

An analysis of Challenges International Students Face in pursuing doctoral study in the area of English language teaching

ABSTRACT

Aims: A lot of international students aspire to seek admissions in higher education, and pursue their studies especially in the US. Therefore, institutions in general and American institutions in particular must realize the students' perspectives and offer support so the students can face their unique problems and during their education. This review aims to look into specific learning and adaptation related experiences of six international higher education students during a challenging transition to a large, public, research university in the United States.

Study design & Methodology: A qualitative method for data collection and analysis was followed to arrive at conclusions. Therefore, 6 Saudi students were interviewed in detail.

Setting of the Study: The study was conducted at an American university in the south west. The program enrolls students from all over the world seeking master's and doctoral degrees in languages and social studies. Students may select from a wide range of concentrations such as teaching English as a Second Language and bilingual education, and social justice, just to name a few. These students are often encouraged to study interdisciplinary subjects to improve their understanding of the realm of education and how it's affected by society and politics. Professors teaching these interdisciplinary subjects who also descend from various countries and major in various disciplines usually hold controversial and sometimes even contradicting visions on education and research issues.

Results:

Results revealed that international Saudi students faced challenges and problems which could be roughly mentioned as language barriers, academic differences, and funding. Study findings also revealed various social, cultural, financial and family related implications arising from the continuous increase of Saudi students on American higher education.

Conclusion: This review studied different challenges and problems were faced by most Saudi international students while pursuing higher education (master's and doctoral education) in the US. The challenges and problems were summarized under certain specific themes/heads. It is concluded that Saudi international students encounter certain difficulties in the US institutions such as adjustment, family responsibilities, financial crisis, lack of administrative support, communication gap between the supervisors and the researchers, etc.

Keywords: Higher education; English education; second/foreign language; academic writing; challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

The number of international students studying in the United States of America (nearly one million for the academic year of 2014-2015) exceeded the number of international students studying abroad in other nations altogether (Wetherill, 2015). Wetherill and Clayton (2014) indicated in their study that the population of international students represents 4% of total population of students in the United States of America. However, it appears that nations like the United Kingdom and Australia have succeeded in obtaining and sustaining higher retention rates of the international students than the United

Stated of America(Burkholder & Holland, 2014). As an international graduate student who is pursuing his higher education in the United States of America, I wonder what leading factors are at play that contributed to such a paradox between America and other nations in terms of the retention rate? What supporting components are missing or malfunctioning for international students in the U.S. but were successively made available and efficiently functioning in other nations? Why do international students in the United States of America seem to struggle in their academic journey? Is the problem pertinent to academic readiness?

From my own experience, I believe that a major and a logic reason behind the existence of those international students in America (or any other nation) is their exemplary academic excellence back at their home, otherwise they would have not been nominated, selected, and sponsored by their governments to represent their nations in aboard universities. I assert that a huge number of international students, at least those I was privileged to meet, somehow have reached a certain degree of fluency and eligibly passed some forms of achievement tests that qualified and legitimized their admitted status at American schools. Therefore, I argue that the probable cause of such a struggle that some of the international students in the U.S. are enduring goes beyond their academic aptitudes. It is probably factors that deal with the new educational structure, academic life, and social world the international students have just entered (Burdett, & Crossman, 2012). Their struggle revolves around, I think, issues intersecting with their cultural and national boundaries and expectations more than it is the lack of a certain set of academic skills. It was noted in the recent past that Saudi students face many challenges of different types: cultural issues, adaptation problems, family responsibilities, financial crisis, general health, social and emotional problems, and language and academic challenges.(Albeshir,2022). While Alasmari (2023) confirmed adaptation related issues.

1.1. Problem statement

This paper endeavors to critically tap onto some obstacles and issues the international students are confronting in the United States of America. Its ultimate goal is to help school administrators and academic advising services better understand this group of students. It also aims at assisting the school administrators tailor their future initiatives towards more equitable comprehension and inclusion of this minority group of students and to alleviate the issues and obstacles they are facing. It particularly concentrates on studying the advisor-advisee relationship along with communication breakdowns/malfunctions between the international student and his/her committee members or advisor. As a graduate student, I have come to realize that international students are more likely to experience more hardships compared to their American fellows, due to differences in terms of culture and education system. So, this paper strives to inform stakeholders (school administrators and faculty and international students alike) and suggest ideas that tolerate no further inequalities, injustices, and discrimination between the students in terms of their access to the school advisory resources. All school resources should guide students' professional development in a way that helps them 'read the world' in which they live.

