



MONASH University

**Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women's access to
Women-Only English Classes in Australia**

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Abstract

Australia is a multicultural nation which has one of the highest proportions of non-English background immigrants and refugees, most of whom come from Muslim countries or regions (ABS, 2011). Indeed, a number of studies have been conducted in this country to examine Muslim immigrants' English learning experiences and the factors that influence their access into/success within this process. Within this group, for Muslim women, and particularly those from an Iraqi background, access to English classes is not easy. Some recent studies (e.g. Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013; AMES, 2008; 2007; DEEWR 2009; Macrae, 2002; McCue, 2008; Rida & Milton, 2001) have reported that these women lack access to English classes due to a number of sociocultural, religious and ethical barriers. In response to this, starting in the 90s a number of language teaching institutes in Victoria started providing basic English literacy programs designed only for immigrant women who reported challenges in coping with mainstream English classes.

This qualitative case study critically examines the nature of access of Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women (IMIW) to the few women-only English literacy programs currently offered by language teaching institutes in Melbourne and the sociocultural factors that influence their successes and failures within these programs. In so doing, the study sheds light on Muslim women's English learning in Australia in general by critically examining this group's persistent needs and concerns. The study also provides suggestions on how the women-only English programs can be optimised for greater involvement and learning efficiency for immigrant women in their learning of English in Australia.

The research participants are eight Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women who arrived in Melbourne, Victoria within the last five years and have accessed English learning opportunities with varying levels of success. The selected eight participants were in two groups - the first group of four IMIW were currently studying English at different women-only English classes in Melbourne, while the second group of four IMIW either did not join any English classes in Australia or withdrew from their

classes. Data were collected in two stages following Creswell et al. (2007) design of triangulation, involving questionnaires and both individual and focus group interviews.

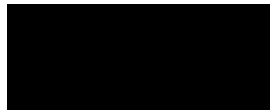
Findings show that the researched IMIW generally held positive attitudes towards English and its learning and use in Australia. Factors such as single-gender environment, the availability, proximity and access to support networks and flexibility of time were found to likely increase their access into the women-only English classes. Nevertheless, factors such as lack of information and limited provision of such classes were reported as obstacles. Generally speaking, it can be argued that the women-only programs are a useful initiative that require more attention from the Australian government. It is through the spirit of social inclusion strategy of Australia that such initiatives will contribute in developing the country through empowering immigrant women and increasing their social participation in the broader Australian community.

It is hoped that the results of this study will help policy makers, curriculum developers, course coordinators as well as the immigrants to optimise and enhance immigrant-specific English language learning in Australia in more equitable, fair and socially just ways.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

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Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee

The research for this thesis received the approval of the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) on 10/07/2013 (reference: CF13/2036 – 2013001066)

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List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
AMES	Adult Migrant English Services
AMTB	Attitude/Motivation/Test/Battery
AV	Anglicare Victoria
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DIAC	Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship
ASIB	Australian Social Inclusion Board
ALLP	Australian Language and Literacy Policy
BWH	Broadmeadows Women House
CHAT	Cultural-Historical Activity Theory
DNH	Dandenong Neighbourhood House
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
ELP	English Language Program
ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESO	English-Study Online
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IMIW	Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
MWEI	Melbourne Women's English Institute
MUHREC	Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NEW	Newcomer Women's Services Toronto

SCT Socio-Cultural Theory

SLA Second Language Acquisition

SLL Second Language Learning

TAFE Technical and Further Education

TG Transformational Grammar

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Published Journal Articles

Published Journal Articles							
Title	Author(s)	Publisher	Page numbers	Year	Volume/Issue	ISSN	Publication quality and Impact in the field *
EFL learners moving to an ESL context: Motivating and demotivating factors in English language learning among Iraqis	Dat Bao, Hassan Abdilah and Raqib Chowdhury	<i>The New English Teacher</i> , 2012	19	2012	6.1	1905 - 7725	The article was published in The New English Teacher journal which is a scholarly peer-reviewed journal. The article is also available on www.reaserchgate.net and www.academia.edu and has been viewed 3286 times by scholars around the world.
Gender and motivation: A case study of Iraqi immigrants in Melbourne	Hassan Abdilah and Raqib Chowdhury	<i>International Journal of Arts & Sciences</i> , 2013	10	2013	6(1)	1943 - 6114	The article was published in The International Journal of Arts & Sciences (IJAS) which was founded in 2005 as a double-blind refereed journal. The article is also available on www.reaserchgate.net and www.academia.edu and has been viewed 429 times by scholars around the world.

Chapter One: Introduction

1. Overview

This chapter begins with an introduction to the topic and why it is worthy of research, followed by an explanation of the role of English in the integration of immigrants. English learning for Muslim women in Australia is then discussed, alongside women-only English classes, and the research aims and questions which have driven this study. The potential significance of this research follows, before I explain my personal experiences which have led to this research being undertaken. Finally, I present an outline of all the chapters to come.

1.1 Background

This research investigates Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women's (IMIW) access to the women-only English classes initiated by the Australian government to increase women immigrants' social participation in the Australian community. According to the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), the Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) immigrants ought to have at least some English skills to be able to participate in and integrate into broader Australian society, as well as to access available services (DIAC, 2008). The Australian Social Inclusion Board (ASIB, 2012) asserted that disadvantaged immigrants who lack effective English competency are likely to become even more disadvantaged and isolated in Australian society. English has gained its dominant status because it is the "de facto" national language of Australia and is the only language spoken by about 83% of the population. It is also "the language of the major and powerful institutes in Australian society" (Lo Bianco, 1987).

It is well-known that Australia now has one of the highest populations (per capita) of overseas-born immigrants, all arriving under varying circumstances. According to the ABS (2011), 6.0 million overseas-born people (27%) lived in Australia as at 30 June 2011, most of them came from Muslim countries or regions. According to the

Department of Immigration and Border Protection annual report (DIBP, 2015), people from Iraq represented the largest ethnic group to be granted humanitarian visas (followed by the Syrians and Burmese). In Iraq, English is treated as a foreign language. This is why the Iraqi immigrants' English competency is relatively low at the time of their arrival in Australia. Some Iraqi immigrants even arrive in Australia with no English skills at all, meaning they did not have any English education in their country of birth (Bao, Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2012; De Courcy, 2007).

According to DIAC (2009), 42% of Muslim immigrants are women. The majority of these are mothers with children (Hassan & Lester, 2015). Recognising the great importance of English language in the immigrant's (including Muslim women's) social life and settlement, the Australian government has funded many English language programs to help Muslim immigrants, particularly women, learn the language. One of these programs is the women-only English classes. Despite these significant services of English learning, questions still arise as to how Muslim immigrant women utilize such services and whether these services meet their literacy needs. This study proposes to investigate this issue through a qualitative case study involving eight IMIW's.

1.2 The role of English in the integration of immigrants

As mentioned above, the population of Muslim immigrants has increased rapidly in Australia in recent years. Iraq is amongst the top five countries from which Australia is currently accepting refugees. This is happening under various visa categories including women at risk visas and other refugee visas (DIAC, 2009). Most Iraqi immigrants arrive in Australia as families (DIAC, 2008). It is well known that English plays a key role in their social life and settlement in this country. This makes their English learning and the obstacles that may hinder it a main focus of current L2 research. Such research work has been promoted and funded by the Australian government itself as it recognizes the importance of inclusion of this cultural group in the wider Australian society for the sake of many economic, social security and development purposes (ASIB, 2012)

L2 researchers recognize the role of social setting in L2 learning, especially in countries where the target language is the only formal speaking language, such as is the case in

Australia. The most influential theories which assert the role of social setting in L2 learning are the sociocultural model of Vygotsky and his colleagues and the socio-educational model proposed by Gardner and his colleagues. Both theories argue that L2 learning is a social process that is influenced by the social context, as well as being a process which also influences social context (Davdov, 1995; Gardner, 2001, & Lantlof, 1994). Inspired by this framework, some L2 research has examined sociocultural factors that affect Iraqi Muslim women immigrants' English learning, as well as examining the role of English competence in their social life in particular, and in the nation's development and economy in general.

Many L2 researchers argue that sociocultural factors such as family, religion, age, gender, and availability of classes, can be barriers that restrict Muslim women's access to English classes (Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013; Rida & Milton, 2001; McCue, 2008; Yasmeen, 2007). Rida and Milton (2001), for example, researched Muslim women from Iraq, Bosnia and Afghanistan who had at the time recently arrived in Australia. They documented internal and external factors such as mixed-gender classes, time and location of classes, and lack of information about eligibility, and concluded that these factors "contributed to the relatively low presence of Muslim women in English language programs" (p. 38).

In addition, researchers have investigated the role of English in Muslim women's settlement and employment (Taylor, 2005; Waxman, 2000). Waxman (2000) for example argues that "English language proficiency is crucial for successful adjustment from an economic [and] social perspective" (p. 7). This means that English competency is very important to Muslim women's successful settlement, employment, and social participation. Viewed from the social perspective, acquiring English will increase these immigrants' social participation and employment and, in turn, will enhance the nations' social harmony and economy.

This two-way relationship between English learning and the Australian social setting is the main focus of this research. Most current L2 research on IMIW's focuses on personal sociocultural factors that may affect these immigrants' English learning in Australia.

However, less attention has been paid to other important factors such as Islam, security, social network and Australian community views on these immigrants (see figure.1)

The Australian government, through a number of teaching institutions and community organizations, recently initiated women-only English classes to stimulate more Muslim women immigrants into participating in the English programs it offers freely to them. Even though these classes have been available for many years now, the level of participation of Muslim immigrant women has not been scrutinised in academic research. Some research has been done to examine Muslim women's English learning in Australia from a more general perspective. Still, there has seldom been documented work such as publications, government and/or organisational/institutional reports on the women-only literacy classes.

As for the Iraqi Immigrant Muslim Women's access to such classes, I am not aware of any empirical study that specifically focuses on IMIW's access to women-only English programs in Australia. Therefore scholarly research is much needed on this groups' decision-making process, and in exploring the factors that encourage/discourage their access to such programs. Such research may lead to promotion of the encouraging factors and overcoming the discouraging ones. This is what the current study seeks to achieve through examining a group of Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women in Melbourne. I am from a migrant background myself. I have witnessed with my wife and my fellow Iraqi women immigrants the big difficulties they face in their English learning in Australia.

Two years ago I conducted a Master's thesis and completed similar research to this current research, and recommended the provision of women-only English programs through Muslim community organizations, in order to improve these women's English learning. That study also recommended the need for future research to further investigate this problem, and that is what the current study is based on.

In my opinion, Islam, security, and the views of the Australian community play a very important role in the decisions IMIW's make in whether or not to access their free English classes in Australia.

Therefore, investigating these factors has the potential to uncover some of the issues that highly affect these immigrants English learning process. The current study aims to examine the sociocultural factors that may affect this process at both a personal as well as a community level.

1.2.1 Muslim migration to Australia

Australia is a multicultural nation which has one of the highest proportions of people born overseas (Thapa, 2004, p. 199). Every year, Australia welcomes tens of thousands of immigrants. Immigrants come to Australia under two major visa categories: immigrant and humanitarian visa. According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) annual report (2009), 171,318 immigrants and 13,507 refugees arrived in Australia in the year 2008-09. Out of 171,318 immigrants, 67% percent came in the skill stream, 32.9 % came in the family stream and 0.1 percent came in the special eligibility component stream. In contrast, a total of 13,507 refugees and humanitarian entrants settled in Australia. This includes 11,010 refugees and 1,497 holders of protection and other onshore visas.

Over recent years, immigrants have come to Australia from three main areas; Africa, Asia, and the Middle East (DIBP, 2015). Countries in these regions from which Australia is accepting immigrants include: Ethiopia, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, People's Republic of China, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran and Egypt (DIAC, 2009). Most of the immigrants from these countries immigrate to Australia directly from their country of birth or from a country in the same area after obtaining their humanitarian visas (offshore visa). Contrary to this, holders of protection visas get their onshore visas while they are inside Australia. Once settled in Australia, new arrived immigrants and humanitarian visa holders are entitled to English language tuition help through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

However, only humanitarian entrants are eligible for settlement services (DIAC, 2009). Numerous Iraqi immigrants have settled in Australia over recent years. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 1680 Iraqis arrived in Australian in 2008-2009 (ABS, 2009). Like other immigrants, their settlement has been mainly in big cities such

as Sydney or Melbourne, however, today an increasing number of them "are attracted to rural and regional Australia" (Woodlock, 2008, p. 3). English language learning opportunities are an essential factor in their choosing to live in cities. Additionally, other advantages of living in cities such as finding jobs or joining friends or families are likely to apply to Iraqi immigrants as well. In what follows, I will discuss the Iraqi immigrants in Australia and their experiences in learning the English language.

1.2.2 The role of English in the settlement of IMIWs in Australia

The settlement of Iraqi Muslim immigrants in Australia is mainly in the states of Victoria and New South Wales. In Victoria their settlement has been mostly in the City of Melbourne or in suburbs close to it, for example Broadmeadows, Fawkner, Dandenong, and Springvale. They chose these cities in order to be with their friends and relatives, or because of the availability of services, jobs and English language classes. Living in regional areas with limited access to English classes would challenge the ability of these immigrants to learn and speak English in the new community (Woodlock, 2008, p. 3). However, a significant number of Iraqis have settled in rural and regional areas, for example in Shepparton, Laketown and Cobram, either to work in farms or because they are directed to go there by DIAC (De Courcy, 2007; Taylor, 2005; & Woodlock, 2008).

Iraqi immigrants are mostly Muslims and native speakers of Arabic. In some cases, they also speak Kurdish and Syriac. Their experience with the English language and particularly its communicative aspect is poor due to their limited use or practice of it in real life situations. Resulting from this experience, Iraqi immigrants' competency and confidence in English is generally low at the time of their arrival in Australia. (Waxman, 2000, p. 12). Waxman (2000) conducted a study to analyse the impact of English language proficiency and information sources on the settlement adjustment of recently arrived refugees from Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq in Sydney. He highlights that refugees' English achievement in their country of birth influences their settlement in Australia, as well as their attendance in English language classes.

The relationship between English proficiency and settlement in Australia has been extensively researched (e.g. Antecol, Cobb-Clark, & Trejo, 2002; Chiswick, 2002;

Murray, 2000; Waxman, 2000; & Woodlock, 2008). Taylor (2005) conducted a study on the experience of refugees settling in regional Victoria. He examined the settlement experiences of Iraqi refugees in Shepparton and Sudanese immigrants in Colac and Warrnambool. The study reports that the limited access to English classes was a major problem in immigrants settling in regional Australia (Taylor, 2005, p. 5).

Similar findings were reported by Woodlock (2008). He researched the factors impacting the success of Iraqi Muslim settlement in the rural town of Cobram in Victoria. The researcher concluded that the inadequate provision of English classes is one of the factors acting as barriers to Iraqi immigrants' successful settlement in Cobram. (P. 11). Viewed in this light, it can be seen that experience in English language plays a crucial role in the Iraqi Muslim immigrants' settlement and adjustment process in Australia. It can be argued that learning English in Australia has become like a "survival tool" for most immigrants – including Iraqi Muslim women – to help them adjust successfully into broader Australian society, and for them to successfully assimilate into the Australian labour market.

Immigrating to Australia is a new and challenging experience for almost all Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women. One of the greatest challenges IMIWs encounter shortly after their arrival in Australia is being able to successfully communicate in the English language. In Iraq, Iraqi women's learning of English is very limited and lacks skilful and efficient communication because of the EFL nature of English learning approaches there, and because of very limited opportunities for using this language in Iraqi social situations. Their English learning in Australia is, in general, not successful because of many sociocultural factors that limit their access to English classes. My colleagues and I (2012), for instance, reported in a study conducted to investigate the factors that affect recently arrived Iraqi immigrants' English learning in Australia, that the women's participation is very low due to certain sociocultural factors such as family commitment, past L2 education and taking care of children (Bao, Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2012).

The immigrants' social networks (figure. 1) and relatives also affect their learning of English in this new country. In Australia most Iraqi Muslim immigrants prefer to live

close to each other and within their own community. Their support networks negatively influence their English language learning as they usually use the Arabic language in their daily communications. That is, if a woman spends most of her time within her Iraqi group communicating in the Arabic language only, her participation in English learning will be less successful. This is because her need to use English is significantly reduced while she satisfies her linguistics needs through using the Arabic language. The support and encouragement to access English classes the IMIW might get from their support network is very limited. In fact, their social networks usually discourage them from studying English while they can still use the Arabic language to communicate (Al Dukhaile, 2012; Rida & Milton, 2001).

Religion, also, has an important role in the IMIWs' English learning in Australia. In many occasions, their access to English classes may be restricted by their religious norms. For example, some Muslim immigrant women, including Iraqis, reported that they did not attend their free English classes because of the mixed-gender nature of those classes (McCue, 2008). It is worth noting that Islam restricts women's interaction with 'stranger men' (men they do not know) apart from in formal settings. Hence, many Muslim women do not feel comfortable studying with male strangers and prefer, instead, to study in what they perceive as a more female-friendly environment.

In its numerous efforts to equip immigrants with English skills, Australia has initiated women-friendly classes across the country. This step that some Australian language schools have taken has been successful to some extent. However, such programs are still very limited and the number of Muslim immigrant women utilizing them is also very limited. Next, I will talk about these classes in Melbourne in an attempt to shed light on a rather new and undiscovered experience in English teaching and learning in Australia.

1.3 English learning for Muslim women in Australia

In Australia, English learning is not easy for Muslim immigrant women including those who are from an Iraqi background. Many studies (such as in the examples above) have reported that these women lack access to English classes due to certain sociocultural,

identity and religious barriers. This greatly affects their settlement in Australia as well as their integration into broader Australian society. According to DIAC (2009), poor English skills restrict immigrants' social participation as well as limiting their access to employment, technology, and many other services, which in turn affects the development of the nation. It has been widely recognised that Australia has a high population of Non-English Speaking background (NESB) immigrants living in its lands. Acknowledging the high need of these immigrants for mastering the English language, the Australian government sought to provide English learning opportunities for all immigrants through the National Language Policy, which was firstly introduced in 1987.

Even though the policy, at the time, stressed the "support for the maintenance of ethnic community languages [and] Aboriginal languages" (Lo Bianco, 1990, p. 1), its main concern was to promote teaching English as a second language throughout the nation. The policy argues that there is a strong relationship between immigrants' low social interaction and unemployment, and English literacy. Ingram (2000) argues that the development of the policy was based on social as well as economic goals. It aimed at more social engagement of immigrants in Australian society by equipping them with English language skills. It also aimed at enabling immigrants to obtain employment, as it would be very difficult for them to do so without having English skills. In the early 1980s Australia initiated much language planning and many teaching centres, and consulted with relevant bodies throughout the country, in order to foster the newly developed policy and implement it successfully.

As education (including language teaching) is administered at the federal level in Australia, each state articulated its own language plans and programs with common and shared goals. Working in their own states and territories, many language centres developed their own ESL programs to teach NESB immigrants the English language. Some of these programs were nationwide, such as the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), and supported by the government. As clearly asserted in language policy, the provision of English classes to NESB immigrants is mainly to integrate them into broader Australian society. This comes in line with the Australian government's social inclusion policy in which Australia sought to increase the immigrants' level of

participation in broader Australian society. The Australian Social Inclusion Board (ASIB, 2012), maintains that people with poor English proficiency are less likely to attend community events, have lower employment rates, have only poor or fair health and mostly feel unsafe at home. Therefore this social inclusion the Australian government seeks from equipping immigrants with English skills does not go unchallenged.

