition to his responsibilities as a student, he is also a husband and father.

Participant 4:

A female graduate student attending Kent State University. She received her undergraduate degree in Islamic sharea law. She is of beginner level language proficiency. In addition to her responsibilities as a student, she is also a mother and wife

2.1.2 Data Collection

In order to obtain the best possible results for the qualitative study given, an interview would be conducted with the participants in which a series of questions to best understand the phenomenon through the experiences of the students. An observation would also be used to best depict the interactions the learners display throughout their culture shock experience.

Interviewing. Mishler (1986) notes that interviews are beneficial, in that they help the researcher to use conversations from the participants' to explore their various interpretations and experiences. In addition, Hatch (2002) adds that the procedures involved in an interview uncovers a level of depth in meaning for the participants that would organize their experiences and make sense to the world around them. This will be made possible with the use of a digital recorder, in order to best analyze and review the data multiple times if needed.

In Hatch (2002), Bernard, et al. (1994) introduces several types of qualitative interviews. The informal type seems to fit the needs of the study, in which the researcher is a good listener and has the ability to create questions on the spot. As researchers, we often feel the need to guide the study, however, to best learn about "informants" (as described by Hatch) experiences, it would be best to allow the participants to drive the conversation after having informed them of the intricate details of the topic of study. Also, in the event that the data required is already covered in a previous question, an informal interview would allow me the opportunity to modify another upcoming question.

The interview procedure had me meet with the students in the agreed time and room within Kent State University's language center's building. In the event that the majority of participants are unable to attend on the same day, I was to request that we split the

participants into two groups that would meet on two separate days for their convenience. Upon meeting with each group, I interviewed individual participant one at a time for about a 40-minute period each. I started the recording and began the interview with a brief introduction of myself and an overview of the study I am conducting. I also asked the participants if he/she might have any questions retaining to the study before having started the interview. Throughout the interview, the following questions (and follow up questions) were asked:

- How have your positive and negative experiences been since arriving in the country?
- What cultural differences most stand out to you?
- Do you feel like you've experienced Culture Shock at all here?
- Do you feel Culture Shock has had any kind of impact on your academic performance?

The author met with three of the participants individually for a period of 40 minutes each. Due to cultural and religious protocols, I was not able to meet with participant 4. Instead, I asked her husband (a PhD student, writing his dissertation at the time) to conduct the interview with his wife, they were able to undergo the interview at their apartment without my supervision. The remaining participants met with me at different times on the fourth floor of the Kent state library.

2.1.3 Data Analysis

Hatch (2002) describes data analysis as a complex process that is rarely fully explored in depth in explaining qualitative research. Those who conduct studies often struggle with finding connections and themes that would make sense of the data, Hatch (2002) offers his own take on the process; "data analysis is portrayed as messy, cumbersome, inductive, creative, challenging, subjective, nonlinear, labor intensive, exhilarating, and time-consuming" (p.147). Depending on the type of study at hand and the goals that the study is set to accomplish, each individual researcher's themes and connecting ideas, as well as overarching message will differ from another.

In Sanders (2003), the author lists several steps suggested by Colaizzi (1978) to approach an analysis for a phenomenological based study. In accordance with the first step, I plan on listening to the recording of each interview several times in order to gain a better grasp of the details and feelings expressed in each recording, I would also read through the transcripts five or six times in order to better reflect on what was said during the interview process. Step II would follow up on the reading of the transcripts, and add identifying key phrases and meaning brought about by the experiences of spirituality extracted from the stories conveyed by the participants.

Step III calls for the researcher to generate general themes to align with the statements provided by the participants, in order to aid the researcher to formulate rich meanings. Additionally, Sanders (2003) suggests the use of bracketing to highlight the researcher's own unique ideologies and ideas retaining to the topic of the study, allowing further explorations

and comparisons between the researcher and the participants. A further stage of this step would include raising feasible questions regarding the materials mentioned within the transcript, this would have me question actions and possible connections laid by the participants in identifying their motives and spirituality. The matter of spirituality could potentially prove extremely useful, the participants' culture and religious background (in this case) are deeply intertwined and present a heavy influence on their perception of the world.