2. Literature review

2.1. Areview of multiple factors

An international student's ability to succeed in an American college is no longer solely dependent on his/her level of intellectuality, intelligence, or linguistic competence but also is contingent upon and intertwined with so many factors. The path to succeed in foreign universities is more complicated than it simply appears. From my own experience, I have come to a realization that it takes more than a sophisticated and well-formed set of academic skills to persist in the American educational system. I believe the success in studying far from home, family, friends, every social and academic space that looked familiar to me, and every beloved cultural practice I grow up following, cannot but be influenced and contingent upon more than one's mere cognitive abilities or academic skills, as mentioned above. I, and others with whom I was pleased and privileged to meet, have felt a sense of alienation and frustration especially in our first year of studies. These sentiments were echoed by first-generation doctoral students as revealed by (Gardner, 2013). A sense of belonging, which can be cultivated by academic advisors, is a very influential factor (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).Affiliating with some sort of a community greatly enhances one's self-esteem and efficacy. As a human being, feeling and gaining that sense of belonging and respect is of great significance in order to succeed in a context whereby all surroundings, communication patterns, and expectations look challenging and completely novel. The advisors' appreciation, acceptance, and respect of the international students' backgrounds enhance the international students' outcomes on the personal and academic level alike (Cadieux, & Wehrly,1986).The findings of the latter accord with others in which effort, personal and academic development, and improved learning outcomes were found three influential factors that an advisor of international students can inspire and accomplish by being more attentive and appreciative to the students' backgrounds and funds of knowledge(Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013).

The criticality of the college level is emphasized in this article because to me, a college is a place where first-hand unfamiliar spaces and identities are enormously created, given the increasingly multi-ethnic, racial, and cultural demographic in which one has to blend(Witherell& Clayton, 2014). In the college level, international students are often obligated to cross the boundaries of their comfort zones to engage in totally-unfamiliar experiences that could challenge their ability to academically thrive. New campuses and novel national experiences can be overwhelming (Burdett,

&Crossman, 2012). This unfamiliarity that the international students undergo in college might, subsequently, threaten and undermine their life chances because the college level is indeed a critical crossroad. One avenue for students to escape this maze is to utilize a counseling/advising resource through which navigating this complex educational system becomes possible. As Petress explicated, "students' academic performance is inexorably tied to how the rest of their lives are progressing. Students' teacher, peer, family, romantic, and employment relationships; their physical, mental, and emotional, and spiritual health; their out-of-class activity, financial well being; test anxiety; and post graduation anxieties are all germane to the advisor's role" (1996, p. 92, as cited in Prop & Rhodes, 2006).

In a very racially and ethnically diverse educational context, as it is the case of any campus in most of the American universities, it is expected that a decent advising service is made available for students, which is, to a large degree, the case in most American schools in the U.S. However, the fact that these counseling services were made 'accessible' may not necessarily evoke positive outcomes. Perry, Weatherford, and Lausch (2016) have revealed that international students have experienced more difficulties while collaborating with their academic advisors. Their study produced results that corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work of (Hwang, B., Bennett, R., & Beauchemin, 2014; & Valka, 2015) who showed that international students exhibited more concerns about their advisor-advisee relationship than their western-students peers.

The heterogeneity of students' cultural backgrounds and expectations of what a decent counseling experience should entail and look like represents a challenge to school administrators. This heterogeneity is a result of the distinct dispositions and habitus that students bring with them. What I mean by habitus is "the embodiment of what one brings to bear on a particular moment of being with the other in life and in classroom: all the intellectual tools, languages, perspectives, social practices, and so on that one has acquired or learn" (Jones and Enriquez, 2009, p. 147).