L2 researchers state that most of the English classes that are available to immigrant women, particularly Muslim women, do not meet their social, cultural as well as personal needs. This makes a large number of them opt not to attend. The Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR, 2009) asserts that immigrant women are the most disadvantaged group in regard to accessing English learning, and that much attention should be given to this segment of the Australian society in order to increase their social participation as well as to stimulate successful settlement. The department maintains that acquiring English skills plays “a key role” in the newly arrived immigrants’ settlement in Australia as well as in driving the Australian government’s social inclusion agenda (p. 4).

Many second language studies (e.g. Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013; Casimiro et al., 2007; DEEWR 2009; Macrae, 2002; McCue, 2008; Rida & Milton, 2001) have reported that Muslim women’s access to their free English entitlement in Australia is minimal (see Figure.1 which shows the factors affecting Muslim Women’s English learning in mainstream classes in Australia). Casimiro et al., (2007) for example, reported in a study examining the English learning experiences of Muslim women from Iraq, Sudan and Afghanistan in Western Australia, that they felt “uncomfortable” attending mixed-gender classes due to cultural and religious commitments and, subsequently, chose “not to attend” (p. 64) their free English classes. Casimiro et al. suggest that Muslim women’s needs and concerns should be given more consideration in order to facilitate the learning of English for this important cultural group. Their argument is based on data they collected directly from Muslim immigrant women in which some of the participants clearly expressed their unwillingness to attend mainstream English classes

due to their mixed-gender nature. Indeed, one of their research participants stated explicitly that she does not feel “comfortable in mixed English classes” and that the government should offer “women-only classes” to help them learn the language in a more comfortable way (Casimiro et al. 2007, p. 62).

McCue (2008) also wrote a report funded by the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), where she sought to identify the drivers and barriers to Muslim Australian women’s participation in Australian civil and social life. She documented that Muslim women face difficulties in their participation in Australian society because of their limited English competency. She also states that their access to English language training programs is restricted by lack of information on such programs, as well as a lack of women-friendly classes. McCue (2008, p.10) highlighted:

A national review should be undertaken to identify access to various services by newly arrived Muslim women with a view to improving services and increasing resource allocation. This should include a review of English as a Second Language (ESL) training, including children friendly and women friendly programs ... to facilitate women’s more active participation in ESL programs.

The report suggested that considerable support should be given to Muslim women to overcome the significant barriers that exist in regard to their active participation in Australian society, specifically the difficulties identified with regard to their access to English language classes (p. 8). The report suggested that these immigrants need to be provided with “women-only English classes” (p. 4) to help them participate effectively in Australian society.

Most of these studies have suggested offering women-friendly classes, local classes with flexible time and location, and home tutoring, in order to encourage more immigrant women to take up English classes. In response to this, some women-only literacy classes at a number of educational institutions and community organisations in

Melbourne were introduced. These included, but are not limited to, programs at Victoria University, Chisholm TAFE at Berwick, Dandenong Neighbourhood Centre and the Broadmeadows Women’s Community House. The majority of students in these classes have been Muslim women (Macrae, 2002).

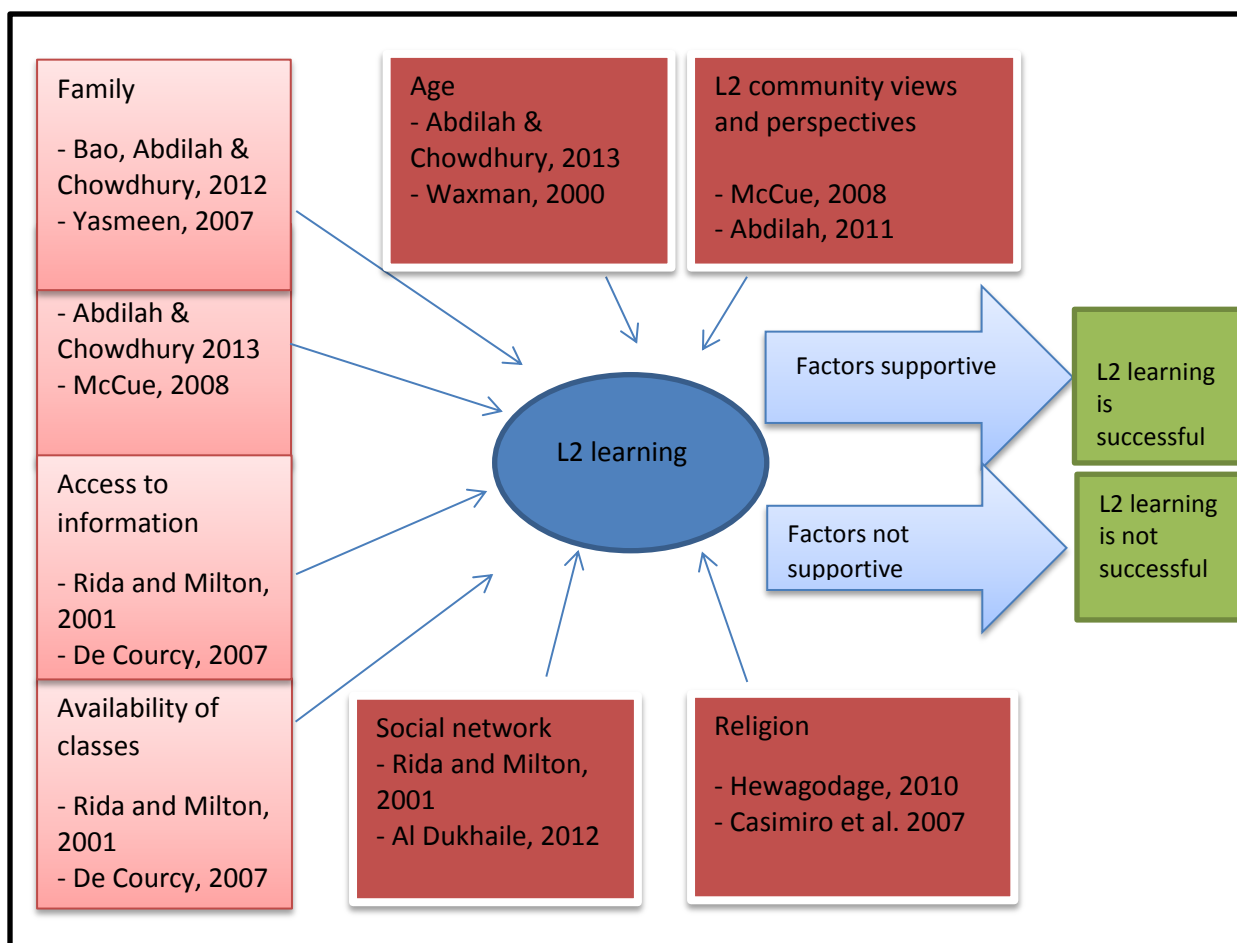


Figure 1: factors affecting Muslim Women’s English learning in mainstream classes

1.4 Women-only English classes

The idea of introducing women-friendly second language classes for immigrant women (otherwise known as ‘women-only’ second language classes) is not new around the

world. Many L2 researchers around the world agree that immigrant women usually hesitate in attending mainstream L2 classes due to a number of reasons, including feeling uncomfortable when learning in a mixed-gender environment (e.g. Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013; Casimiro et al.;2007; Frye, 1999)). So over time L2 researchers in English speaking immigrant-receiving countries such as the USA, UK, Canada and Australia suggested initiating women-only English classes to engage more immigrant women in language learning. In the UK, for instance, many women-only programs were offered to non-English speaking immigrant women, including Muslims, at different teaching institutions.

The Celtic English Academy was one of the first language teaching schools in the UK to offer such classes. The academy offers to immigrant women a range of English classes ranging from beginners to advanced, with a variety of topics that are mostly related to the immigrants' daily life. The "ladies-only English classes" the academy offers to non-English speaking immigrant women is a good example of this. According to the academy website, these classes are designed to provide immigrant women with a study environment where they can feel more attention has been paid towards their culture and traditions, where they can increase their confidence in the daily use of the English language, and to bridge the gap between the learning context and their real world (Celtic, 2016).

In the USA, Frye (1999) provided similar perspectives on women-friendly classes in that country. Frye developed women-only English classes at one of the language centres in Washington DC, USA for immigrant women from different backgrounds. She reported that she had previously noticed a lack of female learners in her English classes, and when she investigated the issue some of the women she interviewed told her why. They had chosen not to attend or to withdraw from the classes because "they felt uncomfortable in the predominantly male classes and hesitant to participate even if they did attend" (p. 502). She further agreed with her participants that these male dominated classes did not encourage participation from the local women and, hence, argued for the usefulness of women-only classes in helping them learn the English language in a safer and friendlier environment. She documented that the women-only classes "provided an

atmosphere of caring and safety that allowed freedom of expression and reflection for the women who participated in it” (p. 504)

Similarly, in Canada women-only programs were introduced to immigrant women in different cities across the country. In Toronto, for instance, the Newcomer Women’s Services Toronto (NEW) is one of the leading organizations in this field. NEW has been delivering English classes for immigrant women since 1992. The program is called the English Language Program for women (ELP) and is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). According to the NEW website, the centre provides an encouraging environment for women to learn English as it offers a variety of classes every week for ELP levels 1 to 6, including one class for mature women aged 55 and over. Through equipping migrants with language skills, the centre offers women a chance to learn about themselves and explore their new country through a “rigorous curriculum, skills workshops, field trips and presentations by guest speakers”. The classes also teach women how to use English in daily life including in banking, shopping, finding a doctor and looking for work, as well as through learning about Canadian history, geography, politics and culture (NEW, 2016).

In Australia, limited research has been done on women-only English programs. According to Faine (2016), the classes were firstly introduced late last century. As far as this researcher is aware, there is little data or statistics available on these programs or the date they were introduced. One of the very first women-only ESL courses in Melbourne was the Northern Metropolitan TAFE women’s program in Collingwood which started its work in 1987. Faine was the manager of that centre back in the 1980s. The centre was part of the TAFE college and was operating in a community centre in Collingwood. The centre was offering English and vocational training to immigrant women from different cultural backgrounds, including Muslims. The courses the centre was offering included accredited courses in social service and home care, pre-accredited courses in office work, a high level ESL course for people who have overseas qualifications and wanted to get into work, a child development course, sewing classes, cooking classes, and basic Education courses (Maths, Science, and Legal studies).

The classes could be undertaken in both part-time and full-time mode with flexibility in the study hours. The centre was also offering child care services at a nearby childcare centre. Even though the centre was part of the TAFE college, it received state government funding from the Department of Employment and Education, and Centrelink funding (to support parents to get back into work). The centre is now closed and does not offer such classes anymore. More details on the reasons behind the centre discontinuing will be discussed later.

Macrae (2002) also provides insightful information about women-only classes in Broadmeadows Women House (BWH) in Melbourne. The BWH is an initiative of Anglicare Victoria (AV) and is one of the leading associations in providing literacy support to immigrant women in Melbourne. The centre started its women-only classes in the late 1980s and is still offering them to local immigrant women. Similar to the Maryam language centre, the BWH offers free English classes to non-English speaking immigrants, as well as other vocational training including sewing skills. The learners at the centre are from different cultural backgrounds. However the majority are from Muslim countries. Currently the centre offers women-only classes in two different locations and on two-days-a week basis for each class. According to the Anglicare website, the centre is committed to providing learning opportunities for all immigrant women, including free English classes to “explore and develop their strength, skills and confidence to be fully involved in the lives of their families and their communities”, as well as addressing their social and cultural needs (AV, 2016).

Another provider of women-friendly English classes in Victoria is the Melbourne Women's English Institute (MWEI). The institute was established with a fund from Melbourne University to teach immigrant women the English language, and it started providing women-only English classes in 2010. It provided free English classes to immigrant women from different cultural backgrounds. However the majority of students were from Muslim countries. The centre is no longer running. It is not recorded why it stopped providing its services to the public. But it was most probably due to a lack of ongoing funding. According to the centre's website, The MWEI was committed to offering women from local and international backgrounds more choices and greater

access to quality language programs. The MWEI was also committed to several “worthy causes and was dedicated to giving back and growing opportunities for members of disadvantaged and/or minority groups” (MWEI, 2015).

Not all women-only English classes’ providers in Melbourne could survive and continue offering their services (table.1). The table below gives an overview of the places that offered and are currently offering such classes. This information was collected through extensive internet research and is thorough, according to the best of the knowledge of the researcher. However, there may be other places that are offering or once offered such classes.

An examination of the table shows that the majority of the centres have stopped providing their services. Victoria University, for instance, used to run a very useful women-only English class for immigrant women at its campus in Footscray until 2015. However in 2016 the school stopped providing such services. Similarly, campuses of the TAFE institutes in both Epping and Berwick campuses used to run such programs but are not offering them anymore. However, other places such as the Broadmeadows Women’s House, Dandenong Neighbourhood House, Fawkner Community House, St Mary’s Catholic Church in Dandenong, and Wellsprings for Women are still offering them. Interestingly, the places that are currently running the women-only classes in Melbourne are all community centres. On the other hand, those which stopped the services are all specialised educational institutes. This brings us to the next discussion – why are women-only programs limited to a small number of community organizations and not spreading within the educational sector.

Macrae (2002) states that the women-only classes in Australia do not get enough financial support from the government. She argues that the limited funding provided by the government to women literacy development has caused less classes to be offered to immigrant women in this country. Further, Faine (2016) provides us with even more detailed insights on why such programs are not spreading in Australia. She argues that it is not only the limited financial support that caused these classes to squeeze shut, but also the “pressure from the government to forcedly assimilate the immigrant women

within the Australian community” (Faine, 2016). She furthermore argues that the limited support these classes get from the government is not only due to financial reasons but also to the government willingness to assimilate the immigrants, and particularly women, more into the workplace. This follows the belief that if immigrant women spend most of their time in women-only environments, including for learning English as their second language, their willingness to work in environments that are usually mixed-gender will be reduced. She also adds that the teaching institutes, in general, are looking for the “outcome” of any planned course before they decide to continue running it. Hence, the limited number of students who access such programs (women-only classes are usually attended by immigrant women only), as well as the limited funding from the government, has contributed to stopping these classes at some of the teaching centres. In a personal communication with one of the course providers in Melbourne, the writer asked the receptionist whether they run women-only English classes anymore. The answer was “no” and she explained that this is due to limited funding for such classes.

Even though such programs have different names and methods of delivery, depending on the country in where they are offered, the main aim of these programs is to engage as many immigrant women as possible in English learning. In Australia, L2 researchers posit that such programs face many challenges within the educational system, including the consequences being a part of government social inclusion agendas, and limited funds allocations, which, in turn, cause them to be run mostly by non-profit organizations which are offering them for free, and mostly by self-funding (Faine, 2016; Macrae, 2002). Viewed in this light, the current study tries to uncover the results of such initiatives by examining the factors that affect the access of an important segment of Australian society, the Muslim women, to participating in women-only L2 classes.

This study attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of these immigrants’ English learning in Australia in both mainstream and women-only classes, as well as providing insights into the sociocultural factors that influence their access to each of the classes.

Table. 1 Women-only English classes in Melbourne

Name of program	Name of offering institution	Program location	Current Status
English classes for women	Melbourne Women's English Institute	Preston, northern suburb of Melbourne	Discontinued
Women's ESL course	Footscray TAFE Women's Learning Centre	Footscray, Melbourne inner west	Discontinued
Women's English Program	Northern Metro TAFE	Collingwood, Melbourne inner north	Discontinued
English as a Second Language for Women	Victoria University	Sunshine, western suburb of Melbourne	Discontinued
Women- only English classes	Broadmeadows Women's House	Broadmeadows, northern suburb of Melbourne	Running
English for women	Kangan Institute of TAFE	Epping, northern suburb of Melbourne	Discontinued
English for women	Fawkner Community House	Fawkner, northern suburb of Melbourne	Running
Women-only English classes	Dandenong Community House	Dandenong, south-eastern suburb of Melbourne	Running
English for women	Chisholm Institute of TAFE	Berwick, south-eastern suburb of Melbourne	Discontinued
English classes for women	Catholic Church of Dandenong	Dandenong, south-eastern suburb of Melbourne	Running
Basic English classes for women	Wellsprings for Women	Dandenong, south-eastern suburb of Melbourne	Running

1.5 Research aims and questions

This study aims to explore the sociocultural factors that influence IMIW's decisions to access the (free) women-only English classes. It also hopes to provide suggestions on how the women-only English program can be optimised to engender greater involvement and learning efficiency for IMIWs in their learning of English. This study will try to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent do English learning classes in Australia meet the IMIW's literacy needs?
2. What sociocultural factors influence the IMIWs' access to the women-only English language literacy programs?
3. In what way do such factors impact the IMIW's learning of English in Australia?

1.6 Significance of the research

In light of the above discussion, English language is seen as a fundamental element in the successful inclusion of immigrants and particularly IMIWs in Australia. Thus, examining their English learning, and the factors that affect this process, may facilitate their acquiring of this language and, as a result, smooth their adjustment and assimilation into the Australian community.

This research aims to investigate the complexity of the IMIWs' access to the free English courses offered to them by the Australian government. Although this study proposes to examine the Iraqi Muslim Women's access to English classes in Melbourne in particular, it also sheds light on Muslim women's English learning in Australia in general. This is because Muslim women have significant needs and concerns that are "generally shared among [them] regardless of nationality" (Casimiro et al., 2007, p. 57). It is also hoped that the present study will help ESL policy makers and curriculum developers to plan teaching courses that take into consideration the factors that directly affect these immigrants decision to access or not access their free English classes in

Australia. This will thus enable educators to gain insights into facilitating greater participation of IMIWs in English learning in Australia.

1.7 My personal experience

I obtained my bachelor degree in English language from Basrah University, Iraq in 1998. After graduating from the university, I taught English in secondary schools in Iraq for three years and in Jordan for 2 years. In Iraq, English is learnt and taught as a foreign language (EFL) with less attention given to its use in communication. This is due to the limited use of this language in the Iraqi social life.

My interest in English as a second language (ESL), and particularly how immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds perceive such experience in diaspora, began when I arrived in Australia as an immigrant in 2008. Shortly after my arrival, I and my wife were referred by the family settlement case manager to the Adult Migrant English Services centre (AMES) in Dandenong (a suburb to the south-east of Melbourne) to learn English. At AMES, we were offered 510 hours of free English learning as part of the Adult Migrant English Program AMEP program. Even though I myself was a holder of a bachelor degree in English, the case manager advised me to take all these free English learning hours.

My wife had not had much English education in Iraq. She only studied English as a compulsory subject during her primary and secondary schooling. She was very happy to join the free English classes as she knew they would be very useful to her, especially in improving her speaking skills. However, I thought I would have no need to learn more English. Yet I took the advice of my case manager and joined the English course for two reasons – to learn more spoken English and to be prepared for my planned higher education in Australia. Then on my very first day at the AMES language centre I realised the difference between the English we learnt in Iraq (English as a Foreign Language (EFL)) and the language as they taught it in Australia (English as a Second Language (ESL)).