Step IV involves the formulation of the gathered meanings generated from the transcripts, and arranging them into themes. Out of the interviews I listened to and transcribed so far, I would assume that the participants would have similar and perhaps several interconnected themes, such as false expectations, fears, anxiety, while few expressed concern for their families in their countries. Step V makes use of the ideas found within the transcription, to then relate them to the phenomenon at hand. Better use of this step could cultivate the themes, as suggested by Sander (2003), in order to ensure connections with the phenomena. For instance, the theme of fear and anxiety would be contracted from excerpts within the transcripts and related to one of the symptoms of the phenomenon of culture shock.

Step VI calls for the researcher to describe the fundamental structure of the phenomenon. A cultivation of sorts, the process hereafter will offer an opportunity to review past steps in order to describe the process and meanings found throughout the research process. Sanders (2003) again encourages using Colaizzi's (1978) method of analysis in order to obtain a sense of outcome from the overall structure, and pave the way for more promising results. The final step suggests returning to the participants for validation on the data that was provided. I presume this might be somewhat problematic, as the participants are students and were initially difficult to contact, however, a follow-up interview might be possible.

3. Results

The results of the interview and data collection generated three emerging themes: (1) initial anticipations that the participants initially expressed prior to their arrival and interaction with the target culture, (2) false expectations, consisting of the realities that the participants came to find once their culture clashed with the target culture, and how a number of experiences displayed discrepancies with their initial expectations, (3) feeling the experience has had an impact on the learner's language learning process while attending language centers within the US.

Theme 1: Anticipations

Learning of the target culture

Xia (2009) states that language learners will attempt to learn what they can about the target culture, this information is often learned through means of the media and/or friends and family members with any prior useful knowledge of the target culture. Several of the participants expressed having similar experiences of learning and requesting information regarding the target culture from others. Participant 1 expressed how he was warned about certain stereo types regarding American culture by his older brother and other members of his family, uncles and other older family members were also involved in offering whatever little

means of stories regarding the target culture, this would often be in the form of advice on whether they thought temporarily moving to a different country with an alien culture was an ideal plan to begin with at all. Other fears expressed from Participant 1 and others was displayed in the many forms of media and news they had followed over the years that would have them fear for their safety, he had formed a solid image of what American culture and neighborhoods would consist of and was told to take certain precautions when selecting a suitable place of residence for himself and his wife and kids. He had to inquire several friends and colleagues regarding the safest cities and neighborhoods within the US while also researching whatever information was available online regarding these areas. Other questions mentioned were regarding the etiquette and ways of interacting with his language instructors of the target language, the Participant showed concern for dealing how to speak and interact with his teachers due to how his previous interactions with teachers of his first culture were considered very strict and would not present any leniency with regards to in class discussions and participations:

Participants 1: I could not even look my teachers in the eye, or talk out of turn. These actions usually lead to forms of punishment, usually the teacher might use a stick and strike my hand if I spoke out of turn. I was told that teachers in America are different but was still not sure what to expect, you know, because I had never been here (the US) before at that point.

Researcher: How did you feel about that? Knowing you might expect the same or a totally different manner of interacting with your teachers in the US?

Participant 1: It was a frightening experience for sure, I'm just glad it didn't turn out to be the case.....

Participant 3 also expressed similar negative initial anticipations regarding information about the target culture while also fearing for his family's safety and an immense concern for finding a safe and suitable living residence

Participant 3: I wanted to have an idea of the living areas. The rent. The car dealers. I hoped to find something in a safe area that is also close to campus. I tried to do a lot of research, as much as I could on my own.