It is uncommon for students' preferences on advising to come to a consensus. Research has revealed that some students found it more benefitting when advisors are known for their technical competences rather than personal merits (Pascarella, 1980). Other students value a healthy advisor-advisee relationship at the expense of other technical competences (Winston and Sandor, 1984). But regardless of how inconsistent the students' preferences on advising are, research has shown some broad grounds amidst these diverse expectations of advisor. These broad expectations are twofold: An advisor as an academic developer and as a personality mentor. These two merits are what students usually seek out in their advisors. But, if extant literature has highlighted these two features for advisors to simply acknowledge, why is it still a fact that breakdowns between international students and their advisors are still persistent and prevalent? This inquiry will be addressed in the next section of this paper.

2.1. Socio cultural problems

It has always been challenging for international students to settle down in a country with a different language and culture from their home country, especially when the educational set up is unfamiliar. (Rabia and, Karkouti (2017). However Jameel et al. (2022) found that most Saudi students were finally happy in Australia.

2.3. Financial issues

Financial problems are always considered significant because students are almost always in need of money for different reasons. In this context, it is not that crucial for Saudi students because most of them receive funds as financial aid from the Saudi government (Alremaih, 2016). Aldossari (2016) and Alhajjaj (2016) conducted similar studies and support Alremaih's findings. However, Alhajjaj, (2016) and Alremaih (2016) noted that married students having children are more likely to face financial challenges because they have to utilize the facility of nurseries for their young kids. Albeshir (2022) also confirmed that there are certain difficulties including finance which Saudi international students face in the US.

2.4. Family responsibilities

Most doctoral students live with families during their studies in the US. Males have multiple family responsibilities which they want to do, but they don't get enough time to do household even chores which they have to do. Female students face more issues. They are blamed for negligence toward family and children. Female international Saudi student told that they need nurseries to keep their kids while they are away for studies in the campuses, but there are not many nurseries nearby. (Alramadan, 2016; Alremaih, 2016). Above all, nurseries are quite expensive.

3. Methods of the study

3.1. Setting of the study

The study was conducted at an American university in the south west. The program enrolls students from all over the world seeking master's and doctoral degrees in languages and social studies. Students may select from a wide range of concentrations such as teaching English as a Second Language and bilingual education, and social justice, just to name a few. These students are often encouraged to study interdisciplinary subjects to improve their understanding of the realm of education and how it's affected by society and politics. Professors teaching these interdisciplinary subjects who also descend from various countries and major in various disciplines usually hold controversial and sometimes even contradicting visions on education and research issues. So students find themselves urged to encounter different types of social, cultural, and even academic and scientific challenges having to deal directly with professors unrelated to their

academic interests or beliefs. Conflicts particularly surface when these students and their professors start discussing and projecting their views on the best research practices, especially when a lack of consensus exists between two fields to which the students and their professor relate. Power dynamics across the various disciplines in that program also was a factor that contributed to the decline and acceptance of some students and their academic prospects.

The study followed the qualitative method for data collection and analysis. Therefore, 6 Saudi students were interviewed in detail. Study findings revealed various cultural implications arising from the continuous increase of Saudi students on American higher education campuses. The cultural construct was shown to have several subsequent aspects including: transition, academic life, and social life. University support systems were explored to demonstrate a replicable model that can be adopted to ease the cultural adjustment of these students.

3.2. Purpose and Research questions

As cultural constructs impact student success in colleges, this study explores cultural constructs of a group of Saudi students studying for a college degree in the United States in an effort to explore the multifaceted dimensions of their cultural background and the measures that can address their adjustment challenges to maximize success and benefits from their college experience. The study also offers a deeper understanding of the psychological alienation created by their presence outside their zones of comfort. Related to academic achievement, the patterns of cultural behaviors influencing these students while pursuing their degrees will also reveal rarely visited areas unique to the Saudi case.

The research aimed to discover:

1) what challenges do Saudi international students face while applying and pursuing English language education in the US?

2) what other challenges do these students face in the US?

and 3) the role of the expected support systems provided by universities or agencies in the US?