It seems important here to discuss how English is learnt and taught in Iraq. English was firstly used in Iraq in the early years of the nineteenth century after the British colonisation of this country in 1917. Shortly after colonising Iraq, British Empire started imposing English in this country. The departure of the Ottomans and the long-stay of the new colonisers (the English) helped English language dominate such a position. It replaced Turkish as a foreign language in Iraqi social and official communication, and was taught on this basis. Thus, English was used as the only means of communication with the new colonisers as well as with the outer non-Arabic speaking nations. According to Edge (2003) English in Iraq was an “inheritance of the British Empire’ (p. 701). It was then introduced into the Iraqi education system and Iraqis started learning it in schools as a compulsory subject starting from grade five at primary school. Despite being highly promoted by the English mandate, English in Iraq was not taught as a second language in the Iraqi schools. Instead, it was taught as a foreign language (EFL) with the focus being on grammatical structuring rather than as a language to communicate with. It was (and still is) also taught mainly through the use of L1 (Arabic) without using any authentic English materials.

Even though English in Iraq functioned as a means for outer communication, accessing technological information and inland communication with the new colonisers, the spread of English in Iraq in the early stages was a direct result of the British Council’s efforts to establish English as a universal language. Gaffey (2005) examines this point in his discussion on the early spread of English in the world. He points out that the British Council “in its early stages explicitly referred to its role in the active establishment of English as a universal language” (p. 13).

After Iraq had become free from British colonialism in 1958, English kept its status as a foreign language in Iraq. Iraqi learners continued studying English to keep the ability to communicate internationally. The economic development of the English speaking countries and their control over world trade and international policy, as well as the vast use of the internet, which is mainly in English, have made most people perceive English as the “world language”. Iraq, as many other third world countries, looked to English through this lens. Hence, the need for English in Iraq began to increase.

After the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the huge presence of multinational forces, particularly those from English speaking countries; the function of English in Iraq changed in parallel with the new changes. English use in Iraq increased significantly to sustain communication with these forces and with the vast number of international organizations and contractors that came to work in Iraq. This hegemony of English is explicitly linked to the dominance of the two English speaking countries (USA and UK) in regard to the situation in Iraq. Egde (2003) clearly refers to this point in his argument about the increased number of individuals learning English in Iraq.

He points out that this change is a shift from “you should learn this because it’s in your own best interest”, to “you had better learn this if you know what is good for you” (p.703). According to Crystal (2003), English has gained such a hegemonic position in the world because it has become the “main language of books, newspapers, airport and aircraft control, international business and academic conferences, science, technology, medicine, sport, international competition, pop music, and advertising” (cited in Gaffey, 2005, p. 13). Indeed, the technology and information revolution, and the fact that English is the only means to access this information, has helped English dominate the world of communication and become the pathway to surviving internationally. This widespread use of English, as well as the huge presence of the USA and the UK in Iraq after the 2003 invasion, has not only increased the number of Iraqi English learners, but it has also influenced Iraqi immigrant’s favoured destination to be English speaking countries such as the USA, the UK and Australia.

Like the experience of most Iraqi immigrants in Australia, my experience with English learning started at grade five in primary school. The school was in the village where I was living (about 50 km from Nassyriah city, the capital of Thi-Qar province in the south of Iraq). There was only one female English teacher at the school. It’s worth mentioning that primary school education in Iraq starts from grade one and goes up to grade six. At the time I got into grade five, there were three grade five classes and two grade six classes, all with approximately 25 students per class. The English teacher was very busy with this large number of students considering she was teaching five sessions

a day (one 45 minute session per class per day). This negatively influenced her teaching and the information she was giving us. Like most of the school students, I did not pay much attention in English classes as we all felt little need to learn and master English since it is a foreign language.

I continued my English learning in secondary schooling with the same level of “carelessness” for the language. The secondary schools in Iraq have three grades; first, second and third (equal to grades seven, eight and nine in Australian schools). I only realised the importance of learning English during the third grade of my secondary schooling, when I had to sit a national exam in all subjects including English in order to pass and go on to high school. The list of questions in that national exam was prepared by experts from the Iraqi Ministry of Education and was distributed to all schools early on the day of the exam. The questions were very difficult. With my low level of English, I failed the exam. I was successful in all other subjects and ready to go to high school; but had to pass the English exam in a second attempt after the summer holiday.

In the Iraqi education system, there are two final examination attempts yearly, one is at the end of the year and the second is at the end of the summer holiday, for students who fail in the first attempt to be given another chance. It was a drama to me and I had to hire a private teacher to prepare myself for the second attempt. I did not enjoy the summer holiday that year and had to study a lot to pass that exam. That was the first time I came cross English learning and use. It was tough times but the private teacher helped me pass the exam and join the others at high school. In Iraq, high schools have three grades; four, five and six (continuing on secondary school). The sixth grade is the final high school year where students sit the national examinations to graduate. However, my problems with English continued in high school.

Finally, English teacher noticed my struggle while learning it. I still remember that day when he asked me to stay in the class during the break time. We had a little chat in which he suggested a real challenge that I could do to improve my English. I was in the first year of high school (grade four) at that time, and the challenge was to memorize

one section of a story every day. In high school we were given an illustrated English story each semester to study. I remember that that year's story was *Oliver Twist*. I accepted the challenge and my teacher helped me get a good dictionary from the school. I used that dictionary every day to translate the new English words.

The first day was rather difficult for me and I struggled to read out the whole section. But my self-determination, as well as my strong will, made me feel I had to prove to my teacher that I could do it, and read out the sections correctly every day. From that moment I started loving English and discovered what an international language it is especially. And I was drawn to its literature, and particularly older novels and other fiction. I loved *Oliver Twist* and instead of reading one section a day, I started reading two or more. Then my passion to know the end of the story pushed me to read the remainder of the book very quickly. Of course I used the dictionary to translate all the new words, and in few weeks I finished the whole story. My teacher was amazed when I started telling him what will happen in the next sections and chapters, and I became his favourite student in the class.

I continued with this strategy of learning in the following years and became one of the best students in the English class. My love of story-reading helped me a lot in acquiring new English words every day, and I used to borrow English books from the school library or the town library and read them. I loved English as a language and especially as a form of literature, but never thought of choosing it as my profession in the future: in grade four, high school students in Iraq choose whether to go for science or humanitarian subjects in the next two grades.

I chose to take the science subjects (the science department as they call it in Iraq) as I wanted to be an engineer. I did very well in my study in the science department and especially in the maths subjects. My chances of getting into engineering college were increasing in parallel with my high marks in science subjects. I also continued reading more English stories to increase my vocabulary as much as I could. However, unexpectedly something happened at the final high school examinations that changed my career and my entire life. The night before I sat the final maths test I got a cold. I

took some cough syrup that I found somewhere in the house. Once I had it, I felt a bad taste and started vomiting – and it did not look like cough syrup. My family rushed me to the emergency department in the town hospital, and there they cleaned up my stomach. The doctors found out that the liquid was “Dettol”, not a cough syrup. (It was my brother who kept the “Dettol” in the cough syrup bottle.) It was almost midnight when I got back home from the hospital, and early the next morning I sat the tests.

I could not do much in the tests because of this drama. As a result I got low marks in the maths subject. Consequently I missed out on going to engineering college and at that difficult time I had to choose another career. After engineering, it was only the English language that I loved, so I chose to go to the department of English at the Faculty of Education at the University of Basra to become an English teacher. English then became my major field of study at the university for four years. At the university, we studied English grammar, literature, phonetics and pronunciation with more focus on grammar and sentence structuring. It was also the time I first became familiar with the term EFL (English as a Foreign Language).

This occurred when teachers were teaching us theories on structuralism, particularly Chomsky’s TG (Transformational Grammar). The focus on grammar and sentence structuring that we had at the university made us good English learners but not good English speakers. We could not improve our communication skills in English, as the only environment that we could practise what we learnt was the English department through teacher-student-student interactions in the language. I graduated from the university in 1998 with very good results and was ready to start my career as English teacher. However, my English communication skills stayed relatively low.

My first day of teaching English was during the teaching practicum during the last year of college. Even though I was a student teacher, I could handle the task very well. I was very well prepared and used numerous resources and handouts. The students loved the way I taught them and I found myself “fit” into that position. I loved being an English teacher from that day. I felt it something unique, different as well as rewarding, to be teaching an international language such as English. After my

graduation I worked as an English teacher for three years at a secondary school in my town. I was one of two English teachers in my school and was teaching the first and second grades. My English competency improved vastly during those years and as time passed I came to be able to speak English very well.

My second experience in English teaching was in Jordan where I worked as a high school English teacher for two years. The education system in Jordan was relatively similar to that in Iraq. The focus in English teaching was, however, also on grammar and sentence structuring. Nevertheless, the syllabus there was slightly better in terms of teaching communication skills, as we were able to have more time to practise speaking the language. In Jordan I taught year ten (similar to the Australian system). English in Jordan is also treated and taught as a foreign language (EFL) with very limited use of it in public or social spheres. I could develop good communication skills, however, as I kept practising the language with my students during the class with limited use of Arabic.

So far, throughout this long journey of learning/teaching English, I did not pay much attention to how English is learnt and used by people, but rather to how to memorise the vocabulary and structure it in a sentence. This is a common trend when dealing with English as an EFL. The major shift in my English experience happened in 2004, a year after the fall of Saddam regime, when I started working as an interpreter with the multinational forces in Iraq. Right from the beginning I faced a significant challenge understanding and communicating with English-speaking people. The first place I worked at was an American military hospital in Baghdad. Dealing with English native speakers and particularly Americans was a very new and interesting experience in my English journey. At that time I realised the importance of English verbal communication skills and started questioning the way we learnt this language and the way we were teaching it.

Two years later, in 2006, I went back to my town in Thi-Qar province, where I worked at the same time as an interpreter with the Australian Training Team in Iraq, and as an English teacher. My work with the Australians was not as challenging as it was with

the Americans. After two years of dealing with English natives I now saw myself as competent in English. This huge experience in English changed the way I perceive this language and the way I was teaching it. Even though it was an EFL curriculum in my school, I taught it with more focus on communication aspects and practised the language with my students in the classroom as much as I could. I also started exploring the difficulties my students were facing in using the language. By the end of the year I had a large number of students who were good in using and practising English. That was a great achievement, especially when you use the EFL curriculum to develop students' communicative skills, which is a major element of the ESL curriculum.

As I mentioned earlier, my interest in immigrants' ESL learning and the factors influencing this process started when I joined the AMES school. In my class, there were about 20 students (mostly women) from Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma, and Sudan. In my wife's class it was a similar situation. The learning tasks for most of those students – particularly the women – were very difficult. From my personal interaction with those students (including my wife), I came across many sociocultural/educational barriers involving religion, domestic responsibilities, children, maturity, social networks, teachers/peers and past education factors that immigrants in Australia face in their English learning in this new land.

According to my daily observation, female students were the most impacted group. My wife, for example, could not complete her study at the school because our daughter was only 9 months old at that time and she could not cope with both studying and taking care of the little child. She preferred to postpone her study a full year until the babe was big enough for her to leave her for a full day at the childcare centre. Fortunately there was a volunteer tutoring service that she used at this time to learn some basic English skills. I heard similar stories from my wife about women in her class who could not complete, or who failed their studies, due to similar circumstances. This issue churned over in my mind for the next few years until I came to the time when I had to write my master's thesis. I chose the immigrants' English learning experience in Australia and the factors that motivate/demotivate this as my research topic, and I chose the Iraqis as my study group. I used the study to examine these

factors in detail in order to provide information and recommendations to language policy makers, curriculum developers as well as the immigrant communities, in order to enhance the immigrants' English learning in this country that we all live in. The findings from my inquiry were very interesting. The study concluded that women (especially Muslim women) are the most disadvantaged when it comes to English learning in Australia. (Abdilah, 2011; Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013). One of the recommendations we suggested in that study was providing more women-only classes to help the disadvantaged women overcome their learning barriers and learn more English.

In light of this discussion, the current research sheds light on this important issue by examining these immigrants' access to the women-only classes offered to them by the Australian government. This examination provides a detailed understanding of these immigrants' English learning in Australia, and the challenges they face when utilising their English classes in this country.

1.8 Chapter outline

This thesis consists of eight chapters. The first chapter introduces the setting of the study as well as its significance and contribution to the current literature. It also discusses the needs of Iraqi immigrants in Australia and the role of English proficiency in their settlement and social participation in this new country. The chapter then records the researcher's story and how his past and current experience shapes his understanding of and motivation for the topic.

In the second chapter, three outstanding sociocultural perspectives in the L2 literature are discussed; the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1987), the socio-educational theory (Gardner, 1985), and the language learning and investment theory (Norton, 1995). The discussion focusses on the most recent interpretations of these theories. These theories provide relevant understanding in investigating the research questions as they assert the role of the social context (especially the interaction between the L2 learner and the L2 community) in L2 learning.

The third chapter discusses the role of the religious, cultural and social background of L2 learners. Sociocultural factors including religion, gender, age, past education, social network and host community are discussed because of their remarkable influence on L2 learning and use.

The fourth Chapter – research methodology and design – explains the methodology of the present study. The present study uses qualitative research as a research paradigm. The case study is used as a methodology because of its appropriateness within such a research paradigm. The research participants are eight Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women (IMIW) who arrived in Melbourne, Victoria in the last five years. Three data collection methods, namely questionnaires, in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion, were employed to collect data. This chapter also discusses the study's ethical issues, as well as validity and reliability.

The fifth chapter – Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women's literacy needs and their attitudes towards English learning and use – is the first in a sequence of four findings chapter. The chapter discusses the IMIW's attitudes, needs and perspectives regarding English learning and use in Australia. This relates to the first research question: To what extent do the IMIW's value English and have commitments to improving or developing their English language skills in Australia?

The sixth chapter – Sociocultural Factors affecting the access of Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women to women-only classes – examines the sociocultural factors influencing the IMIW's access to the women-only English classes in Australia. Five factors were reported: the gendered nature of classes, home and family commitments, support networks, availability of information and provision of classes. This relates to the second research question: What sociocultural factors influence IMIW's access to the women-only English language literacy programs?

The seventh chapter – Islam and English learning and use in Australia, spot light of differences – explores the case of three participants (Hamida, Janit and Najat). Hamida Janit and Najat's unique situations are considered in order to examine the role of Islam

in the IMIW's English learning and use in Australia. Their situation is used to explore how Islam shapes IMIW's social interaction with English-speaking Australians in particular, and their social participation in the wider Australian community in general. The data reveals that Islam has an enormous impact on its followers, particularly in their English learning. Hence, discussion on this topic will provide the study with material relevant to all three research questions, especially to the second research question.

The eighth chapter – General discussion and implications – is the concluding one and provides insightful discussion (in light of the literature researched) on the study's topic, the interrelationships between the factors, as well as the interrelationship between the learners' English mastering and the Australian social setting where this process takes place. The chapter also presents the implications and recommendations to the stakeholders such as the Australian government, language policy makers, curriculum developers, non-governmental bodies, teaching institutions and the Iraqi community in Melbourne, about the importance of optimizing the provision of the women-only English classes to satisfy the unique needs and circumstances of this special group, the IMIW. In what follows, an extensive summary of the study is presented, within the scope and the limited size of the research.

Chapter Two: Sociocultural perspectives on Second Language Learning

2. Overview

The relationship between second language learning and the social milieu where L2 learning is happening has been extensively researched, particularly in contexts where the target language is the dominant one, as is the case in Australia (e.g. Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Gardner, 2007; Norton, 2015). Lantolf and Thorne (2006), for example, argue that second language learning happens most efficiently through social interaction. Gardner (2007) furthermore adds that the desire to socially integrate within the target community is a fundamental factor in learners' L2 acquisition. Indeed, L2 researchers (e.g. Norton, 2015) argue that the social relation between the L2 learner and the target community shapes the way the L2 learner perceives L2 learning as well as the way they position themselves within that community.

In this chapter, models of sociocultural perspectives in the research literature are discussed. These models are the dominant social paradigms in unravelling the dynamic interaction between learners and the social-cultural environment of L2 learning. The chapter continues with a discussion of sociocultural factors involved in second language learning which are of relevance to my research questions, such as gender, religion, social networks and the L2 community. Throughout the chapter, research studies related to each notion are indicated.

In what follows, I discuss the most recent interpretations of the three models of second language learning that have been considered seriously in the research. These are sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1987), the socio-educational model (Gardner, 1985), and Language Learning and Investment (Norton, 1995). All three models are relevant in understanding in investigating the research questions. A summary of these models and their relevance to the aims of this study are also presented in this chapter.

2.1 The sociocultural model of Vygotsky

In recent times, second language learning has been discussed from many different perspectives. One of these is sociocultural theory which grew out of the pioneering work of Vygotsky and his associates in 1978. Vygotsky's work was first known as the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). However, more recent L2 research that has been conducted with this theoretical framework used the term sociocultural theory (SCT), and for this reason I will use this latter term throughout this thesis.

When it was first suggested, the main focus of SCT was on the cognitive development of children, with a special emphasis on the integration of social, cultural and biological elements. Vygotsky was the pioneer to assert the social context in the individual's learning. His argument is that human learning is social and cultural rather than individual and that the social interaction is the most essential source of that learning.

He (1991) argues that language learning is first a "social activity and later an individual activity" (cited in Dolya, 2010, p. 7). SCT theory as it is used today proposes that sociocultural circumstances play a central role in human cognitive development. It also highlights that the process of cognitive development is the means by which individuals understand what they learn from social activities, and that this learning is done through the use of symbolic tools (the languages) (Aimin, 2013).

The sociocultural theory attempts to unfold the interrelated cognitive and social characteristics of learning a second language. Vygotsky (1991) further argues that learning in a social context, as in case of language learning, is not only influenced by the environment around the learner but also restructures all functions of behaviour of that learner. Major proponents of using sociocultural theory in the field of SLA include researchers such as Davedov, Lantolf & Thorne, Rogoff, and Swain. Lantolf (2000), neo-vygotskyians, argues that L2 learning is also influenced by the learner's "culturally constructed artefacts and social relationships" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 80). With this in mind, L2 learning is a social process that is, on the one hand, highly influenced by the sociocultural settings around the learner and, on the other hand, influences the social behaviour of learners as well.

Davedov (1995), another Vygotsky student, also supports this argument. He posits that language learning can best happen during interactions in the social situations of the learners' life (Davydov, 1995, p. 15). This kind of learning, according to Davedov, can happen through the teacher-learner interaction or when the L2 learner practises their new language in the L2 society. This interpretation of Vygotsky's framework has inspired many SLA researchers. Lave (1991), for example, argues that L2 learning is an integral part of social practice and therefore takes place in a specific social environment which, he suggests, should be an environment of native speakers. Lave (1991) states that learners participate in the language and sociocultural practices of a target community as apprentices "who are a legitimate part of the society but who participate in various social environments only as peripheral members" (p. 63). Through continuous interaction, they will eventually master the second language and become fully integrated into the L2 target community and culture (Watson, 2009, p. 38).

Generally speaking, sociocultural theory argues that the development of human cognitive and higher mental functions come from social interactions and that "through participation in social activities, individuals are drawn into the use of these functions in ways that nurture and scaffold them" (Aimin, 2013, p. 162). According to this social-cultural perspective of Vygotsky, first language learning comes from processes of "meaning-making" through social engagement with other members of a given culture. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) argue that this understanding of SCT is also applicable to Second Language Learning (SLL). They assert that L2 Learning is embedded within social events and happenings where an individual interacts with people and objects in the L2 environment.