The female participants however, displayed other concerns, ranging from living on their own, to looking after their families and receiving the approvals of their fathers to allow them to make the trip, this was critical in Saudi culture and Islamic bylaws. Participant 2 mentions how she had to convince her father to approve her leave, her anticipation later was that she would have more independence, whereas, her father conditioned her that he accompany her on the trip. Her concern seemed to stem from her father's presence and that it would prevent her from learning about the target culture or interacting with speakers of English, which may hinder her learning of the language.

Participant 2: My whole family was extremely worried for me (my well being). I couldn't argue with them, it's something new, and I was excited to it, but I wasn't sure I would like him (my father) being around the entire time.

Researcher: Why do you think your father's presence would be an issue?

Participant 2: Just because, um..... he worries a lot while I'm here (in the US), I don't know if he'll leave my side there, like let me go to a movie with friends on my own, you know how fathers can be. He was always trying to convince me that the US is a dangerous place, though he says that about our country (Saudi Arabia) sometimes. He made me believe that I had to take him with me everywhere for protection.

This would indicate that Participant 2's father had instilled some elements of fear and concern while no specific reasons to justify the fear were given. Otherwise, this participant showed high anticipations of forming friendships and attending movie theaters, a luxury that does not exist in her own culture due to the fact that theaters are considered a forbidden establishment in the Kingdom, and is thought to create ideologies that may conflict with the home culture. Participant 2 however, expressed that her method of learning about the target culture and other world cultures were mostly made available through films and YouTube videos.

Researcher: You seem to know a lot about American culture, would you mind if I ask how you learned all this?

Participant 2: yes, I did some traveling abroad and used to watch movies with my family. But of course, after returning home I wanted to keep watching movies, but the only way to do that was to download them off the internet.

Researcher: yes, I'm very familiar with that, my students did that all the time.

Participant 2: It's really the only way to watch these movies we hear about on the news, I'm not into violent movies honestly. I like it when they show people coming together to accomplish something or make a positive change.

Researcher: and is that something you expected to do maybe once you traveled?

Participant 2: I was really hoping so, I feel like I'm very sociable, but you don't know what to expect with people sometimes.

The interactions with the films Participant 2 experienced would hint to her anticipating a more positive outcome with her travel by expecting to watch movies in theaters. Decapua & Wintergerst (2010) express that world views could potentially be inflected by the media such as news, TV, and film, hinting that the movies would have given her some idea of what to expect within the target culture. In contrast, Gass & Selinker (2001) note that social distance is a contributing factor to culture shock, and that an immigrant cannot fully experience the phenomenon without being immersed within the culture. To this end, the films might represent an impact on the initial anticipations but not necessarily the experience within the target culture.

Theme 2: False expectations

Coming to terms with the reality

After having arrived in the target culture and being immersed in it for a short period of time,

the participants had expressed some discrepancies with their initial anticipations and lead them to have false expectations to which they were beginning to come to terms with, Xia (2009) refers to this as the next stage in Culture shock. Participant 1 explains a better experience with the community and everyday passing individuals.

Researcher: So, what most stood out to you once you arrived here?

Participant 1: The people were very friendly in the neighborhood my family and I moved into, they were always greeting us and smile at us on our way into and out of the building, which I thought was strange at first but then realized it was just their way of being friendly, usually back home (in Saudi), people keep to themselves, or at least that's how my neighbors were.

Researcher: did that bother you at all that things were different or did you like the change?

Participant 1: I just wasn't used to it, especially because of you know, how men and women aren't supposed to socialize that much in public in Saudi. It took some getting used to I thin. But they seemed very nice, and I could tell they were just being friendly.

Participant 1 had undergone new and unexpected experiences, while also coming to a realization that his neighbors would not pose a threat as he had initially anticipated, instead, he began to acclimate to his new environment and reflect on the changes such as the non existence of gender segregation when his own culture had called for it and made it out to become a norm within his society. Participant 4 reported on having a somewhat different experience, mentioning that her neighbors insistently would offer to help with things like moving in and legal issues.

Participant 4: When first coming here (the US), I thought it make take some time to get to know people and especially the neighbors. They saw our moving truck, and after offering carrying a few boxes with my husband and kids they offered their help.