3.3. Participants

A group of six international students are recruited. These students are pursuing their higher education at an American university in the Midwestern region and descend from different nationalities, races, ethnicities, and genders. Three of them are females and three are males. All of them have come a long way in their course work phase. Four of them have their program of studies finished and the other two are about to complete their courses. All but one of the participants are married and have teaching experiences of at least four years. Four of the participants have children. The participants' advanced position in their programs of study course will inform the tentative findings in this project as the participants have experienced and gained adequate and rich knowledge about the nature of academic relationships in the American educational structure. It is also worthy to mention that my participants and I share a strong academic relationship as conferences and professional developmental workshops held by the school periodically bring us together. The next pseudonyms are used to refer to the participants in the tentative findings section, Michel, John, Zizo, Suzan, Sarah, and Brittney.

3.4. Instrument and implementation

To collect data for this project, 'interview' was selected and implemented for collection of qualitative data. As a researcher, I wanted to collectively discuss and shed the light on some critical aspects that some of us (international students) might have or are currently experiencing. To coordinate between all participants, this group interview was scheduled in different times and days. The participants have agreed on the location and date for the interview to take place. Unofficial consent forms (invitations) were also sent to the participants. The participants were also informed that our discussion will be recorded. Two of them attended the interview while the rest responded via online mode especially the zoom.

3.5. Research questions

Following questions were asked to each of the interviewee:

1- Do you face any social or cultural issues? If yes, what kinds?

2- How crucial is the financial problems faced by you as an international student?

3- To what extent is your family a factor that contributes further to challenges?

4- Do you think living alone would be better than living with your family?

5- Is English language/accent also a challenge? If yes, to what extent?

6- Do you mix up with non Saudis in gatherings? If yes, which nationalities do you interact with, and why?

7- Did you find it difficult to choose a preferred course/program?

4. Analysis of qualitative data

4.1. Thematic Analysis of the Interview

Theme.1- Cultural differences & adjustment:

Based on the interview responses and available literature it can be said that suggest there are many cultural differences between the two countries such as the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. (Alenezi, 2019; Alhajj, Almotery, 2009; Alobidan, 2020; Brutt-Griffle, et al., 2020). It is also a fact that while seeking admissions in the American universities, the candidates keep such differences in mind, and are ready to accommodate or adjust with (Alenezi, 2019, Alobidan, 2020) unless the issue becomes 'religious' which a muslim may not tolerate. (Alqahtani, 2020). On the other hand, married Saudi students are supposed to deal with less adjustment issues than their counterparts who are unmarried. (Alramadan, 2016). Adjustment issues are not only associated with cultural factors but also linguistic as the Saudi students find it difficult to accurately and impressively communicate in English language. (Alsanea, 2017). He continued that the mixing issue of genders in the classroom also leads to cultural and adjustment related challenges.

Theme.2- family issues and Dependence

Most of Saudi students at higher education level study in the US when they are married. They depend on each other. Sometimes they feel more independent in the US. Females, felt more independent in their daily lives (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Macias, 2016; Alruwaili, 2017; Alenezi, 2019;). While they are independent to a great extent, there is always blame that some female students neglect families and prefer studies. In this connection, the female students were found as more indifferent towards their para- academic responsibilities because they were overburdened with their studies. Out of many challenges for female students one is related to children's education as there are not many available nurseries or elementary schools nearby the international students' residences. (Alramadan, 2016; Alremaih, 2016).

Theme.3- Financial difficulties

Financial issues are not a big issue for Saudi international students studying in the US for those who get funds from the Saudi government (Aldossari, 2016; Alhajj, 2016; Alremaih, 2016). However, those who bear additional family responsibilities face real financial challenges, especially the ones who have young children to be educated (Alhajj, 2016; Alremaih, 2016). Nursery/primary education in the US is not free like in the KSA. Moreover, not all students can work part time due to regulations and short of time.

Theme.4- Academic challenges related to the English language

English language education has been noticed as one of the crucial challenges for Saudi International students. (Heyn, 2013; Melius, 2017; Young, & Snead, 2017; Alqarni, 2018; Alenezi, 2019; Alobidan, 2020; BruttGriffle, et al., 2020) Many Saudi students agreed that their inadequate English language proficiency has adversely affected their academic achievement (Sandekian, et al., 2015). In addition, reviews of studies revealed that thesis and project writing is also a challenge especially for those who are not good at academic writings. (Alenezi, 2019; Alhajj, 2016; Alqarni, 2018; Alromahe, 2018; Bar, 2017; Brutt-Griffleet al., 2020). As perceived by many professors, the academic writing skill of many scholars are not up to the mark, therefore supervisors are not quite happy. (Alenezi, 2019; Almorshedi, Alromahe, 2018; Bar, 2017). On the other hand, some researchers have explored that by the time the students advance and progress, they face less academic reading issues (Melius, 2017; Alromahe, 2018; Alenezi, 2019).