The main focus of sociocultural theory is on the understanding of the development of human cognitive processes. Nonetheless, its distinctiveness from other traditional cognitive perspectives, as explained by Vygotsky, is that SCT considers that, "The social dimension of consciousness (i.e., all mental processes) is primary in time and fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary" (1979, p. 30). Lantolf and Pavlenko (1995) argue that "development does not proceed as the unfolding

of inborn capacities, but as the transformation of innate capacities once they intertwine with socioculturally constructed mediational means” (p. 109). These means, according to Zuengler and Miller (2006), are the socioculturally meaningful artefacts and symbolic systems of a society, in which language is essential. Zuengler and Miller (2006) further explain that in L2 learning, when learners’ “appropriate mediational means”, including language, is made available as they interact in socioculturally meaningful activities, they get control over their own mental activity and begin to learn the second language successfully (p. 39).

The sociocultural perspective of language learning highlights the relationship between the learner’s thinking and the social context in which language learning takes place. Vygotsky (1978) established the understanding that learning and development are culturally associated and socially mediated processes. According to Lantolf (2000, p. 79), the sociocultural theory proposes that:

“...specifically human forms of mental activity arise in the interactions we enter into with other members of our culture and with the specific experiences we have with the artefacts produced by our ancestors and by our contemporaries”

He adds that rather than differentiating the mental and the social activities, the theory asserts a “seamless and dialectic” relationship between these two contexts. According to him, not only do our mental activities shape the nature of our social world, but this world of human relationships also determines to a large extent how we regulate our mental processes (Lantolf, 2000, p. 97).

L2 Learning, according to this theory, is happening through the social interactions of people around us in classrooms, hospitals, and markets etc. This social interaction through language also constructs the learners’ knowledge and develops their understanding of the cultural system in which the learning process is happening. This is very relevant to the second research question: What sociocultural factors influence the IMIWs’ access to the women-only English language literacy programs? Further,

through this social and cultural interaction, L2 learners act and perform in a way that is more culturally appropriate to the members of the L2 community where they operate and where their social identities are forming.

According to the sociocultural theory, L2 learning happens over two planes: in the process of social interaction (the interpersonal plane) and within the mind of the learner (the intrapersonal plane). As language is the primary means by which we negotiate social relationships and social values, language makes it possible for people to identify themselves in a new environment, and it helps them to make sense of the events and interactions in a new community (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009). Learning, according to this theory, is not fixed, but changeable and developmental. In this sense, the L2 developmental focus is on the learner's learning abilities. Thus, the L2 individual's learning and achievement are mediated by fruitful interactions with members of the L2 community. This interaction is essential in mastering the new language, which seems to be the case in the IMIW's English learning in Australia, as the study will demonstrate. The cultural aspect of sociocultural theories of learning is highlighted by Gee (2008). He posts:

“A sociocultural approach places a premium on learners' experiences, social participation, use of mediating devices (tools and technologies), and position within various activity systems and communities of practice. The word 'culture' has taken on a wide variety of different meanings in different disciplines” (p. 100).

Gee (2008) explains that in our early socialisation in life, we each learn ways of being in the world, of interacting, thinking and using language, objects and tools that critically shape our early sense of self (Gee, 2008, p. 100). In this sense, when the individual learns a new language, he/she will be in a process of acquiring a new culture as language and culture are interrelated. Hence, “the acquisition of new cultures interacts formidably with learners' initial cultures”. (p. 100). Thus the cultural understanding and experiences that students need to hold are highly influential in their mastering of the second language. Furthermore, learners need to recognise the differences in their social

and cultural life experiences, as well as their L2 motivations, and apply it to their second language learning.

The role of social setting and sociocultural factors in second language learning has been extensively examined by many sociocultural researchers (e.g. Atkinson, 2011; Davydov, 1995; Ellis, 1994; Lantolf, 2011; Ortega, 2011; Rogoff 1995 & 1990; Vygotsky, 1991). In fact, most SLL researchers recognize that L2 learning takes place in a social context and accept that it can be influenced by that context, both at micro and macro levels. Rogoff (1995 & 1990), for instance, emphasizes the significance of learners' interaction in the social context of their learning. She states that there is an interrelationship among three aspects of that interaction. In other words, L2 learners are affected on three planes – the communal, interpersonal, and personal planes.

According to Rogoff (1995), the communal aspect occurs with “apprentices”, individuals who are in the process of becoming fully integrated members in the L2 target community. In this case learners are influenced by the social, cultural, and political norms of the L2 situation and community they are in. The interpersonal aspect occurs when learners are acting as “guided participants” who are influenced by the individuals or groups with whom they interact in society. And the personal aspect occurs through what Rogoff terms “participatory appropriation” (Rogoff, 1995, p. 21): in participatory appropriation learners appropriate (or assimilate) the values and knowledge they receive through participation in social activity, during the process of raising their level of skill and motivation from one activity to the next (Watson, 2009, p. 39).

In light of the above discussion, immigrants' L2 learning is influenced by many elements in the social environment they are in. Their success in learning L2 as well as their social participation in the L2 community is determined by many sociocultural factors which operate in this context. Hewagodage and O'Neill (2010), for example, conducted a study to investigate five immigrant women's English learning in Australia. The researcher document that each of the five participants did not participate in their English speaking community because of “various cultural and linguistic barriers to learn the English language” include, religion, cultural background and inability to read and

write in English (p. 1). The Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women's (IMIW) English learning in Australia, like that of other immigrants, is highly influenced by such factors. Their cultural background, religion, age, social network, family etc. determine the level of their participation in the English language learning programs in this country (Figer.1). The IMIW is part of the broader Muslim women community in Australia, hence, the current study tries to uncover the role of such sociocultural factors in this group's access to their free English classes in an attempt to understand their learning of this new language. More discussion on the sociocultural factors that affect Muslim immigrants' English learning (including that of Iraqi Muslims) will be presented in the next chapter.

To sum up, even though most researchers agree that L2 learning is mainly a social process, many of them on the other hand argue that it is, also, a cognitive process in which the learners' desires and goals, accompanied by their self-determination, play an important role in their L2 learning (Atkinson, 2011, Lantlof, 2011, Gardner, 2007, Schumann, 1980). Schumann (1980), for example, in his discussion about acculturation to the target L2 community, points out that learners "acquire the language to the degree they acculturate to the target language group" (p. 378). As for IMIW's English learning, their personal goals and desires to integrate within Australian society motivate them to more learning and use of this language (Bao, Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2012). This means that integrative motivation plays an important role in their participation in English learning programs. Next, I will talk more about the role of integrativeness in L2 learning process and in learners' decisions to learn or to not learn the language.

2.2 Socio-Educational theory: The role of integrativeness in L2 learning

The socio-educational theory, developed by Gardner (1985) and later further developed by his associates, also investigates second language learning in the social milieu, as well as the factors that affect learners' motivation towards L2 learning and use. They argue that L2 learners' motivation "facilitate[s] second language acquisition" (Gardner, et al. 2004, p. 3) and increases learners' second language achievement. According to Gardner et al. (2004), second language learning is influenced by a number of social related factors such as positive attitudes toward the language community and willingness to

integrate within the L2 group. In later research by Gardner and his associates, Gardner (2007) expanded the model to involve more factors that are attributes of classroom language learning. These factors include classroom activities, teacher's motivating work, and parents' encouragement.

Gardner asserts that the L2-learner relationship is a two-way process. This means that using L2 will also increase learners' integrativeness and positive attitudes towards the L2 target community (see diagram 2). The motivated learner in this model is seen as the one who "expends effort to learn the language" (Gardner, 2001a, p. 12). Even though this theory examines L2 learners' motivational factors, it emphasizes the role of these factors in their decision to learn and use L2. Dornyei (1994) emphasises that Gardner's socio-educational perception and the way it has been understood is on "general motivation components grounded in the social milieu" (p. 273) which is most likely to be the case.

According to this theory, learner's motivation towards L2 learning and use is defined as a "combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes towards learning the language" (Gardner, 1985, p. 10). The L2 learner's motivation in this model is postulated to have four elements: attitude toward learning the language, desire, motivational intensity, and goal (Gardner, 1985). Motivational intensity refers to the "amount of effort the individual expends to learn the second language" (p. 53). Motivational intensity is considered to be influenced by the desire and attitude components as well as other factors such as the demands of the teacher or the compulsory nature of the subject. The goal refers to the reasons for learning the second language.

Gardner et al. (2004) argue that these components represent the essential variables in defining the learner's motivation towards second language learning, and that focusing on only one of them "would not adequately characterise a motivated individual" (p. 4). Figure 2 below represents motivational components according to Gardner's model:

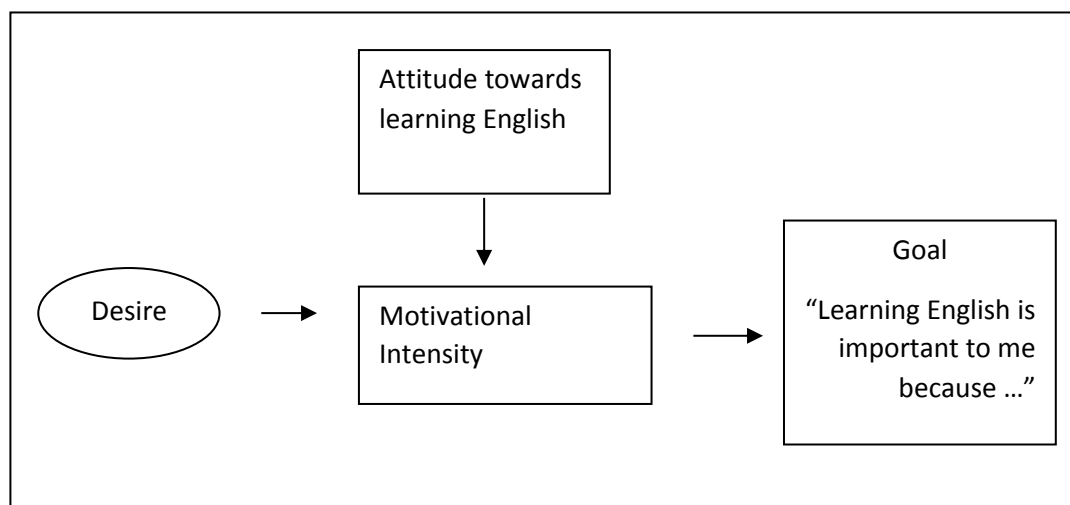


Figure.2 Schematic representation of motivation relating to second language acquisition according to Gardner's socio-educational model. Source: Gardner (1985, p. 54)

Gardner (1985) and his associates developed a self-report questionnaire to measure five components associated with second language motivation. They named it the Attitude/Motivation/Test/Battery (AMTB). The attributes measured by the AMTB are described below:

1. Integrativeness. AMTB measures: Attitudes toward the Language Group, Integrative Orientation. Interest in Foreign Languages.
2. Attitudes toward the Learning Situation. AMTB measures: Evaluation of the Language Teacher, Evaluation of the Language Course.
3. Motivation. AMTB measures: Motivational Intensity, Desire to learn the Language, Attitudes toward Learning the Language.
4. Language Anxiety. AMTB measures: Language Class Anxiety, Language Use Anxiety.
5. Instrumental Orientation. AMTB measures: Instrumental Orientation. (Gardner, 2001b, p.12).

It should be noted that the questionnaire used in this study was based on these AMTB points, where the participants' integrativeness towards the Australian community (the language group), as well as their attitudes towards English and its learning and use, were measured. This comes in line with the second research aim of examining the influence of these social-related attributes in the participants' English learning in general, and in their decision to access or not access the English classes in particular.

Gardner divided second language motivation into two forms: Integrative motivation and Instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is the core construct in this theory and is the greater focus of current research. This is because it fits well with the learners' perspectives and views on L2 and its community. Integrative motivation refers to the learner's desire to integrate and identify with the target language group. Instrumental motivation on the other hand, refers to more practical reasons behind learning the second language, for example: getting a better job, passing exams, qualifying for university entrance. The motivated learner in this model is seen as the one who "(1) expends effort to learn the language; (2) wants to achieve the goal; (3) will enjoy the task of learning the language" (Gardner, 2001a, p. 12). The model also emphasises that aptitude and motivation "facilitate second language acquisition, whereas anxiety has a debilitating effect" (Gardner, et al. 2004, p. 3) and that some motivational variables affect second language learning achievement. In later research (Gardner, et al. 2004) state that "that level of language achievement and the experience of learning a language" can also influence some of these motivational variables (p. 3).

According to Gardner (2001a), the integratively motivated learner of a second language "has a desire or willingness to identify with the other language community" (p. 10). This identification involves positive attitudes towards the L2 group and culture and the desire to integrate with them and even to be a member of the target L2 community or culture. It also involves reading and watching movies in the L2, a desire to speak with native speakers, and even travelling to the L2 countries. Dornyei (2006) argues that the complete identification with the L2 community might involve "withdrawal from one's

original community” (p. 5). However, despite Dornyei’s observation, this may not be common practice within migrant communities.

In the socio-educational model, Integrative Motivation is formed via three classes of variables: Integrativeness, Attitudes Toward the Learning Situation, and Motivation. In later research, Gardner refers to integrativeness as “Openness or Openness with Cultural Identification” (p. 15). Furthermore, Gardner (2001b) emphasises that Integrativeness and Attitudes Toward the Learning Situation are correlated variables and support Motivation, but it is Motivation – supported by other attributes – that leads to achievement in second language learning (see Figure 3).

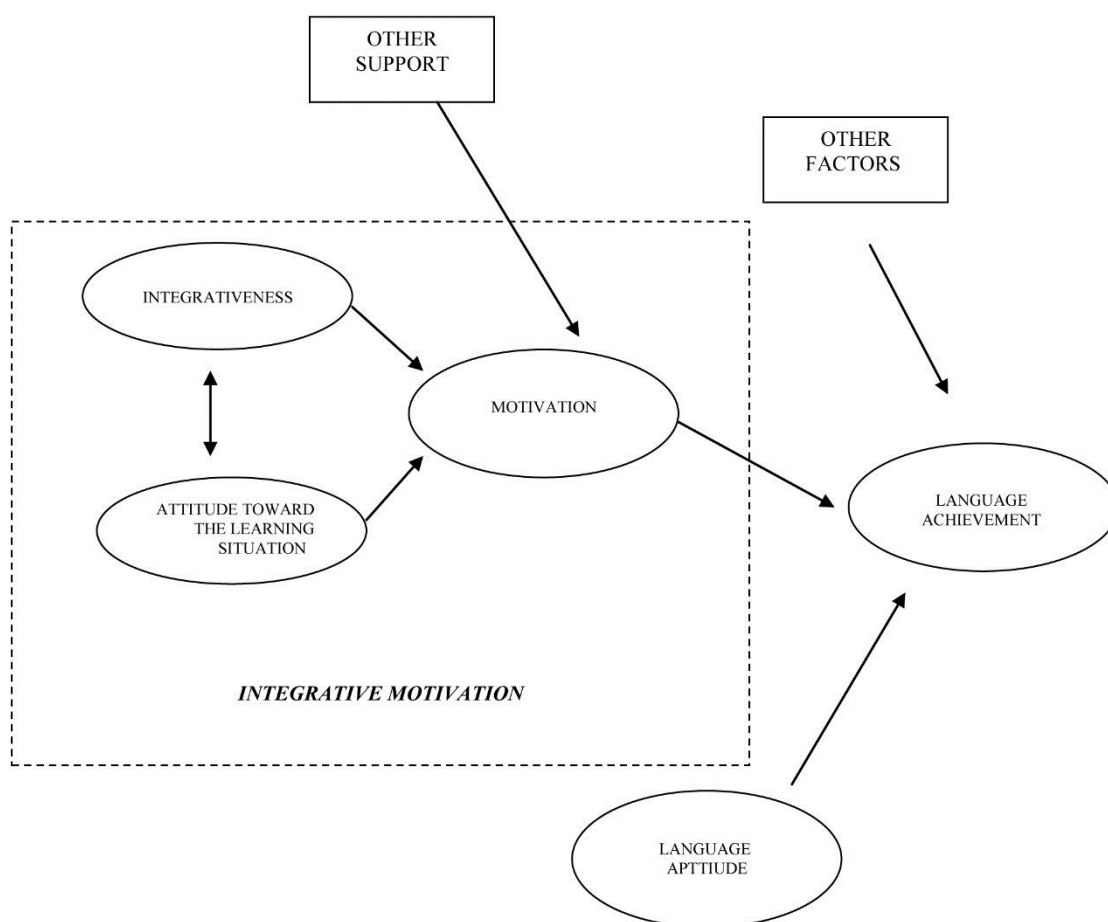


Figure .3 Representation of the socio-educational model shows the role of integrative motivation and language aptitude in language achievement. Adapted from Gardner (2000, p. 17).

Gardner and Lambert (1972) conducted a study on Anglophone Canadians learning French and found a remarkable correlation between integrative motivation and L2 achievement (cited in Ellis, 2004, p. 679). They assert that integrative motivation is a more “powerful predictor of achievement in [a] formal learning situation than instrumental orientation” (p. 679). In a recent study, Gardner (2007) investigated the English motivational variables among 302 Spanish English-Study Online (ESO) students. The participants were a sample of 166 ESO level 2 students and 136 ESO level 4 students. The study reports a high correlation between integrativeness and students’ language motivation. Gardner (2007) states that “students with an openness to cultural identification, and/or a favourable attitude and interest in English speaking countries achieve higher grades in English” (p. 16).

Over a 15 year period, Dornyei (2010) headed a research team in Hungary to carry out a longitudinal survey among teenage learners by administering an attitude/motivation questionnaire at regular times (in 1993, 1999 and 2004). Dornyei and his associates examined the attitudes of over 13,000 learners towards five target languages: English, German, French, Italian and Russian. In this study, Dornyei and his team found that Integrativeness plays a “key role in L2 motivation” (p. 26) and that Attitudes Towards the L2 Speakers and Instrumentality are the immediate antecedents of Integrativeness. In his early research Dornyei criticises Gardner’s concept of Integrativeness saying that in this globalization era, there is no specific English group to integrate with when learning the English language. But according to him “after some consideration” he came to the conclusion that viewing Integrativeness from a self-perspective can offer a good explanation of these findings (Dornyei, 2010, p. 27).

Dornyei (2010) concludes that individuals learn L2 not only because they have the desire to integrate with its cultural group, but also because the learners have an L2 ideal self which motivates them to master the language if they want to become L2 speakers. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, is another construct of Gardner’s socio-educational model. It refers to learners’ desires to learn the language for pragmatic reasons (Gardner, 2001a). That is, the learner who is instrumentally motivated has

specific purposes behind his/her learning the language such as getting a better job, passing an exam or increasing their salary.

In EFL contexts where learners have little interaction in the target language, or with its native speakers, instrumental factors are more likely to be applied to classroom motivation. Dornyei (1990) in a study on EFL learners in Hungary found that instrumental factors have special importance in EFL situations. Moreover, he argues that the “integrative motivational subsystem is less homogeneous than is the instrumental” (p. 65). Kimura and Nakata (1999) conducted a study to investigate the motivational factors among a wide range of Japanese EFL learners. They found a strong pragmatic tendency among learners who cited motivational factors such as the items “(To find an exciting job) or (To have a financial benefit)” (p. 58), rather than integrative factors.

Furthermore, Gardner and MacIntyre (1991, cited in Ellis, 2004, p. 683) reported a study in which they tested 46 university psychology students learning French vocabulary. The students were told they would be rewarded with \$10 if they succeeded in a paired-associated (English-French) vocabulary task. A similar number of students were also asked to do the same task but without any reward. Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) noticed that the students who were offered the reward did better in their task and spent more time and effort in their work. But on the last trial their performance went down because it became clear to them that they could not achieve enough to get the reward. This study explicitly shows that instrumental motivation is not effective at all times and in all situations, as the desire to learn the language may wane after getting the benefit, because the externally imposed goal has disappeared.