Researcher: And how was that different from your neighbors in Saudi?

Participant 4: (laughs) well, I barely knew my neighbors in Saudi. Not even their names. It seems really bad to me now, but the very first time we moved into our house in Saudi, our neighbor who was on his cell phone at the time stopped just to clarify with our dad which parking spot was his, instead of helping us out. That stuck with me and made me stay away from our neighbors.

Researcher: So, did that situation have an impact on how you treat your neighbors here now?

Participant 4: Well, it did at first. I thought I should stay away as much as possible, but they seemed very friendly and wanted to help me whenever I needed help with things.

The false expectation was represented here in the assumption that the neighbors were to be avoided, the participant came to a realization that this was uncalled for and perhaps worth exploring close relations with the neighbors. She further explained that the friendship had grown and one of the neighbors in particular became a close friend, to which she was sad to see leave when the neighbor moved away. Still, looks forward now to getting to know more current and future neighbors in her neighborhood. In contrast, Participant 3 expressed having

little culture shock during his initial move, before arriving in the country he was able to get in touch with several Saudi students in hopes of finding someone who might be able to help him with the move. Despite having never lived abroad before, he reported having a smooth transition, due to the fact that he stayed with some friends upon arriving in the country and was house hunting for a suitable home with his newly found Saudi friends.

Participant 3: I was very glad to have found them (the Saudi friends). I know close to nothing about what to pay for rent, which schools were best for my kids, and the which hospitals to go to, how to register for classes.

Researcher: How about after your family arrived. Did you have any trouble once you were on your own?

Participant 3: I kept in touch with my friends still. They were very good about helping us through the transition. Perhaps the one thing I had some trouble with was getting around, I wasn't used to using a GPS at that point and did not want to bother the people on the street, I called my friends a few times but I'm terrible at taking directions.

Researcher: If you don't mind my asking, why wouldn't you ask the people on the street for directions?

Participant 3: At that point, I wasn't too confident with my English and wasn't sure if they would help or not, I didn't want to seem like a tourist or a lost foreigner.

Researcher: Normally in Saudi, would you have asked for directions from people passing by?

Participant 3: Yes I think so, I just feel more comfortable there speaking my own language.

The participant displayed a slight language and cultural barrier, by preventing himself from asking for directions. He describes his experience as somewhat embarrassing, while also displaying fear. He also initially showed concern for the transition into the new culture, his decision to avoid any means of integration may negatively impact his cultural experience in the future, should he encounter a situation that would call for him to handle himself. The asking for directions was a great example, yet even then he refused any attempt to integrate himself. Bochner and Furnham (1986) note that factors such as refusing to integrate into the target culture, may lead to extreme stress in the longrun, while also having the learner abandon the target culture all together and return to his/her home country.

Similarly, Participant 2 explained that while her father's presence presented an element of security, she had some concerns over leaving her father due to the dangers he had instilled in her. She mentions walking to and from campus on her own and how that represented an element of fear during the initial period of the move. That was until, she managed to integrate herself and befriend some students on campus to accompany her on the walk.

Researcher: what about when you moved here with your father?

Participant 2: He didn't leave the house much for a while. I had to walk to class on my own.

Researcher: Was that ok with you or did you mind walking alone?

Participant 2: It was extremely awkward at first. I'm sure you know about how roads are in Saudi, they're just not made for pedestrians. They're more suitable for cars and trucks. I guess it was very awkward at first walking up and down the hill to campus and back on my own at first.

Researcher: How did you get past that?

Participant 2: I asked some friends from class to walk me, they were also from Saudi.

Researcher: Did you make any non-Saudi friends on campus?

Participant 2: well, not at first. It wasn't easy, I was very hesitant to talk to them.

Every once in a while we saw a group of girls who would complement our head scarf. They wanted to talk to us about attending their church. We didn't give it much thought but one of them was very friendly and decided to join us on an outing.