English language issues are related to all the skills including listening and speaking. Fluency issue is quite crucial. (Sandekian, et al., 2015). Language anxiety and hesitation is another factor that hampers such skills especially when there is a big audience. (Unruh & Obeida, 2015; Alhajj, 2016; Young, & Snead, 2017; Alqarni, 2018; Albahlal, 2019).

Theme.5-Academic Admission

Another significant challenge faced by Saudi students is admission approval from the American universities. It has been noticed that some students are not satisfied with many universities' administration in the U.S. and their admission requirement such as high score in the TOEFL, which is very difficult for quite many Saudis (Almorshedi, 2011; Almotery, 2014; Alremaih, 2016). Lack of quality support and coordination has been felt by international Saudi students.

5. Discussion, Findings, and Conclusions

5.1. Discussion

Many of critical aspects that were taped into during the course of the interviews concerned with exploring and critiquing systems of power. One of the key points deliberated in this project was the vital role of language in perpetuating the status quo of the power dynamics predominant in interpersonal relationships in the school settings. I sparked the discussion by briefly exhibiting the potential of language and its powerful effect in shaping our social relationships; how a certain and dominant ideology can be manufactured and carried over by language; and how language has created a set of norms for students to follow. Then, normativity in schools (and especially in the advisor-advisee relationship) has become a major aspect of our discussion. We exchanged insightful deliberations and engaged in informed discussions about how language and norms in the school, as a social structure, dictate human being's subjectivity and agency leaving them in a false consciousness (Adorno, 1982). In addition to the specific questions asked and answered, the participants reflected on their stories and showed how it was difficult for them not to follow the "norms" when approaching their advisors. "I

always over think about what to tell my advisor a thousand time and ahead because I do not want make her feel like disobeyed.”

It became compelling to us that through language, the members of any social structure are unconsciously being commanded to follow the socially reproduced, preconditioned, and looked-for “norms”(Gallagher, 1992). We also agreed on that critical literacy is a practice that involves resistance in social contexts.

The participants were given the opportunity to articulate their feelings and share their experiences while dealing with their advisors. Through critical reflection, we came to a consensus that there was a vacuum in the educational system that nurtures the occurrence of these obstacles between the advisors and their international advisees. When the participants were asked to bring on their experiences in this regard, one of the participants took the initiative and said “I don’t know where to start. It’s been really tough. I mean um can you believe that for two years I was not given the chance to register for the courses I wanted to have? I mean it’s crazy. I know that my advisor is very knowledgeable in my area but this does not give her the right to treat me like an undergrad.”

It is clear from this example that the Saudi students felt intimidated by his advisor’s authority and control, and was confused and frustrated. Although a sense of respect seemed to feature participant’s relationship with his advisor, which can be inferred from his word “knowledgeable”, a sense of being oppressed also coexisted, “does not give her the right to treat me like an undergrad”. The same sentiment was echoed by John. One other participant (John) supported former’s disposition by saying:

“I kind of had the same experience but the way I approached it was different. I mean my advisor in my first year told me that she’s a directive person from the beginning. She imposed some courses on me and I could not take it. So, I simply asked for another advisor.

Although all students are in agreement on that an advisor should always be “knowledgeable”, “supportive”, and “critical” in giving feedback, it is clear that these two examples evidently indicated the exertion of authority over the international students. Another powerful example can be found in Sarah’s comment when she stated that “I need my advisor to deal with me as an adult who have families, kids, and another live besides the one in campus (says, Sarah in her stories/part of her interview). When I carefully analyze her words, it can be arguably inferred that there is a lack of understanding from the advisor. This lack of understanding was the catalyst for the resulted breakdown between the two.