Although Gardner made a distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation, this distinction is not always clear. Gardner (1985) reported in a survey of seven different geographical areas in Canada a remarkable correlation between integrative and instrumental motivations. This can also be seen clearly in FLL settings in which integrative motivation can be considered instrumental, when learning a foreign language will facilitate integrating into the target language culture (Bonney, Cortina, Darden &

Fiori, 2008, p. 2). Lamb (2004) reported similar findings in a study conducted in Indonesia. The research examined the motivation of Indonesian children aged 11-12 years learning English in an urban junior high school. The researcher found very high levels of motivation to learn the language throughout the cohort, including both integrative and instrumental orientations. The research also contends that "these two traditionally distinct constructs were found to be almost indistinguishable" (p. 1)

2.3 Immigrant women L2 learning and Norton's notion of Investment.

In mid-1990s, the SLA researcher Bonny Norton presented a new way of thinking about Second Language Acquisition (Norton and Toohey, 2001; Norton, 1995). Norton (1995) re-conceptualised second language learning by problematising the social identity of the second language learner. She argues that current SLA researchers do not present a complete picture of L2 learning as they "have struggled to conceptualise the relationship between the language learner and the social context" (p. 9) in which L2 learning takes place. She furthermore adds that existing SLA theorists do not explicitly show how power relations in the social context affect interaction between the language learner and the target language group, for example the interaction between a native speaker of a language and a migrant learner of that language.

Drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1991) and the identity researchers (e.g. Hall 1997; Weedon, 1990), Norton presents the notion of "Investment" (cited in Norton and Toohey, 2001, p. 312) as a better device for understanding the relationship between the second language learner and the target language. According to Norton (1995), Investment in the second language may involve accessing symbolic resources (e.g. language, education) or material resources (e.g. capital goods, money). She (1995) argues that if learners "invest" in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will gain a wider range of symbolic resources as well as material resources, which will in turn increase their social capital as well as power and make them more effective participants in the target community.

Norton (1995) stresses that her notion of "investment" tries to explain the relationship between the language learner and the social setting where language learning is

happening (Norton, 2000, p. 10). L2 learning, according to Norton's 'investment' concept, will bring benefits to the learners as it will increase their participation in the target community as well as gain them more social power in that community. She perceives L2 learners as having a dynamic social identity and multiple interests, to which their "investment" in the second language constantly reshapes their social identity and helps identify who they are in the target social context.

She highlights:

"The notion presupposes that when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with the target language but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own social identity" (Norton, 1995, p.18)

As confusion is often made between these two concepts because of the functional aspects of L2, Norton distinguishes between the "Investment" concept she postulates and the concept of "Instrumental Motivation" that was proposed by Gardner (1985). As discussed earlier, Gardner perceives the instrumentally motivated L2 learner as "a unitary, fixed, and historical language learner who desires access to material resources that are the privilege of target language speakers" (p. 17). Norton (2015), on the other hand, argues that the construct of motivation remains a psychological orientation, while investment is a sociological framework seeking to make a meaningful connection between a learner's desire and goals to learn a language, and his/her complex and changing social identity (2015).

Norton, in this definition, argues that the construct of investment she presents addresses a particular set of questions associated with a learner's commitment to learning the target language. That is, according to her (2011), in addition to asking, "To what extent is the learner motivated to learn the target language?" the researcher can ask, "What is the learner's investment in the language practices of this classroom or community?" This is because a learner sometimes may be a highly motivated language learner but may have little investment in the "language practices of a given classroom or

community, which may, for example, be racist, sexist, elitist, anti-immigrant or homophobic” (p. 421). Thus, despite being highly motivated a learner might choose not to participate in learning activities and, as a result, be perceived as an unmotivated language learner by the target community, which in turn will reduce his/her participation in the language learning.

In a longitudinal case study investigating five immigrant women learning English as a second language for sixth months in Canada, Norton (1995, p. 21) reports that the L2 learner might be “subject to” a specific discourse in the social world which positions her/him as a stranger and illegitimate user of English. This might make the learner create a counter discourse in which she forms a new social identity and practises English in social interaction to smooth her acceptance into the Canadian English speaking community. The study contents also indicate that in this process, the learner’s motivation to speak and use English is mediated by investments in the target language, for example to “take over the parental tasks of the home” or for “dealing with the public world”. Thus daily living tasks are seen as important motivators for target language use.

McKay and Wang (1996) also investigated the language investment of four adolescent Chinese immigrants to California, USA. In this research, they reported that immigrant language learners are socially positioned by relations of power with the target community. That is, the social setting in which the language learning process is happening positions the language learners in particular ways to the degree in which they might develop a contrast counter-discourse that puts them in a powerful position rather than in a marginalized one. McKay and Wang also highlighted that the language learners are complex social agents with multitudes of fluctuating and conflicting needs and desires, and their “investment” in learning the target group language enables them to negotiate their social identities and claim themselves as legitimate participants in American society (McKay and Wang, 1996, p. 603).

Very recently, Norton and her associates have expanded the theory of investment to not only examine the relation of power between language learners and the target community and how learners are positioned by the target community, but also to investigate how L2

learners assert themselves as legitimate “speakers” in the new community and position themselves as well as others in that community (Norton, 2013; Darvin & Norton, 2015). According to Darvin and Norton, (2015) in the present new era of vast communications and the use of unlimited resources of technology, learners now are able to participate in a greater variety of contexts in both face-to-face and virtual worlds, especially with easy to use and readily available social media, SMS, emailing, and other Web 2.0 applications which allow them to speak by writing as well as by direct speech.

In her new argument, Norton says that in addition to asking, “What is the learner’s investment in the language practices of this classroom?” (Toohey & Norton 2011) this model extends the question to:

“To what extent are learners invested in the language and literacy practices of their classrooms and communities?) And the question now includes the sub-questions:

1. “How invested are learners in their present and imagined identities?
2. “In what ways are they positioned by others, and how do they, in turn, position interlocutors in ways that grant or refuse power?
3. “How can learners gain from or resist these positions?” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47)

To explain how this new interpretation of investment can be used to explore the needs of different learners in the digital age, Norton and her associates use two case studies of learners of contrasting geographical and social locations: Henrietta in Uganda and Ayrton in Canada (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Henrietta is an 18-year-old female student who participated in a study on the use of digital resources for HIV/AIDS education and enhanced language development (Norton et al., 2011). Due to her low linguistics as well as social and economic capital as a rural Ugandan girl with very limited technology and literacy resources, Henrietta positions herself as an “inadequate” and not “sufficiently knowledgeable” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 49) learner compared to more modernized and “well-equipped” learners on the northern side of the planet. In her discussion of the case, Norton reports that both Henrietta’s own social location, as well as the economic position of rural Uganda, constrains her access to the technology and literacy resources

necessary for her to develop her literacy skills. Indeed, and because of this social positioning, her access to English language learning is very limited.

In this example, Norton argues that the literacy and technology skills that Henrietta will gain from this course will enhance her “self-knowledge” as well as the way she perceives and positions herself in the new socialized world. Further, her social interaction with the internet in English will be shaped according to, “... how other interlocutors will position her as a teenage girl from rural Uganda”. Norton concludes that it is this learner’s investment in her “imagined identity that will determine to what extent she will invest in the [literacy] practices of the course” (p. 49).

In contrast to Henrietta’s investment, Norton and associates present another case, of Ayrton, a 16-year-old Filipino male who lives in a wealthy suburb of Vancouver, Canada and whose family emigrated through the Investor community. Ayrton participated in a study that explored digital literacies in home settings of learners with contrasting socioeconomic backgrounds. As a member of a very wealthy and educated family, Ayrton’s literacy as well as technology skills are very high.

His literacy and technology resources are also relatively unlimited. Motivated by his father’s investor spirit, he signed up for an online course on currency trading, and then he engages in online discussions with professionals from different backgrounds and expresses opinions about market trends and opportunities. These literacy, economic, and social capital skills allow him to position himself as a legitimate speaker, participant and contributor in the community he moves in (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 50)

In light of this, Norton argues that in the new era of technology and globalization, language learning continues to “multiply and evolve with distinct and increasingly invisible structures of power with concomitant implications for conceptions of ‘good’ language learning and learner strategies” (Darvin and Norton, 2015). She further adds that the model of investment she extends not only investigates the microstructures of power in communicative events, but also examines the “systemic patterns of control that recurring communicative practices are indexical of”, where learners have the capacity to

invest in learning that allows them not only to gain material and symbolic resources, but also to “dissect, question, and sometimes resist dominant practices and ways of thinking that have become systemic within different fields” (p. 51).

Generally speaking, L2 learners do not only need to exchange information via the second language, but they themselves are constantly constructed and reconstructed in the sense of “who am I”, “who are they” and “how do they relate to the social world” (Norton, 2000, p. 19). Indeed, the nature of relationships between individual learners and the social structure of the host country is not “unidimensional”, but is complex and contradictory (p. 27). MacKay and Wong (1996) similarly report that L2 learners are complex social beings with multiple sources of identity formation. Lee (2003), also supports this contention and reports that second language learners “constantly wrestle with power positioning-resisting positioning, attempting positioning, and deploying discourse and counter discourses” (p. 3). It seems that the identity and identity formation is maintained by cultural and social identity, and it is modified through social interaction (Bruce & Sutch, 2003).

That is, L2 learners’ social identities depend on their social roles in the target society and are re/constructed through their daily interactions in the second language, and with the second language speakers. Many studies (e.g. Lee et al. 2010; Norton, 2013; Toohey, 2000) have investigated the English language learning role in re/constructing L2 learners’ identities in L2 social milieu. Lee et al. (2010) for instance, conducted a qualitative case study to investigate the impact of English on the construction of social and cultural identities of a group of Malaysian English learners. The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with twenty Malaysian undergraduate students from different ethnic groups in Malaysia (Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Singhalese). The writers contended that the English language played a crucial role in the learners’ identity construction as well as their everyday self-negotiations.

Most of the study participants stated that they use English in their daily lives, to communicate with friends, in their schools, and in social situations when they meet

other English speakers. The study concluded that English learning helped the Malaysian ESL learners become more 'open minded', as well as improve their self-esteem and social status. That is, English learning helped them become more knowledgeable as well as re/shape their sense of social identity.

Finally, Toohey (2000) researched L2 learner's identity construction and his/her competence development in classroom environments. She examined the learners' participation in classroom events of six ESL learners in different Canadian classrooms from kindergarten to grade 2 levels. The data for this study were collected through classroom observations and interviews. This study found that students' identities shifted in parallel with their competence developing in the different classroom communities. Toohey (2000) documented that the learners' interactions in the social practice led them to participate more in the classroom activities and so they were able to develop their English learning.

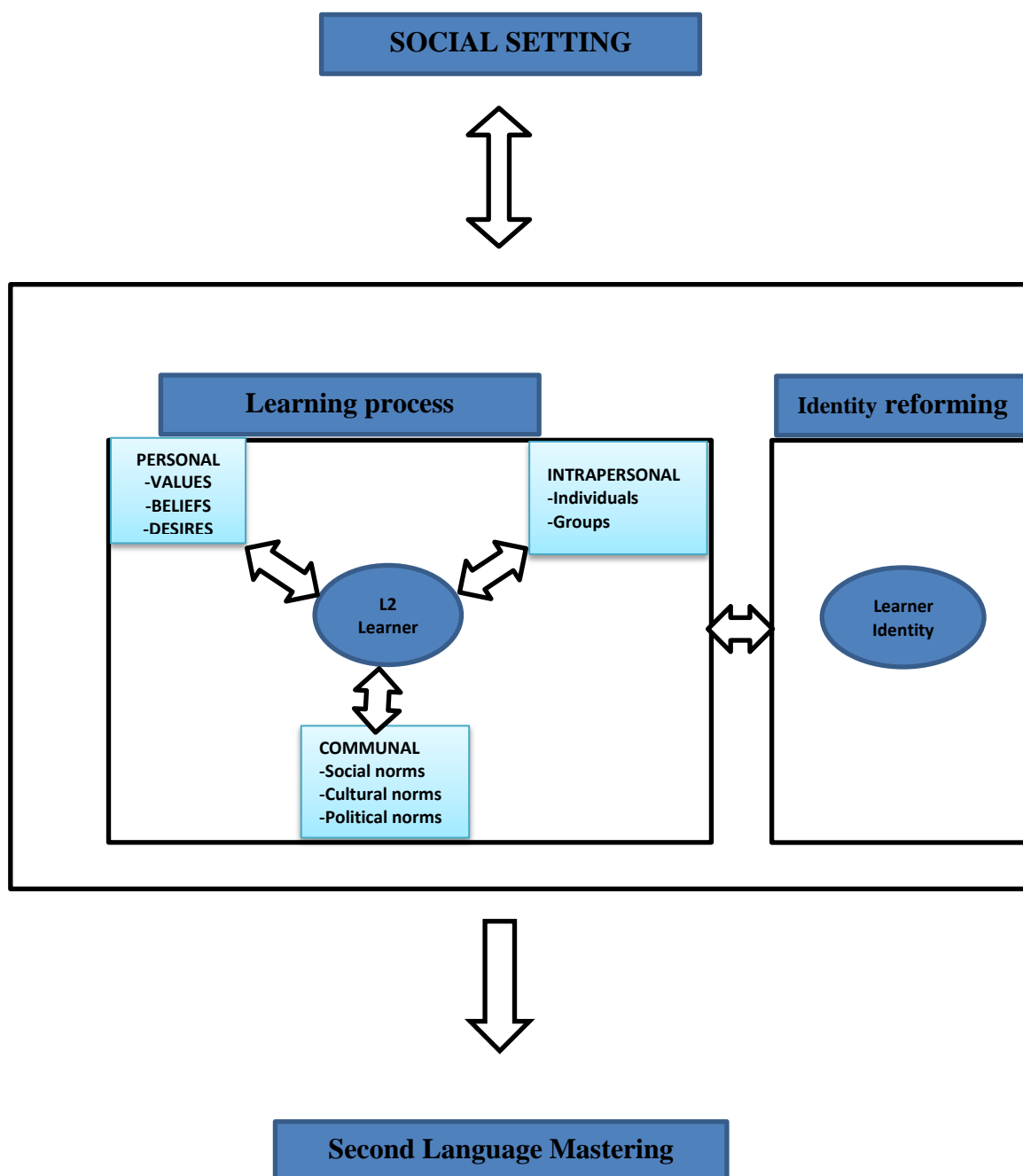


Figure.4 The relationship between learners' L2 learning and the social setting

2.4 How these models inspire my work

In the previous sections I introduced three significant theories in regard to the relationship between the L2 and the social setting it is learned in. Based on the above discussion, it can be understood that second language learning is a solid social process in which the L2 target society plays a major role in individual's learning of the second language (Figure 4). The sociocultural perspective of Vygotsky clearly states that the best way to learn any second language is through the social interaction between the L2 learners and the social context around them. This social context includes relating to teachers and classmates through the fruitful use of symbolic tools such as the language.

Gardner (2007) goes further and explains that learners' desires and attitudes towards the second language and its target group are essential elements in mastering the second language. He adds that L2 learners' integrative motivation plays a major role in his/her achievement in learning the second language, to the degree that the more integrated the learner, the more successful they are in mastering the second language.

Norton, on the other hand, provides us with even more understanding of second language learning within the immigrants' context when she refers to the notion of investment in learning the L2. Norton argues that when immigrants learn a second language, they do so with an understanding that they will gain more capital resources in the new community as well as social empowerment. She further argues that this "gain" will help immigrants reform their social identity, as well as positioning them well in their new society.

These L2 learning perspectives will provide me with an insightful understanding on the Muslim Immigrant Women's English learning in Australia. The IMIW experience is unique in the sense that it is happening in a very multicultural community and with a group of people who have many needs and views in regard to English learning and its use in Australia. In such an environment the L2 learner-community relationship, the learner's internal perspectives, relations of power, as

well as social identity reconstruction, come into play. Hence, these sociocultural, socio-educational and identity explanations of L2 learning are of great assistance in aiding the interpretation of the data of this research with even more accuracy and reality.

Chapter Three: The sociolinguistics of L2

3. Overview

This chapter discusses the relationships between second language learning and some of the social-related factors that influence L2 learning in Australia. The chapter firstly discusses the relationship between culture and second language learning, as well as between language knowledge and second language learning. The chapter also discusses age, gender and social networks as influencing factors in L2 learning. The chapter concludes with an important discussion of Islam as a factor in Muslims' L2 learning, especially in regard to Iraqi women learning English in the Australian context.

3.1 Culture and L2 learning

In second language learning, culture plays a critical role in facilitating the learning process, especially in learners' integration into the target society if they are from different cultural backgrounds. It can shape the relationship between L2 learners and the target community as well as among the learners themselves. Generally speaking, the term *culture* refers to the shared values, norms and beliefs of the people who belong to the same cultural backgrounds (Hall, 1997). Lusting and Koester (2003, cited in Scarino and Liddicoat, 2009) argue that "culture is a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values and norms which affect the behaviours of a relatively large group of people" (p. 27). In the classroom setting, of which language learning is a part, individuals usually behave differently according to their own cultural perspectives and beliefs.

Scarino and Liddicoat (2009) defined culture as a "body of knowledge" that individuals have about a particular society. This knowledge might be about "cultural artefacts or works of art, places and institutions, events and symbols, or ways of living" (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009, p. 21). In language teaching and learning, this knowledge-based view of culture usually takes the form of teaching information about another country, its people, its institutions, and so on. Viewed in this light,

culture is not just a body of knowledge but rather a framework in which people live their lives and communicate shared meanings with each other.

Holland and Quinn (1987) furthermore define culture as a shared knowledge; or what people “must know in order to act as they do, make the things they make, and interpret their experience in the distinctive way they do” (as cited in Hinkel, 1999, p. 77). The word “act” here includes verbal acts, whether in the spoken or the written mode. Shared knowledge in verbal behaviour refers to the familiar conventions in language use. In this sense, people who share common language and the cultural conventions of its use find it easier to interpret or “make sense” of one another’s utterances and actions and “everyone readily recognizes the fact that only very restricted communication is possible without shared language” (Holland and Quinn, 1987)

Culture plays a crucial part in the social life of the community, and a lack of cultural understanding among people who belong to several communities often leads to social inequality and then struggle may occur among those people. Hence, cross-cultural understanding may be viewed as referring to the different values, beliefs, norms and ideas of different cultures and societies. Knowing cultures is important in language learning in order to facilitate communication with people. L2 learners need to learn about and understand the culture of the L2 society in order to get a good understanding of the cultural practices of that society. This they need to help them acquire the L2 in an appropriate way. It is very important to understand that culture is practices and shared meanings with other people. In the second language classroom, L2 learners usually develop knowledge of the L2 target culture as well as understanding themselves in relation to that culture. This “intercultural” understanding in L2 learning involves, in addition to knowing other cultures, understanding how the learners’ own culture shapes their perceptions of themselves, the world, as well as their relationship with others. In this sense, L2 learners become familiar with how they engage with others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009).