Participant 2 seemed to be reluctant about making friends outside of the Saudi community at first. However, she was able to overcome her fear walking to campus and back after being joined by her friends. The interaction with the American girl from the church group displayed an ability to integrate and become sociable with a native from the target culture. The fears generated from her father seem to have subsided, she reports that she was able to then make the walk on her own in the future and without much complications.

Theme 3: Culture shock in the classroom

The phenomena's presence and the learning process

McCroskey (1992) reports that learners must take advantage of any given situation in order to communicate with native speakers of the target language in order to help mediate the learning process. The phenomenon of culture shock may hinder the experience in a variety of ways depending on the participants' individual willingness to interact with native speakers of the target language and culture. Participant 1 mentioned several aspects of cultural differences relating to interactions with his professor.

Participant 1: I looked towards the administrators at first. They were the first people I met when I arrived and submitted all my papers at the university. Honestly, they seemed extremely nice and accepting of other cultures. The department secretary was a little weird though, she seemed to frown at me a lot. I couldn't tell if it was because I was an international student or if she was just having a bad day. The professors and class mates seemed very nice. If I would pick out one thing, I would say I just wasn't used to having dead lines, professors seemed very strict about that sort of thing. I guess it's their way of teaching us responsibility. But back in Saudi they were very lenient about when we would turn in our papers.

Researcher: Well, did that bother you at all?

Participant 1: It just took some getting used to. Most of them (the professors) seemed to understand that we just needed sometime to adjust to how things are.

This theme carried through among most of the participants. When asked about any cultural issues relating to the language classroom, participant 2 explained trying to get used to other aspects of her teachers relating to personal life rather than academics.

Participant 2: At the university? I suppose I wasn't expecting the teachers to be so open minded.

Researcher: How so?

Participant 2: One of my teachers had tattoos of Harry Potter all over her body. I think she must have been a big fan of the films.

Researcher: Ya, Islam doesn't let us get tattoos.

Participant 2: Well, I had seen people with tattoos in movies and magazines, but never in person, and never this much to the point where it was all over her body.

Researcher: Did that bother you then?

Participant 2: It just took me a while to get used to. You know the feeling, like when you see something weird for the first time.

Researcher: Absolutely, I can definitely relate. But, would you say it distracted you in class?

Participant 2: Whenever she wore short sleeves I couldn't help but notice them and stare. You could say it distracted me from the class sometimes.

Participant 3 would also mention cultural distractions in other aspects at his university. This would stem from encounters outside the classroom and with the administrators. This participant has already noted his unwillingness to initiate a conversation on his own with native speakers of the language, thus, might encounter some difficulties when being forced to talk to a university employee.

Participant 3: I remember having to log into my university account and was having a lot of trouble. My friends couldn't get it to work and suggested we call technical support. They called on my behalf but then they asked if the owner of the account was the one calling. They said I had to talk to the technician, despite trying to avoid using my English. All my friends laughed because they knew I was trying so hard to get out of that.

Researcher: So, I hope the phone call went well?

Participant 3: Not exactly. We went back and forth, he couldn't understand me and I was having a hard time making out his instructions (smiling).

Researcher: but it all worked out in the end, right?

Participant 3: It took sometime, maybe more than I thought. But we were able to establish some level of communications. I just needed to use a few capital letters in my password.

Finally, participant 4 was more concerned with matters at home. She expressed that looking after her kids was a matter that occupied most of her thought. It was somewhat uncommon to

hire babysitters in Saudi. Although, permanent house keepers are more commonly used. At first, she tried to balance her school work and her duties as a mother on her own, this proved to be very problematic.

Participant 4: People advised me to look into hiring a baby sitter. I wasn't used to the idea at all. I guess I wish I could have brought my family's housekeeper. I kept on thinking about things like, what if something happens to them when they get back from school, and my husband and I are in class.

She further explains that it took sometime before she could fully adhere to the concept of hiring a babysitter. In that time, she was very distracted from her classes and even missed a few in favor of staying at home with the kids when they returned home. Eventually, she came around to the idea of hiring a babysitter and sometimes asked the neighbors to look after the kids, which was also somewhat unorthodox for her home culture.