Feedback was a recurring theme in the interview. It appears that all the participants have agreed on its importance. What is worth mentioning, though, is Michel’s and John’s complaint and dissatisfaction about the inconsistency they have noticed about their advisors’ amount of feedback. “I was not expecting such these treatments from an advisor. I felt that my professional needs were not met and even not respected. I came to the U.S. to learn and improve my skills from expert professors as everyone expects when he goes to a university in a leading country. I felt that I needed more feedback and a room for more discussions ... in order to develop my research skills” (Michel’s interview).

John’s narrative about feedback differed from Michel’s in that he noticed his advisor’s inconsistency and discrimination against him. When I asked him to clarify, the response was “we students talk. And what I noticed is that my advisor is not consistent in treating all students. Some are getting critical feedback and others’ topics I would say are being laughed at” (John, interview, 2016). He continues; “every time I asked him for feedback, he would say “yes” “sure” but would never ever get back to me. And, every time I think of asking him, I think that he will misunderstand me or get mad over me. Really sad! What even makes me crazy is that every time I visit him in his office, he would make some silly comments and say “oh, you didn’t do that to you forgot to mention this” (John’s interview)

John’s and Michel’s responses confirm my argument in that the EVT theory (although beneficial) does not suffice and account to explicate all breakdowns and malfunctions between international students and their advisors. The EVT theory solely focuses on the expectations different interlocutors of a conversation have on each other and overlooks the context potential in creating and sustaining obstacles for international students. The aforementioned examples provide a compelling explanation of the role of educational system in place in withstanding an oppressive cycle and power hierarchy in the interpersonal relationship between advisor and their international students.

When the participants were encouraged to collectively brainstorm to suggest a way out of this maze, their responses were different. On the one hand, some found this idea appealing. On the other hand, others deemed it challenging to designate a document or take an action that tolerates no discriminations against the international students in terms of access and benefit of academic advisory resources. Brittney stated that “I wouldn’t write anything since I didn’t have any negative experiences with the advisors” (Brittney, interview, 2016). Michel deemed it hard to “think of the document as an agreement”, he continues,... “the academia is a community of practice where its members share, exchange, discuss, and help each other without an agreement or contract” (Michel, interview, 2016). However, John and Zizo had a different view in this regard. A common ground between the two is clear in Zizo’s utterance in which he says, “If we were to suggest an agreement, we would make sure it includes the following. First of all, new graduate students must have a meeting with department’s head or anyone in charge to explain to them explicitly the rights and responsibilities between PhD candidate and committee members” (Zizo’s story/ interview).

Zizo’s powerful utterance is evidently one out of many examples that speak to the participants’ final conclusion. Susan and Sarah proposed the establishment of a workshop to take place in the beginning of each academic year. “I think it would be great if we can get some from the department talk about, you know, what kind of assistance to expect from your

advisor, like a bill of rights to be shared" (Susan, interview) is Collectively, all the participants, including me and Brittney who experienced no obstacles at all, found their proposal appealing and reasonable that the school should consider organizing and designating a certain workshop in which the school representatives specify and demonstrate the students' and advisors' rights and obligations. This will preserve all parties' justices. Students' complaint about the "lack of feedback or "guidance", "acceptance and understanding of backgrounds", and undervalue of their "views and decisions" and many other issues they think their advisors must acknowledge and respect can be resolved if the school prearranges such workshops. When these workshops are publically organized for both the students and advisors to attend, it becomes easier for students to identify and express any sort of discrimination, prejudice, and injustice practiced against them because they would have already learned what to be expected and what their rights are.

5.2. Important Findings

Research questions and findings

Research question.1- Do you face any social or cultural issues? If yes, what kinds?

Review of previous studies and the responses of the current study's participants confirm that most of the Saudi international students face different kinds of problems and challenges: cultural differences & adjustment, family issues and dependence, financial problems, academic and linguistic barriers, etc.

Research question.2- How crucial is the financial problems faced by you as an international student?

Finance related issues are crucial for international students. Saudi students also encounter such problems due to many genuine reasons. Saudi government provide funding in most cases, though.

Research question. 3- To what extent is your family a factor that contributes further to challenges?

Family responsibility is crucial for both males and female students. They have to perform multiple and different roles apart from studies during which they are unable to justify their roles.

Research question. 4- Do you think living alone would be better than living with your family?

It has been found from the responses of the participants that staying alone or being together has both advantages and disadvantages.