This intercultural perspective in second language learning (and teaching) involves more than developing knowledge of other people and places. It means learning that everyone is shaped by his/her own culture and that communicating across cultures involves “accepting both one’s own culturally conditioned nature and that of others, and the ways in which these are at play in communication”. Successful intercultural learning in a second language classroom therefore occurs as the learner understands the relationships between the different cultures in the classroom. Hence, such learning involves more than just developing knowledge about a language and its culture. (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009, p. 22).

When L2 learners learn the culture of a specific language, they usually link that to their own knowledge of the relationship between language and culture as they are interrelated, particularly in creating and interpreting meanings. Learning beyond the classroom environment is more important than any knowledge that learners may obtain of the L2 culture, or any other culture during their learning period. This is because cultures are quite variable and diverse and it is very hard to know everything about every culture in one setting. What is usually taught in the language classroom is only a small portion of the relationship between language and culture. Viewed in this light, this dynamic relationship between language and culture is always critical and can be best understood through exploring the interactions between them.

Iraqi immigrants in Australia come from a country where Islamic culture and traditions and Iraqis’ identities are strongly related. It is very hard to distinguish the Iraqi culture from the Islamic one as most Iraqis are Muslims and, hence, their culture is based on their religious beliefs. However, in Iraq there are also other few cultures such as the Assyrians, the Izedians and the Turkmans, but they are all minority groups in that country. As discussed above, the Iraqi immigrants in Australia are keen to learn about the Australian culture to help them master the English language which is the language of the host community. This learning helps them understand the cultural norms and traditions of the Australian society as well as speaking the English language with more confidence and mastery. It also helps these immigrants develop culturally-conditioned

behaviours which assist them in becoming more easily accepted into the Australian community (Bao, Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2012).

In this light, learning (and teaching) the cultural norms of any language is of high importance to both L2 learners and their teachers. Little and Sanders (1990, as cited in Ellis, 1996) state that L2 classroom activities mostly have a topic with cultural references to teach the students the target culture, as well as the target language itself. They further posit that L2 learners sometimes may find difficulty understanding the topic because of the cultural differences between their culture and the host community culture. Scholars conclude that such unfamiliar cultural references might impede the second language learning, and that more cultural appropriate resources should be introduced to facilitate the second language learning. McKay (2003) argues that English language teaching texts in English speaking countries usually include topics about these countries' cultures.

Such topics might be about dancing, alcohol, love, etc., which are usually of no interest, or even embarrassing to some learners, especially those from Islamic countries, as they are considered "inappropriate" to be discussed in classroom settings. For example, Muslim learners will find it difficult to cope with or learn topics such as dancing, listening to pop or rock music, or a discussion on how alcohol is produced (Taqi, 2008). Taqi argues that there must be efforts to make the English language teaching resources diverse and more culturally-appropriate to meet immigrants' needs. Hence, maintaining cultural diversity is essential in second language learning, especially for immigrants from non-English backgrounds who have never been exposed to the western cultures, such as in the case of Muslim Iraqis.

Kachru and Smith (2008) report that it is not only the L2 learner-host community relationship which is complicated, but also learner-learner relationships, when the learners in a classroom are from different cultural backgrounds. They posit, "It is complicated when people from different linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds from different areas of the world interact with each other" (p. 312). They furthermore add that this complicated relationship among learners who belong to different cultural

backgrounds is due to different opinions, different traditions and different ways of thinking. This “complication”, according to him, occurs as a result of one’s values, principles, and systems of social relationships. That is, learners’ interpretation of the cultural norms and traditions of the new community might be misunderstood by the individuals of that community. This may result in affecting the learning process.

Based on the above discussion, knowledge of the host community culture is vital in second language learning. This is because of the role culture plays in communication and interaction in the new society, as well as inside the classroom. In Australia, there is a strong relationship between English learning and the Australian culture. Immigrants in Australia (including Iraqis) are usually required to engage more in Australian social life and have a good understanding of the Australian culture in order to facilitate their English learning in their new land (ASIB, 2012). The Australian culture has a great influence on the immigrant’s English learning and use, as many of the teaching materials are based on the Australian culture. Hence, familiarity with this culture’s norms and traditions will facilitate the learning process and make it even smoother. This complements the interactions L2 learners have with other English speakers they communicate with in their learning journey, which happens mainly in the broader Australian community and according to the Australian way of communication.

3.2 Language knowledge and ESL learning

Traditionally, language is viewed as a set of codes. That is, language is made up of words and a series of rules that connect words together. Others see language as open, dynamic, constantly evolving and personal (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009). Some perceives a language not just as a body of knowledge to be learnt but as a social practice in which to participate (Kramsch, 2000). In this sense, language is considered as something that people use in their daily lives and something they use to express, create and interpret meanings and to establish and maintain social and interpersonal relationships (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009). As language is a social practice of meaning-making and interpretation, its learners (and users) usually use it to create and represent meanings and to communicate with others. This requires the development of awareness by the user/learner of the nature of the L2 language and

its impact on the society that it is being used in (Svalberg, 2007). In the same vein, L2 learners also engage in learning activities in which they create and interpret meaning, and in which they communicate their own personal meanings and develop personal connections with the new language.

L2 research has shown that second language learning is remarkably associated with learners' knowledge of the language's practices and the way it is being learnt and used (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). As language learning in general is associated with the process of using new information, then L2 learners' understanding of the language practices can either enhance or hinder their learning of the new language. That is, the L2 learning process will be more "successful" when this new information fits with the L2 learner's existing knowledge of language and its meaning-making process. On the other hand, second language learning will be "unsuccessful" if learners' knowledge (especially their knowledge learned in their native language) is different to their new language learning in the L2 language (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

The relationship between language and culture is central to the process of learning another language. In second language use, the new language in its cultural context is what creates meaning. In language learning classrooms, learners usually engage with the ways in which context affects what is communicated and how. Indeed, both the L2 learner's own culture and the target culture in which meaning is created or communicated have an influence on the ways in which language meanings are understood. This context is not a single culture as both the target language and culture and the learner's own language and culture are "simultaneously present and can be simultaneously engaged". Thus, learning to communicate in an additional language involves developing an awareness of the ways in which culture interrelates with language whenever it is used (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009, p. 17).

Scarino & Liddicoat (2009) problematize the relationship between L2 learners' first language and the L2 and argue that L2 learning programs should not focus only on the code of a language. This, according to them, will model a theory of language in

which the relationship between two languages is simply a matter of code replacement, where the only difference is a difference in words. Instead, if the language pedagogies focus on the interpretation and creation of meaning, language is learned as a “system of personal engagement with a new world, where learners necessarily engage with diversity at a personal level” (p. 17). Svalberg (2007) further the argument and states that L2 learners are involved in a learning process which promotes exploration and discovery, rather than only being passive recipients of knowledge as it is transmitted to them by others.

In so doing, these learners require learning skills which will give them independence as users and analysers of language. Many L2 studies show that learners’ past language learning experiences (in both L1 and L2) have a strong influence on their preferences in the new language learning (Killeen & Barnfather, 2005). L2 learners, particularly adults, usually have assumptions and opinions about how language learning is happening. Such assumptions usually reflect their past learning experiences in both first and second languages. Sawir (2005), for example, examined Asian ESL learners in Australia and the role of their past English Education in their English learning process in Australia. She documented that these ESL students are reliant on their prior English language-learning experiences – especially at school in their home country – as the basis on which their later learning will be built. She furthermore reported that the ESL students are, therefore, closely affected by the kinds of pedagogies that were used before coming to Australia, as well as by “the beliefs about language learning that were installed in them, and the numbers of hours of effective experience in conversation already acquired” (p. 568).

Waxman (2000) also, conducted a study to analyse the impact of English language proficiency and information sources on the settlement adjustment of recently arrived refugees from Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq in Sydney. He highlights that refugees’ English achievement in their country of birth directly affects their settlement in Australia as well as their attendance in English language classes. He highlighted:

The higher the level of education achieved in the country of origin, the greater the likelihood of attending English language classes in Sydney which, subsequently, stimulated use of English Language media, enhanced English language proficiency and would more likely lead to further studies being pursued in Australia (Waxman, 2000, p. 17).

Chiswick, Lee, and Miller (2002) furthermore add that immigrants from non-English speaking countries (as in the case of Iraqi immigrants) who have greater exposure to English language and its culture in their country of birth may have "greater preparedness to learn English" in Australia (p. 7).

Other studies have shown that coming to a new educational environment (as in the case of ESL learning in Australia) poses difficulties for those who come from non-English speaking countries. One of these difficulties, for instance, is adjusting to or understanding the teacher's accent. Burns (1991) argues that ESL students might be unable to participate in classroom activities or discussions because "accent and speed of delivery only complicate the communication process" (p. 48). This means, native-speaker teachers' spoken style tends to stress one or more syllables and slur the rest of the sentence. In this vein, familiarising themselves with various Australian English teachers' accents could be extremely challenging for many immigrant English learners in Australia.

3.3 The relationship between language, culture and learners' L2 identity

Many L2 researchers (e.g. 2003; Hall, 1997; Killeen & Barnfather, 2005, 2005; Lee, 2003; Tang, 1999) argue that language and identity are connected. Tang (1999), for instance, suggests that through speaking a language a speaker will also be able to think and react through that language. Brown (1994) argues that language and identity are interrelated and they cannot be separated, otherwise we might lose the significance of both of them. Kramsch (1998) indicates that identity has been considered as the norms, beliefs and assumptions which are represented by a language's speakers or learners. In addition, Lee (2003) argues that language is a dynamic process that is the primary means of showing, transferring and adapting culture and identity. Language is used to

keep an individual's identity, and to adopt a new cultural identity with its new experiences. Lee shows that learning a second language helps an individual to enlarge their understanding of the world "through another cultural lens" (p. 1). Hence, cultural identity is represented through producing and exchanging meanings.

Hall (1997) proposed the term "Diaspora" to refer to any migrant people that share common ethnic identity, such as in the case of the Iraqi Diaspora in Australia. Hall concludes that there is a complex interrelationship between culture, identity and language, and that they are closely connected to each other. Language and culture are unique to humans and intimately related to each other. From all the above, it seems that language is part of culture and culture is part of language. Language is also a set of cultural practices adopted by its users. These practices differ from one society to another. Language can be the carrier of both culture and identity because it is through language that we represent our culture and identity.

Bredella (2003) argues that language is not a closed system independent of culture, but that it is inherently connected to it. Through language we convey and show our culture and traditions to others, and vice versa. According to Bredella, it is not enough to know the language as a system in order to engage and communicate with an individual: we need also to know about the speakers' or learners' prior knowledge of culture and identity. Cultural identity is an ongoing process of construction and re-construction. This happens because of the production of new meaning that occurs in culture every day because of the changing of place and time. Hall states that in terms of the "signifying system", language is not only connected to the production of meaning and identity, but that cultural identity is also formed through language learning.

The multicultural classroom is the meeting point of various aspects of language learning, diverse learning purposes and different expectations of how language should be realized. Such differences reflect disagreement, frustrated expectations and conflict (Killeen & Barnfather, 2005). The culture of the classroom does not delete these differences, but contains them. Hence, the present research first discusses the major challenges that are embodied in language teaching and learning. Second, cultural challenges are addressed

in this paper. The essential challenge for teachers and learners is to find a balance between the conflicting internal cultural reality and the external reality: this balance has to be continually negotiated. Third, the concept of identity becomes a discursive site of struggle, particularly between an individual remaining outside of the new culture, and integrating with it. Additionally, as identity is bound up with culture, the available research discusses the Iraqi students' identity in the new language classroom as a final component of this chapter.

3.4 Age and second language learning

Almost all L2 researchers agree that children, young children, and adults differ in their second language acquisition. Indeed, many argue that children are fast learners of a second language when compared to adult learners (e.g. Bradshaw 2009; Chiswick et al., 2005). In specific situations such as moving to a new community, children do acquire the new language more easily than their parents do. Their great amount of exposure to the second language – for example in school playgrounds, sporting clubs or when being with friends – as well as their need to survive in the new community, helps children master the new language faster than adults (Bradshaw, 2009).

Chiswick et al. (2005) also support this argument and note that immigrant children “acquire [L2] proficiency more rapidly than their parents” (p. 246) as they have greater exposure to the language and culture of the L2 country than do their parents. They further assert that this intense exposure to the dominant language the immigrant children get, either at schools or out in the host community, enables them to learn the new language quicker than their parents. Chiswick et al. also point out that the process of acquiring L2 not only differs between the parents and their children, but also amongst the children themselves. Indeed they argue that older children learn the language faster than younger ones due to the amount of exposure these older children get in the host community compared to the exposure of their younger siblings, who usually have more interaction with their parents in their first language. Adults on the other hand, are generally perceived as less successful L2 learners as they have less exposure to the

target language than the children have. They have less motivation and do not invest much time in learning the new language as well (Chiswick et al., 2005).

This argument was also supported by Long (2005, 1993) who posits that older children pick up the new language faster than the younger ones as they (older children) acquire knowledge faster than young ones in general. However, in the long term adults who learn as children in the early stage are better L2 learners on “morphological and syntactic measures” (Long, 1993, p. 197). Cummins (1981) furthermore supports this argument and states that adult L2 learners acquire L2 “syntax, morphology, and literacy skills more rapidly than younger learners because these aspects of language proficiency are closely related to cognitive skills” (p. 136). In a classroom setting, the situation is different from the social context where children do not have the amount of exposure to the target language. In a classroom setting children also do not have the same need to survive in the new language (for example to communicate with friends outside the classroom). This makes them less effective learners when compared with adult learners who have more needs as well as more self-discipline in their second language learning (Bradshaw, 2009, p. 80).

The L2 learning of immigrant children, especially in English speaking countries such as the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia, has been a field of inquiry for many decades. Studies in these countries have researched the immigrant children’s English learning and the factors that affect it. De Courcy (2007) for example, researched Iraqi immigrants’ English learning in a family context. She found that the child participants had a higher English competency compared to the parent participants. Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) conducted a study to analyse English proficiency and its relation to age among immigrants to the USA. 24,903 speakers of Chinese and 38,787 speakers of Spanish participated in the study. The researchers documented that learners who had engaged in L2 learning from childhood and had longer formal education reported better proficiency than adults who started late or had less formal education. The researchers also conclude that “children are better second language learners than adults because their brains are specially organized to learn languages” (p. 175). Studying these

differences, one question to be asked is: when should children start their second language learning? SLA theorists agree that this depends on whether there is a critical period for second language learning. Long (1993) defines the critical period as "a time of heightened responsiveness to certain kinds of environmental stimuli, bounded on both sides by states of lesser responsiveness with abrupt or gradual increases or decreases in learning ability expected " (p. 196).

It is interesting to see how immigrants perceive learning and use of English differently according to their age groups. Therefore the current study examines age as a factor among Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women in regard to their English learning in Australia. In previous research I investigated the recently arrived Iraqi immigrant families' English learning motivation in Australia in relation to age (Abdilah, 2011). In this study I concluded that within the same family, younger Iraqi learners are more successful in their English learning compared to adult learners. According to the study, this is because the parents tend to be less motivated to continue their learning as they feel that the language they have so far is quite enough for their needs. In contrast, the study found that younger learners were more motivated. As there is no age restriction in this current research, the research provides an opportunity to uncover how this social factor might affect the IMIW's English learning in Australia.

3.5 Gender and second language learning

Bearing in mind the research questions for this study, it is important to note that gender is of utmost importance as a sociocultural factors influence the IMIW's access to the women-only English language literacy programs? (Research Question two.) Over the last few decades, L2 researchers (e.g. Pavlenko & Piller, 2001; Norton, 1995) have extensively investigated the role of gender identity in second language learning. Accordingly, the field of language and gender has become "one of the most lively, sophisticated, and interdisciplinary areas of linguistics inquiry" (Pavlenko & Piller, 2001, p. 2). Holmes and Meyerhoff (2001) furthermore add that "language and gender is a particularly vibrant area of research and theory development ... within the larger study of language and society" (p. 1).

It has been generally acknowledged that men and women have different goals and desires in their L2 learning. In mastering a second language, men and women have also been affected differently by factors such as past L2 experience, social class, children, or ethnicity. In a review of the literature on gender-related L2 success, Moon (2000, in Pavlenko & Piller, 2001) examined Chinese women learning English in the US. She noted that women are seen as more successful in language learning than men. They participate more in classroom activities, produce more complex sentences and achieve higher marks in spelling and grammar tests.

Men on the other hand are represented as slower learners and as facing more difficulties in practising reading and speaking in a second language. However, Pavlenko and Piller (2001) argued that immigrant women have fewer opportunities to attend classes in a second language due to cultural practices such as needing to take care of children and the inappropriateness of sitting with unknown men in afternoon classes (p. 25). This indicates that women may not be as successful at L2 learning as men for socio-cultural reasons. Pavlenko and Piller also state that in multicultural communities where second language skills are highly needed and linked to economic and social advantages, "men have privileged access to this symbolic capital, while women are prevented from learning and using the language by a number of gatekeeping practices" (p. 24).

In a classroom context, girls and boys also have differences in their second language learning. L2 researchers (e.g. Kissau, 2001; de Courcy, 2007) argue that once girls engage in second language learning, their achievements in the language classroom are higher than the boys' achievements. Kissau (2006) carried out a study in Canada to examine gender differences among grade 9 students in their motivation to learn French. 490 students (254 males and 236 females) from an English speaking province participated in this study. Kissau (2006) documented that male students have less desire to learn French than their female classmates. Moreover, the study indicated that females have a higher sense of integrative orientation and motivational intensity than boys. In a study investigating immigrant Portuguese women in Canada, Goldstein (2001, in Pavlenko & Piller, 2001) contends that 1 out of the 26 participants in the study had previously been working in Canada. She reports that there are a number of cultural and

social reasons preventing women – and not men – from attending ESL classes. These reasons include housekeeping needs, the large number of men in the class, being frightened of attending night classes, and financial obligations.

As discussed earlier (in Chapter. One), gender has been reported by many L2 researchers as having a key role in Muslim women's utilizing of their free English entitlement in Australia. Indeed, many of these studies have reported that Muslim immigrant women, in general, are disadvantaged in term of access to English classes compared to their men counterparts due to certain sociocultural factors (e.g. Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013; Casimiro et al. 2007; De Courcy, 2007; Rida & Milton, 2001; Yaseemen, 2007). Rida and Milton (2001), for example, conducted a study examining immigrant Muslim women accessing English classes in Australia. 23 Muslim women from different Islamic countries who had recently arrived in Australia participated in the study. Only ten women had accessed the English classes offered to them by the Australian government. Rida and Milton (2001) document that internal and external factors such as time and location of classes, lack of information about eligibility, cultural affiliation and mixed-gender classes were "claimed to have contributed to the relatively low presence of Muslim women in English language programs" (p. 38).

De Courcy (2007) studied Iraqis' English language learning in Sydney. The participants were 39 family members (males and females) from Iraqi backgrounds. The findings reveal that the males were serious about learning English through using media in English language, such TV channels and newspapers. The women on the other hand were the slowest to use media in English due to its lack of "cultural suitability" and "home duties" (p. 13). As a result, their English language learning was slower than for men. Such findings reveal that women in the social context have fewer opportunities to learn a second language compared to men. Women have more obstacles in their second language learning than do men. Some of these obstacles involve conflicting needs with care of children, home duties, time of classes and mixed-gender classes. Men, in contrast, have easier access to English classes. Moreover, their chances to use their second language in work, school or social life is greater than those of women who stay mostly at home where they speak the first language. As the current study takes place

within a unique female environment (the women-only classes), it is essential to uncover how gender identity impacts the Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women in their access to English classes in Australia, which is one of the main aims of the study.