All the participants seemed to face cultural issues that distracted them from their language classes. It seemed to hint to anxiety in some cases, where the participants were unsure if these matters would be resolved or not. The feelings of stress and anxiety seemed to come up in all their cases, as they felt that these minor issues might have lead them succumb to the phenomena and put a hold on their language studies. Participant 4 explained that had she not been able to find a baby sitter, she might have returned home to have her mother take care of the children or possibly return permanently until a better solution could be found.

4. Discussion

The study showed three emerging themes. The overwhelming false anticipations that were brought about by those close to the participants, as well as the media within the first culture. The participants experienced the beginnings of fear before their journey even began, leading them to a semi troubled start with their language studies. Oberg (1954) explains that the transition is never an easy one and is expected to cause problems along the way, the learners all experience an ongoing fear of the unknown while taking into consideration the forced fears and concerns that immediate and distant family members had. Xia (2009) would classify these symptoms as part of the first stage of the phenomena, mostly consisting of having ideas and perceptions generated from external sources. They would all eventually come to a realization that the expectations that had would prove false in most case, it would seem as though, the stories and perceptions would not hold their weight against the reality, the learners needed to be immersed into the culture in order to truly experience the phenomena. They could then make the changes needed if necessary to adapt to the target culture, the interactions and experiences differed among them, however, they were all able to make the adjustment. Some were forced into making changes, and might have elevated a feeling of being uncomfortable with forcibly talking to a technician in order to sort out the university account issue. Fowers and Richardson (1996) note that integration and multiculturalism would immensely aid the learners throughout the transition, the problem here lying in the participants' refusal or acceptance and/or motivation to integrate themselves. Some expressed a difference in ideologies, while others were simply fascinated with new concepts and ideas such as the teacher's tattoos of Harry potter, and how the participant had

never come across such a thing in her first culture. The learners managed to eventually overcome and subside their concerns and successfully integrate themselves with the target culture.

McCroskey (1992) places an emphasis and critical role that interaction and the students' willingness to take advantage of interactions in their learning process. The phenomena may have presented itself as an element that kept the participants away from partaking in such activities, to the point where it kept the learners from reaching their full potential at a faster rate. Participant 3 mentions he was reluctant to interact with the technician at the time. Similarly, Participant 2 was distracted by her teacher's appearance and cultural differences at first. There is no denying that the first culture represented a contributing factor, all the participants moderate how the two cultures are very different, tying elements of culture and religion to their current inner conflicts. The clashes of cultures did not seem too severe, and all the participants carried some level of knowledge of the target culture that would not prepare fully, yet still offer a type of reference, despite most of that reference being false.

The learners seemed to experience the majority of the phenomena through a series of clashes of the target and first culture. This led to stresses and the need to make hard decisions regarding changes in their lifestyle, while also resorting to measures and actions that may have not been considered in the past. The cultural features that seemed to stand out the most among the participants included physical appearances, and interactions among strangers, such as the neighbors who offered to help move the participants' and her family's belongings into their home. The learners believed that to some extent, their experiences of the phenomena did cause them stress and hinder their language learning during their transition into the target culture.

5. Conclusion

While the number of participants for the study was minimal, the factors within the findings are unique to the group selected and their individual experiences with the phenomenon of culture shock. The study examined cultural elements from both the first and target cultures retaining to each situation and the participants' perception of how they were conflicted by the phenomenon, the first culture would appear to have clashed with the target cultures in different ways in each participant in accordance to the situation at hand. Covington (1992) places an emphasis on language institutions, however, the cultural interactions seem to occur on a much grander scale, both in and outside the language classrooms. In the end, the participants were able to manage their integration by embarking on their own journey to understand the differences into cultures. Therefore, integration would seem to represent a crucial element, and is encouraged among learners who are in the process of learning a second language while residing in a foreign environment, particularly one where there are great cultural differences.

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