Research question.5- Is English language/accents also a challenge? If yes, to what extent?

It has been confirmed by the participants that they encounter language related issues especially during the first year of the study.

Research question.6- Do you mix up with non Saudis in gatherings? If yes, which nationalities do you interact with, and why?

Participants revealed that they usually don't mix up with non-Saudis due to their home culture.

Research question.7- Did you find it difficult to choose a preferred course/program?

It was noted that most students face such issues, and don't get enough support from any ends.

5.3. Conclusions

This review studied different challenges faced by Saudi international students while pursuing higher education in the United States. The challenges were summarized under certain specific themes/heads. It is concluded that Saudi international students encounter certain difficulties in the US institutions such as adjustment, family responsibilities, financial crisis, lack of administrative support, communication gap between the supervisors and the researchers, etc.

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Appendix-A: Interview questions & responses

Following questions were asked to each of the interviewees:

- 1- Do you face any social or cultural issues? If yes, what kinds?
- 2- How crucial are the financial problems faced by you as an international student?
- 3- To what extent is your family a factor that contributes further to challenges?
- 4- Do you think living alone would be better than living with your family?
- 5- Is English language/accent also a challenge? If yes, to what extent?
- 6- Do you mix up with non Saudis in gatherings? If yes, which nationalities do you interact with, and why?
- 7- Did you find it difficult to choose a preferred course/program?

Responses:

Q.1- Do you face any social or cultural issues? If yes, what kinds?

Michel: yes, there are. We are identified as member of a different community, and sometimes treated differently.

John: Cultural identities are really crucial.

Zizo: Interactions outside campuses are limited and somewhat restricted.

Suzan: Local administration is perhaps not much aware or concerned with the Saudi international students.

Sarah: We face the loss of connectedness to important family members and the lack of local community support that perhaps increase their socio-psychological distress.

Brittney: Our collectivist cultural background lead to interactions and mixing up locally.

2- How crucial are the financial problems faced by you as an international student?

Michel: The cost of life is quite high. It affects living in general.

John: Despite a good financial support from Saudi government, there is a need to be economic in all dimensions.

Zizo: Since we live with families (and children), nursery/primary education is also quite costly. We are used to frequent and even fun shopping which is not easy here in the US.

Suzan: We often face financial anxiety due to limited funds but extra needs.

Sarah: It's quite obvious in the US as we spend in dollars.

Brittney: Not much. I get financial support from my father too.

3- To what extent is your family and kids a factor that contributes further to challenges?

Michel: I am living alone.

John: family responsibility is crucial because we have to do all the works alone.

Zizo: we are blamed for neglecting family especially children.

Suzan: I am not worried about. My husband takes care.

Sarah: maintaining a balance between education and family responsibility is really challenging.

Brittney: Ladies are supposed to take care families. Keeping a maid in the US is extremely expensive and sometimes unsafe.

4- Do you think living alone would be better than living with your family?

Michel: No, it will be more troublesome.

John: not our culture to be away for a long time.

Zizo: It has advantages and disadvantages both.

Suzan: can't say exactly.

Sarah: Family is a big support.

Brittney: it affects anyhow: living together or not.

5- Is English language/accent also a challenge? If yes, to what extent?

Michel: Yes, it is. Communication gap matters.

John: In the beginning for a few months, it was hard to grasp the accent, pitch and stress patters apart from vocabulary.

Zizo: English has different varieties so we need to understand.

Suzan: Well, sometime sound patterns negatively affect understanding and expression.

Sarah: sharing is caring.

Brittney: Though American English is different, not impossible to comprehend.

6- Do you mix up with non Saudis in gatherings? If yes, which nationalities do you interact with, and why?

Michel: rarely.

John: sometimes (with my family)

Zizo: yes, when important.

Suzan: mostly not.

Sarah: We feel isolated and we are neglected too.

Brittney: not our culture to interact with strangers especially in private parties/gatherings.

7- Did you find it difficult to choose a preferred course/program?

Michel: it was difficult in the beginning.

John: it was hard as we had not mustered enough support.

Zizo: we had to do everything, therefore exploring the right thing and right way was not easy.

Suzan: well, yes.

Sarah: I initially struggled.

Brittney: not exactly.