3.6 The role of social networks in Second Language Learning

The social networks of an immigrant have an important influence in his/her second language learning in the diaspora. It's well-known that Iraqi culture is one of the world's most collectivistic cultures (Hofstede, 1980). In Australia, Iraqi immigrants usually choose to live together in one area and close to each other. This makes their social communications (such as when doing shopping or when visiting doctors) occur much within their own group (with other Iraqis) and in their first language, Arabic, which means their need to speak English is minimal. Al Dukhaile (2012) conducted a study to examine the difficulties that hinder Iraqis in establishing successful communication with people from different cultures in the multicultural Australian society. He explained that "it seems that group cohesiveness is one of the reasons that prevent Iraqi immigrants who have been living in Australia for many years from improving their English competency" (p. 35).

The Muslim women's network and other social support networks have the potential to limit the participation of Muslim women in the wider Australian community. Often the support network can have such a strong influence on women that they are convinced there is no need to learn English, and they have no desire to do so. According to Rida and Milton (2001), the support network may work in two ways to limit the participation of Muslim women in Australian English language classes. Firstly, a strong support network may act as a "barrier by fulfilling the language needs of the external domain to such an extent that the women never perceive a need for English" (p. 42). Secondly, a strong network of female friends and relatives may put pressure on the women to "perform the daily tasks associated only with the domestic domain, stressing that this is their role according to culture, tradition and religion" (p. 42). In this case, the network operates to keep the women in the home with the message that they do not need to be active in the wider non-Muslim community.

There is a widespread belief that Muslim women in Australia face significant challenges in their English learning similar to those of their peers from other backgrounds (see Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013; Casimiro et al., 2007; McCue, 2008; Rida & Milton, 2001). It has also been argued that Muslim immigrant women, who are tied to their religious and cultural beliefs, may have more personal barriers to fulfilling their literacy and language requirements than their non-Muslim peers (Yasmeen, 2007). In a study which sought to examine non-English speaking background (NESB) women accessing English provisions in Victoria, Australia, Rado and Foster (1991) found that there were specific categories of NESB women who were likely to miss out on English courses. Among them were women whose husbands were unsympathetic to their education and/or employment orientations.

This might be applicable to Muslim women by virtue of their religious or cultural obligations or their unwillingness to engage in activities which they perceive to be in opposition to their religious doctrines or cultural beliefs (Rado and Foster, 1991). Gardner (2007) argues that the L2 learner's attitude towards the people and culture represented by a language may either impede or promote the acquisition of that language by the learner. Thus a Muslim's religious partiality may indeed become a barrier that may prevent some women from accessing ESL provisions.

3.7 Islam and Muslims' cultural identification

Muslims consider Islam as a comprehensive way of life that dominates all their daily behaviours to the degree that they view the teachings of Islam as being stronger than their cultural traditions. In diaspora, this view, to some extent, shapes their second language learning and assimilation in the host community as well as their identity (Musawi and Goulding (1977). Islam furthermore influences the way in which its followers identify themselves as well as other (non-Muslims) in different contexts. The Iraqi Muslim immigrants in Australia, for instance, identify themselves as Arab Muslims. This kind of identification is because most Iraqi Muslims are Arabs and share with other non-Iraqi Arabs the same language, religion and geographical area.

Iraqi Muslims are strongly related to their Islamic heritage because of the many Islamic sacred sites in Iraq, which are the destination of thousands of pilgrimages each year. In diaspora, Iraqi Muslims try to maintain their Islamic life and often tend to be even more religious in the host society than they were in their home country (Williams, 1988). This is to meet the spiritual needs that they miss when they leave their home country as well as to avoid any sense of alienation they might face in the new land. They also sustain active participation in the Muslims' religious occasions and activities, such as Ramadan, Eid and going to mosques. They also make sure to teach their children Islamic values, norms, prayers and the Arabic language, in order to show their appreciation of their Islamic identity.

The hijab is also a symbol of their modesty in their society that is perceived as totally different in its values, norms and traditions; therefore Iraqi women cannot give up their hijab because this would mean becoming immodest. According to Darnell and Shafiq (2003), the hijab is one of the fundamental elements of a Muslim woman's identity and it can be a signal of a good Muslim woman. Iraqi Muslim women make it clear that their hijab represents their dignity and one of their rights to identify themselves in a non-Muslim society. They usually consider the Islamic hijab as an important part of their social identification despite the criticism that the hijab is a sign of oppression, submission, inferiority and the humiliation of Muslim women. Ameli and Merali (2006) discuss this issue and state that the hijab is not an oppressive garment that covers a Muslim woman, but it is a symbol of modesty that denotes a set of moral values that are relevant to the interaction of both genders.

The Islamic religion has a pivotal role in the lives of Muslims (including Iraqi Muslims) through influencing their identification with others. Alkhazraji et al. 1997 argue that the strength of the religious identification of Muslims is positively associated with a tendency to be less accepting of the other culture, and the engagement in religious practices is associated with the tendency to keep a preference for the original culture. This suggests that Muslim immigrants in general are socially identified with their religion and they tend to perceive the Australian culture as an "out-group" culture. This sense of identification may foster the Muslim women's isolation and hinder them in

practicing the Australian mainstream culture: therefore, it may obstruct their English language learning.

3.8 The Muslim community in Australia

Muslims in Australia face many challenges that affect their daily behaviour and shape their relationship with members of this society. One of these challenges is the stereotype that portrays Muslims as violent, intolerant, inferior, militant, terrorists, outsiders, extremists, fundamentalists, aliens and “others” (Aly, 2007; Dunn, 2001). These feelings have increased after September 11, 2001 and the “Bali 2002 bombings”. Some believe the Australian media has contributed to this view by portraying Islam as backward, and a danger that threatens Western societies, and by presenting Muslims as terrorists (Aly, 2007).

The increase of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim intolerance that has been experienced in Australian society reduces the Muslims’ communication with those who have different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Those who are easily identified as Muslims, become particular targets for stereotyping. Offensive and abusive language has been experienced by Muslims, especially women, at work, schools, in parks as well as on public transport, because of their clothing codes. According to Decapua and Wintergerst (2004), negative stereotypes may impede and prevent effective communicative interactions between people of different cultural backgrounds. According to Schumann’s (1978) model of acculturation, acquisition of a second language will be enhanced if both groups, the target language group and the second language group, have a positive attitude towards each other. The negative stereotypes of Muslims furthermore cause a sense of prejudice and ethnocentrism. According to Nuliep (2006), a negative stereotype leads to aspects of prejudice, ethnocentrism and discrimination of those who have different cultures other than one’s own. These aspects do not affect just their English learning but they can also affect their assimilation process into the Australian society.

For Muslims, Islam is a way of life, not just a religion. That is, their behaviours,

traditions, cultural norms etc. are all linked to Islam. This makes it often difficult for Muslims to immigrate and live in other non-Muslim cultures as the traditions are greatly different. This may create barriers between Muslims and other people from different cultural backgrounds when the differences are not understood. Muslim people try to maintain their Islamic identity by practising their five pillars of Islam which are (1) *Ashhada* (declare that there is only one God and that Mohammed is his final prophet); (2) *Assalat* (pray five daily prayers); (3) *Assaum* (fast during the holy month of Ramadan); (4) *Al zekat* (donate a percentage of their annual wealth to charity); and (5) *Al hajj* (perform a pilgrimage to the Holy City of Mecca). These pillars and practices which are taken from either the Holy Qur'an, or records of the Prophet Mohammed's sayings and deeds (Hadith), affect every aspect of the private and social life of Muslims (Saeed & Akbarzadeh, 2003).

The basic unit in Muslim's lives is family, and every member of that family has specific roles. This is highly emphasized by the Quran. In diaspora, Muslims keep this way of life because it is emphasized by their religion. The husband, for example, is responsible for providing support to the family, such as securing income and handling issues in the outer society. This does, of course, include involvement in most of the communication with the outer society, which makes his need to master the L2 very high. Women, in contrast, are responsible mainly for handling the family issues, including taking care of the children and house duties. This does not mean that women in Muslim societies do not do paid work or secure an income. Many of them do such things, but they usually finish their education before marriage so that when they start work, they manage their time between work and home duties, including taking care of children.

In Australia, most immigrant Muslim women who arrive – such as to join the Iraqi diaspora – are married with children (Yasmeen, 2007). This makes them focus more on their family-related tasks such as looking after the children and housekeeping, because of their role as the backbone of the family, as asserted by Islam. Hence, learning a second language – English in this case – has less priority as they have limited contact with the outer society. The Muslim woman's hesitation in accessing English programs is not, however, determined only by their duties as mothers, as asserted by Islam. It is

also affected by other directives, also strongly related to Islam, such as a negative stereotype the host community has of Muslims, gender-mixed classes and discrimination.

As for the “negative stereotype” the Muslim women suffer from in Australia, after the 11/9 bombings in America, a huge number of attacks against Muslim women happened worldwide. In Australia, similar attacks were reported all over the country. The reason why Muslim women are in the frontline to encounter hostility against Muslims is because they stand as “signposts” of Islam due to their Islamic dress code. The way they dress (the Islamic Hijab) makes them easily identified as Muslims or more specifically as “religious Muslims”, which in turn makes them targets for anti-Islam attacks. This negatively affects their participation in Australian society in general, and in the English programs in particular, in order to avoid being abused or attacked by others.

Indeed, some L2 researchers in Australia reported that the “negative stereotype” of Muslims in Australia has caused many Muslim women to feel “isolated” and, subsequently, hesitant in accessing their free English classes. These women want to avoid discrimination or racist behaviours that they fear they might find in attending mixed-gender classes. It is this worry (based on many experiences) that affects their social participation in the Australian way of life, including their participation in English learning (Casimiro, 2007; Yasmeen, 2007). More discussion on the role of the Australian society on the IMIW’s English learning, and the stereotype by which the Australians portray Muslim women, will be presented in the findings’ chapters.

3.9 Chapter summary

To sum up, the chapter has discussed the relationships between second language learning and some of the social-related elements that directly influence the acquisition of the L2 within the social context of these elements. As the current study examines the influence of sociocultural factors in the Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women’s English learning in Australia, a special emphasis was placed on the relationship between these factors and English learning. This chapter firstly examined the relationship between culture, language knowledge and learners’ L2 identity and second language learning.

Researchers (e.g. Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009) argue that immersion in the new culture is very important in mastering the new language as it facilitates the communication between L2 learners and the host community. Others (e.g. Hymes, 1996) add that it (culture) plays a key role in the social life of the community and a lack of cultural understanding between L2 learners and the target community often leads to social inequality and, as a result, to a unsuccessful L2 learning. The chapter has also discussed age as a factor in L2 learning. Researchers (e.g. Chiswick et al. 2005; Long, 2005) argue that younger learners acquire an L2 faster than older ones. This is because their need for L2 is greater than their older counterparts, and this affects their motivation to learn the target language.

The current study examines IMIW in relation to age. Discussing this important factor provides the study with the ability to uncover how different IMIW age groups perceive English learning in Australia. Similarly, the chapter has discussed gender and social networks as influencing factors in immigrants' L2 learning. This is because the study is taking place within a unique female setting (women-only English classes). Researchers (e.g. Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013; De Courcy, 2007; Rida & Milton, 2001) maintain that Muslim women in general are disadvantaged in their L2 learning because of their sociocultural commitments including home duties, social relationships, religious norms etc. Finally, the chapter has discussed the Islamic religion as a factor in Muslims' L2 learning. This is because Islam dominates all Muslims' daily behaviours, including L2 learning, to the degree that they view the teachings of Islam as being stronger than their cultural traditions. Researchers (e. g. Casimiro et al. 2007; Yasmeen, 2007) argue that Muslim women have, in regard to L2 learning, special needs and concerns that are strongly related to Islam and which need to be seriously considered in order to make their L2 learning successful. Indeed, as the study will demonstrate, Islam plays a significant role in all Muslim's English learning and use.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4. Overview

This qualitative case study employs the constructivism research paradigm. With this paradigm the researcher attempts to establish his constructs from the field by an in-depth examination of the IMIW's English learning in Australia. Using also the phenomenological approach, the present study examines the phenomenon of the IMIW's access to the women-only English classes within the real-life context of their second language learning in Australia. As the process of Second Language Learning happens best through the social interaction of individuals, the constructivist views help to best understand the IMIW's English learning experience in Australia as well as the re/construct of their L2 learner's identities. This is based on the understanding that reality is constructed and reconstructed through the process of human and social interaction (Lantolf, 2006).

The present study uses a multi-method qualitative approach to derive, analyse and interpret data from the participants regarding their English learning experiences in Australia. Three different data collection methods are used in this research to get direct and authentic data from the participants. These are a questionnaire, in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion. It is argued in this study that exploring the IMIW's access to English learning opportunities would be best examined by means of direct and open dialogue and conversations with the participants. That is, their stories, beliefs, and perspectives about their English learning experiences, would be best explored through a multi-method qualitative approach, which is explained in more detail later in this chapter.

The present chapter discusses qualitative case studies and their appropriateness to the current research. The chapter also introduces the study setting, the participant profiles and data collection methods. As well as this it also describes the collecting, managing and analysing of the data. It concludes with a discussion of the role of the researcher, ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

4.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is the field of inquiry that encompasses multiple epistemological positions and data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena in their natural setting (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Sandelowski, 2000; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Qualitative study does this by involving the researcher within the natural setting of the phenomenon to make sense of the meaning she/he brings to the examined event. Hesse-Biber (2010) posits that qualitative research "seeks to empower individual stories with the goal of understanding how they make meaning within their social world" (p. 1). In this sense, it is viewed as the type of inquiry that places the researcher within the context of the social phenomenon to study it from a closer point of view and provide more accurate data and fruitful understanding. Qualitative study also enables the researcher to get closer to the participants of his/her study to share their thoughts and stories about how they make meanings in their social world (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 334).

The present study aims to uncover the sociocultural factors that influence the IMIW's access to the women-only English language classes in Australia. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of this social phenomenon, the researcher needs to get closer to the participants to explore their thoughts and make sense of the meanings they bring to their English learning in this country. Hence, the qualitative approach is appropriate. It allows the researcher to become integrated into the natural setting of the problem in order to provide fruitful explanations as well as comprehensive understandings. Moreover, the use qualitative research allows the researcher to use different data collection methods to get as much data as possible to find the comprehensive answers to the research questions. It also helps the researcher to check one source of data against another to ensure the validity of the research.

Nevertheless, researchers (e.g. Golafshani, 2003; Shaw, 2008) criticize using qualitative research paradigm in social science. One point of criticism is that qualitative research may lack reliability and validity (Golafshani, 2003). Another point of criticism concerns ethical issues in qualitative inquiry, for example the dynamics of the power relations between the researcher and participants (Shaw, 2008, p. 404). A further point of criticism concerns the issue of generalizing data that are drawn from a specific phenomenon to a larger population. (Golafshani, 2003). The researcher's responses to these points of criticism are discussed later in this chapter.

4.2 Phase one: Information collection

Phase one of the study involved collecting background information about Muslim immigrants in Australia (particularly women) and the women-only English courses offered to them. The search was done in the public domain and included an examination of immigration statistics from bodies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (the ABS) and the Department of Immigration and Statistics (the DIAC). It also included obtaining education statistics from the Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) Victoria, TAFE Institutes and elsewhere.

The data were collected from these institutions through direct contact as well as from their websites. This step helped the researcher explore the range of the women-only English classes available to immigrant women in Victoria. This search also involved collecting information on which institutes or organizations are offering such programs as well as the locations of these programs. It also explored the nature and numbers of the students who were accessing these classes. Such information was vital for determining who offers these programs and who examines the effectiveness, as well as the successfulness of these programs, and to inform the policy makers how to best promote these programs.

4.3 Phase two: Case study design

Case study has been viewed by many methodologists as the best strategy the researcher can use to conduct a mixed methods research in the social sciences (Dooley, 2002;

Stake, 1978; Yin, 1981, 2003). A “case study” can be described as the kind of research that makes a contextual analysis of a limited number of events, problems or conditions and their relationships (Dooley, 2002, p. 335). In this sense, a case study can be used to investigate a specific contemporary phenomenon to understand it within its real-life situation. Yin (2003) argues that a case study mainly tries to find answers for the “why” and “how” questions when examining a problem in its real-life context. He defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that “investigates contemporary phenomena within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 11).

A case study is conceived as an effective research approach in a wide range of disciplines such as economics, law, the health sciences, linguistics, identity, and policy. Moreover, it is viewed as a most effective strategy in social inquiry and particularly in the study of human affairs (Stake, 1978, p. 7). This enables a case study to cover a variety of topics within different fields of knowledge. A case study may cover topics such as community studies, innovative projects and economic development (Yin, 1981, p. 97). Some of the advantages of a case study are: (1) it can be used to study both the phenomenon and its context, (2) it can be done using quantitative and/or qualitative research methodologies, (3) it is based on a real life situation and can represent bad and good practices, success as well as failure, and (4) it can employ various methods of data collection.

The present study examines the Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women’s access to the women-only English classes within the real-life context of their second language learning in Australia, with the goal being to find answers to “why” and “how” questions relating to their decision to access/not access these classes. Taking this into consideration, a case study is deemed to be the best research strategy that can be used for an in-depth understanding of these immigrants’ English learning experience in Australia. Furthermore, this study examines the case of a particular group (Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women) at a particular place (women-only English classes in Australia) at a particular time (five years after their arrival in Australia). The particularity of a single case is essential for the case study design (Stake, 1995).

There are two main designs in case study research, a *single case* study and *multiple case* studies. In a single case study, the researcher tries to examine a specific phenomenon within its real-life situation. In multiple case studies on the other hand, the research investigates the same phenomenon in a variety of situations. In this sense, more than one case study is conducted and each individual study is treated on its own. In the conclusion the results from each individual study must be considered in light of the multiple-cases in order to draw rich findings and outcomes (Yin, 2003).

A case study can be used to "develop a pertinent hypothesis and propositions for further inquiry" (Yin, 2003, p. 6) which is an *exploratory case*. A case study can, also, be used to describe a situation (e.g. a case history) or to "test an explanation for why specific events have occurred", which is a *descriptive case* study. Finally, a case study can be used to "make a casual inference". In this case it is called an *explanatory case study* (Yin, 1981, p. 98). The present study is both an *exploratory* and *descriptive* single case study, in which the researcher tries to explore the sociocultural factors behind the decision of a group of Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women to access/not access the women-only English classes offered to them at private and public teaching institutions and community houses in Melbourne, Australia. In particular, the study aims to explore in detail the complexities, experiences as well as personal stories behind each participant's decision.

There has been some criticism levelled at the use of case studies. A case study can be criticized for its inability to generalize its findings because it deals with a limited number of events or problems. Another point of criticism is the personal involvement of the researcher in the study. This may make him/her too close to the content to be objective. The question of the researcher's objectivity is often raised in a qualitative case study (Stake, 1978).

In light of the above discussion and despite the criticism, a case study is still believed to be the most successful strategy in social science research. Its ability to employ multiple data collecting methods in one single study, as well as the real-life context of the investigated phenomenon, enable it to provide accurate and complete research findings.

The present study takes place in a real-life situation through examining IMIW's access into the women-only English classes in the Australian social setting. Thus, a case study approach helps both to investigate the topic deeply and to collect sufficient and rich data. It enables the researcher to observe the case from a closer position, so that he can have a better understanding of the phenomenon, and can then provide the study with more accurate findings. Finally, a case study approach offers the researcher of this study the opportunity to interact and communicate with his participants in the real-life situation of Melbourne, where he lives too. This helps him both manage his research process efficiently, and to find valid and reliable answers to the research questions.

4.4 Scope of the study

It should be noted that although this study investigates the IMIW's English learning in the broader Australian social context, it is still a bounded system (Stake, 1978). Researchers who have investigated Muslim women's English learning in Australia argue that there are many internal factors such as values, beliefs, and desires; as well as external ones, such as the L2 community, religion, social networks, and family that influence this process (e.g. Rida and Milton, 2001; McCue, 2008). Others say that educational factors such as L2 education, teachers, and teaching materials also play an important role in this (De Courcy, 2007; Hewagodage & O' Neill, 2010). The current study will not investigate this problem in both Australian social and educational contexts: it will examine the internal and external sociocultural factors that may affect the IMIW's access to their English entitlement in Australia within the social context only.

Thus the study will be confined to the social environment that surrounds the IMIW. (I.e., it will look at the role played by the Australian community, Islamic religion, learners' social networks, families and children etc. in the IMIW's decision to access/not access the women-only English classes). The reason why the study will not investigate the educational factors is because it is examining the factors which influence learners decision- making process prior to engagement in English learning, in order to encourage their participation in this process. Also because of this limited scope and design, the study will not go further by examining the role of the entire Australian society, other

religions, or other immigrant community groups or networks. Finally, the study is limited to the case of the Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women only (IMIW). It is not investigating women in the wider Muslim community, nor in the broader immigrant’s community in Australia (figure.5).

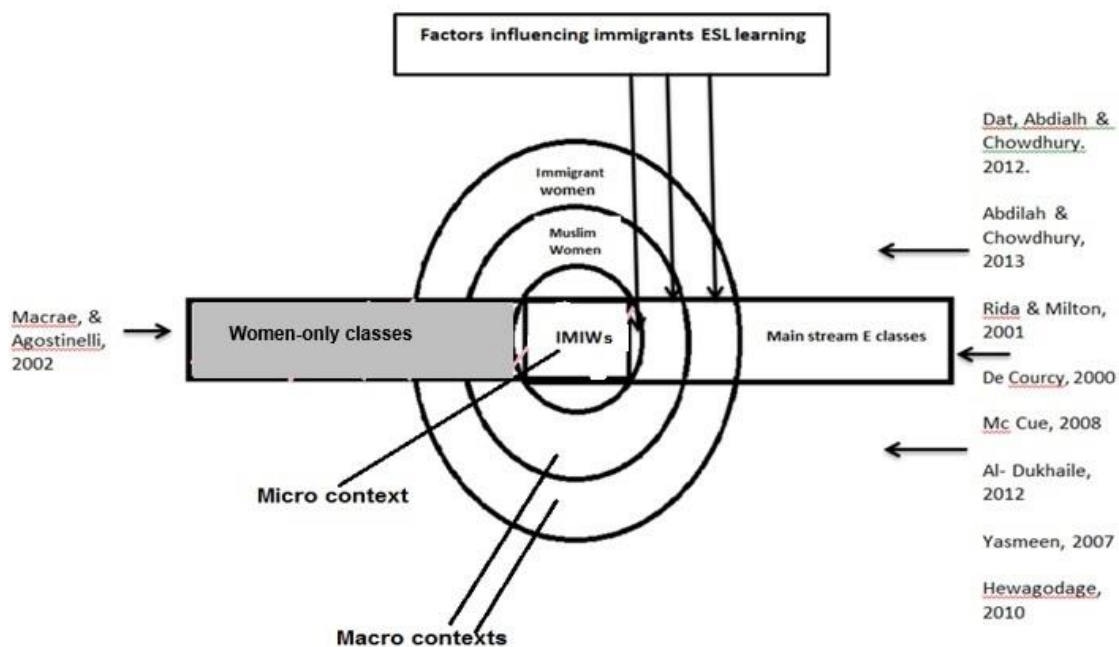


Figure. 5 Scope of the study

4.5 Selection and recruitment of research participants

The research participants are eight Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women who arrived in Melbourne, Victoria within the last five years. To select this focus group, I surveyed 100 IMIW in Melbourne. These 100 people were chosen randomly from the Iraqi community in Melbourne and were approached by the researcher during the Iraqi community meetings and gatherings. In addition to selecting the focus group, a further aim of the questionnaire used is to explore IMIW's attitudes towards English learning and use, their needs and desires to learn English, and their experiences with the women-only English classes. Depending on their answers to the questionnaire items, eight participants were chosen to be the focus group of this study based on (1) their length of residency in Australia (participants who arrived in the last five years were selected only) and (2) their experience with the women-only English classes.

The eight selected participants are of two groups. The first group is four IMIW who are currently studying at the women-only English classes. The second group is four IMIW who did not join any English classes in Australia or withdrew from their classes.

The reason why the study focuses on the IMIW who arrived in Melbourne during the last five years is because the Iraqi community is now growing rapidly in Melbourne with an increased number of Iraqi women learning English in public or community language institutes (AMES, 2010; DIBP, 2015). De Courcy (2007) documents that, in recent years Iraqis have come in "increasingly large numbers" (p. 5) to settle in southern Australia, where Melbourne is located. Most of those Iraqis come to Australia with few English language skills, some of them were English illiterate at the time of their arriving in Australia (Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013).

Some of the research participants have had some formal English learning in Iraq. However, their English communication skills are not good enough to enable them to communicate successfully in the Australian English-speaking community. This is due to the nature of English learning they have had in Iraq, where more attention was given to the grammatical and structural aspects of the language as opposed to its use in (verbal) communication. Despite the fact that some of these participants have had limited English learning in Iraq, they consider themselves as "poor" English speakers and tried

to join English classes immediately after their arrival in Australia. Their access to English language learning is affected by many social and cultural factors, which this study is aiming to explore.

The participants came from different geographical areas in Iraq. However most of them are from the southern region of that country. They also differ in terms of their marital status. That is, some of them are married and some are still single. Currently they are living in different suburbs of Melbourne (Victoria, Australia) including, Broadmeadows and Lalor in the northern suburbs; and Dandenong, Noble Park and Narre Warren in the southeast suburbs. This variety of location (in both Iraq and Australia), marital status, as well as educational background, offers the researcher a typical environment for collecting rich data, and for formulating various perspectives and thoughts.

All the participants came as refugees to Australia within the last five years. Some of them joined English classes soon after their arrival in Australia. Others preferred to have a volunteer tutor to teach them English while staying home taking care of their children and houses.

Table 2. Description of participants

Participant	Age	Marital Status	Education Level	Mainstream English learning	Enrolment in women-only classes
Janit	21	Married (no children)	Bachelor in Accounting	Three months	Yes
Najat	34	Married (four children)	Secondary School	Two months	Yes
Hamida	47	Married (three mother)	Diploma in Education	None	Yes
Fatima	37	Married (four children)	Secondary School	Two months	Yes
Queen	31	Married (two children)	High School	None	No
Suad	56	Married (five children)	No Formal Education	six months volunteer tutor	No
Hawra	52	Married (six children)	Primary School	Three months Volunteer tutor	No
Afaf	54	Married (six children)	Primary School	Three months	No

4.6 Participant profiles

Hamida

Hamida and her husband immigrated to Australia from Iran in 2012. They left Iraq during the 2003 war and lived in Iran for nine years. Then they applied to immigrate to Australia through the Australian embassy in Iran. They entered Australia together as a family in 2012 (Hamida, her husband, and their three children).

Hamida comes from a very conservative Muslim family. Her father was an Islamic cleric in Iraq and lectured on Islamic sharia all over the country. Her husband was an Islamic teacher at a secondary school in Iraq, where she was also teaching. She met him first in the school in 2001 and soon after that they became engaged, then married. Hamida says that when she first met him, she felt that they had many things in common, especially in regard to Islam and what they perceive a good Muslim life to be.

Due to the war in Iraq and the unsettled security situation they decided to migrate to Iran as they thought that would be the best place for Muslims to live in because of the Islamic government there. In Iran, however, they could not get permanent residency, or a satisfactory income. They worked as Islamic preachers in Iran but the income was very low. That was due to Iran's difficult economic situation because of the international sanctions on that country. They then decided to migrate to Australia because they had relatives there.

Soon after their arrival in Australia, Hamida's settlement case worker referred her to "Epping" TAFE to study her 510 hours of English classes. However, Hamida did not go to the classes at the TAFE because they were a mix of males and females. Her husband went there first and told her that all the classes were mixed. Coming from a religious family, mixing with unknown men was not accepted by Hamida, so she preferred to stay home and ask for a volunteer tutor. The TAFE did send her a female tutor to teach her English at home. This tutoring continued until she learned about the women-only classes in Broadmeadows. Hamida joined those classes. Hamida is aged 47 and suffers from diabetes.

Janit

Janit is a young wife who came to Australia on a spouse visa to be with her husband. Her husband is an Australian citizen and met her in Lebanon while he was on a holiday. They liked each other and spent some time together in Lebanon before they decide to become engaged. Janit is from Iraq and was living in Lebanon with her family. Her father is a businessman and runs his business from Beirut. Her husband is also from an Iraqi background but has lived in Australia since 1995. They got married in Lebanon, then her husband returned to Australia and applied for the spouse visa for her. She got her visa quickly and only a few months later she was in Australia.

Janit loves Australia and says that her dream was to come and live in Australia. When this researcher met her, she said about Australia that “Australia is a very good country. There are lots of opportunities for you and your children [for the] future as well”. A few weeks after her arrival in Australia, her husband took her to Epping TAFE to learn English. Janit is a very social person and engages easily with people around her. As a young, rich and beautiful woman, she attracted the attention of many of her male classmates, and they competed to join her in class activities or over coffee at the school’s canteen. Janit wears a Hijab. However, she is not a religious person and has no issue mixing in public with men she does not know.

At the TAFE, Janit had a good network of Iraqi friends, and some of them were close friends. Unlike Janit, most of her “inner-circle” of friends were religious and often disapproved of Janit mixing and socialising with men. Her husband also indicated he was uncomfortable with this behaviour. When her friends learned of the women-only English classes in Broadmeadows, many of them joined these classes and left the TAFE course. Following her friends and her husband’s advice, and seeking to avoid any further criticism, Janit decided to leave the TAFE and join the women-only classes at the Broadmeadows Women’s House.

Najat

Najat also came to Australia on a spouse visa following her husband. Her husband left Najat and her children in Turkey and arrived in Australia by boat in 2012. After getting his permanent Visa, he applied for the family to re-unite in Australia and they obtained the spouse visa in 2014. Najat fled Iraq with her family because of the war. They chose to come to Australia looking for a safe haven for themselves and their children because of the good reputation Australia has in terms of treating refugees. Najat is a very busy mother and has lots of home duties. This affects her ability to attend day school to learn English.

Back in her country of origin, Iraq, Najat had a limited English education in the primary and secondary years. She never practised English outside her class in school, neither did she use it in her daily life in Iraq. During her primary and secondary schooling, Najat went to single-gendered schools only. She did not finish her secondary school due to poverty and left school at the age of 15. She spent the rest of her teenage years working with her mother and father in their farm in the countryside of Basrah city. At the age of 19 she married and shortly after that she became a mother.

Soon after her arrival in Australia, Najat started her free English classes at the Epping TAFE. Her class at the TAFE was mixed-gender and the students were from different cultural backgrounds including Afghani, Burmese, and Vietnamese. None of her classmates were speaking Arabic. Due to her limited English education, Najat has very poor English skills, especially in verbal communications. Because of that, as well as her unfamiliarity with a mixed-gender environment, Najat did not cope with the class and was too embarrassed to participate in the learning activities. She left the TAFE after one month and started looking for more women/children friendly classes. Now she is studying English in the women-only English program at Broadmeadows Women's House in Melbourne.

Fatima

Fatima came with her husband and four children to Australia in 2014. They applied to immigrate to Australia from Iraq because of the unsettled security and the economic situation. Her husband worked with the Australian training team in Iraq throughout 2007 and got a certificate from the Australian Minister of Defence. Because of this accreditation, he got his visa to Australia quickly.

Fatima has four children. Three of her children are attending an English language school in Noble Park (south-east of Melbourne), the fourth is going to the childcare centre near her language school. Fatima's English skills are not good because she did not have good English education in her country of birth, Iraq. Shortly after her arrival in Australia, Fatima started her free English entitlement at Noble Park AMES English School. Her husband was also going to the same school. Because of her heavy home and child responsibilities, Fatima could not cope with the full time study at the Noble Park AMES. She left the school after two months of study and joined the part time women-only classes in Dandenong, southeast of Melbourne.

Queen

Queen came with her husband on a humanitarian visa. They left Iraq for Jordan in 2011 because of the war and the unsettled situation in that country. They lived in Jordan for 3 years and in 2014 they got their visa to go into Australia. They applied to come to Australia from Jordan because Australia has a very good reputation in dealing with asylum seeking applications from Jordan. Queen arrived in Australia with her husband and two little girls. She could not join any English classes at that time because she was pregnant with her third child.

Queen is now learning English at home by herself with the help of her husband and children. She is waiting until the new baby comes and then she intends to go back to school again. She plans to join the women-only classes she has recently been told about at the Dandenong Neighbourhood House near where she lives.

Suad

Suad came to Australia as a refugee with her husband and her children in 2013. Due to the war, they fled Iraq in 2012 for Jordan and lived there for about 3 years. Soon after their arrival in Jordan, they applied for immigration to Australia. They decided to come to Australia because they heard that Australia was a very good country and that immigrants to Australia have lots of rights. So they came to Australia looking for safe and good life for their children.

Suad is a very busy mother. She has a big family (5 children and a husband) and is busy most of the time taking care of the children and undertaking home duties. She did not have time to study English formally at an institute. Suad did not study English in Iraq and has no English skills at all. Because of her heavy home duties, Suad could not go to the language school to study every day English. Now she has a volunteer tutor who is coming to her house to teach her some English. The tutor has now been working with her for about six months and is teaching her the basic English alphabet, and some English words and roles.

Hawra

Hawra came to Australia on a refugee visa with her husband and six children. Her husband worked as interpreter with the coalition forces in Iraq. They left Iraq for Jordan in 2010. From Jordan they applied to immigrate to Australia and were granted the protection visa for the whole family. According to them, the family chose Australia because the application process was easy in Jordan. They also chose this country because they heard that the life in Australia is better than many other immigrant-receiving countries. In Australia, she studied English at the Dandenong AMES for only one month, then she left because of her home responsibilities. Now she is having a volunteer tutor teach her English at home.

Hawra has six children, five boys and one daughter, all of them are going to school every day. She is also a very busy mother with heavy home and child responsibilities.

Afaf

Afaf has been in Australia now for three and a half years. She came to Australia as a refugee with her husband and children. She fled her country looking for a safe life and a good future for her family, and particularly their children. She rates her English as very poor because she did not have any formal English education in Iraq. She has six children, most of them are old enough to take care of themselves as well as other children. Four of her children (two girls and two boys) are teenagers and now studying English at the Berwick TAFE. The remaining two are boys and are at schools now, one at a secondary and the other at a primary level. Afaf does not see much need to learn English as her children and husband do everything for her in regard to English use in Australia. However, she joined the free English classes offered to her by the government soon after she arrived in Australia. She studied only for three months and then left the school due to sickness and loss of motivation.

4.7 Research methods

The current study uses more than one method to collect the data. It uses a closed-item questionnaire, in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion. A triangulation of the three methods is used to increase the reliability and validity of the research. The use of a variety of methods captures the different views of these immigrants' English learning journey in Australia that might not be reached by using one or two methods. Following Morgan's (1996) suggestion of combining methods, the study uses the questionnaire as the preliminary method and the individual interviews and the focus group discussion as a follow-up.

4.7.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are one of the most common methods of data collection in research methodology that have been used to collect data on attitudes and opinions from a large number of participants Mackey and Gass (2005). Questionnaires enable researchers to collect data on various topics or events that are in direct relation to participants' behavior in their social or educational world. It allows the participants to express their beliefs and opinions in a comfortable way as it offers them plenty of time to write their response. According to Mackey and Gass (2005) there are two types of questionnaire

items, closed and opened ended. Questionnaires with closed-item questions enable the researcher to specify the possible answers and easily quantify and analyse the data. Answers to closed-item questions are more reliable as they have greater similarity of measurement. Open-ended items, on the other hand, offer participants more freedom to express their own feelings and opinions in their own ways (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 93)

Using questionnaires in qualitative research has many advantages. It can draw data from a larger number of participants in a short time. It can also be administrated in many ways, for example; in person, by phone, via e-mail or through the mail. Questionnaires offer researchers greater flexibility in the data collection process, and they lead to in-depth understanding of the topic as well as useful evaluations of the specific situation (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 96).

On the other hand, there are also many disadvantages to using questionnaires in qualitative research. Kirk-Smith and McKenna (1998) argue that if the participants do not understand the questionnaires, they may not complete them properly. This may cause misinterpretation of the information that is drawn from these questionnaires. Further, responses to the questionnaire items depend to some extent on the nature of the questions being asked and the situation that is being asked about. Hence, the question of the validity of using a questionnaire method for a specific research problem may be raised. Another point of criticism is that the researcher's social, cultural and educational background might affect the analysis and interpreting of the questionnaire data.

The reason behind using a questionnaire with closed-item questions in the current study is to gain a clearer perspective on the IMIW's English learning experience. In addition to enabling the researcher to choose the focus group of the study, such a method provides the study with variable and rich data from the participants regarding their overall perspectives and attitudes towards English and its learning and use in Australia. Furthermore, the study uses a questionnaire that is translated into Arabic, the participant's first language. This is to help the participants express their opinions and attitudes in an easy and comfortable way as they feel more confident when they write their responses to the questions in their first language. This technique in turn helps the study to be more accurate and contain authentic data. Mackey and Gass (2005), in their

discussion about using questionnaires to collect data, assert that "whenever possible, questionnaires should be administrated in the learners' native language" (p. 96).

4.7.1.1 Questionnaire design

Items in this questionnaire were based on the Attitudes Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) developed by Gardner (1985- 2004). The questionnaire consisted of 17 items. Participants were asked to answer five point Likert-scale questions ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". The goals of the questionnaire were to explore the IMIW's: (1) attitudes towards English learning and use, (2) needs and desires to learn English, (3) experiences with the women-only English classes in Melbourne, and (4) to select the focus group for the study. Based on their answers to the questionnaire items, the eight participants were chosen to be the focus group of this study.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section "Attitudes Towards English" consisted of items 1-8 and investigates the respondents' attitudes towards English language and its learning in Australia. The section involved both positive items, for example "learning English is really great", and negative items such as "I hate English". Using twofold questions like this helps to provide an overall understanding of the respondents' attitudes towards English and its use in Australia. The second section "Integrative Orientation" consisted of items 9-13 and investigates respondents' motivations to learning English and being a part of its cultural group (the Australians). The last section (women-only programs) was represented by items 14-17 and examines the Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women's experience with the women-only programs in Melbourne, as well as their information about the provision of such classes in their areas of living. The questionnaire was designed in English and then translated into Arabic by a professional translator. The participants were given the Arabic version to answer, following Mackey and Gass (2005) suggestion in relation to the importance of using participants' L1.

4.7.2 Interviews

Minichiello, et al. (1995, p. 88) define the interview as “a means of gaining access to information of different kinds by asking questions in direct face-to-face interaction”. According to Minichiello et al. (1995, p.89), there are three primary types of useful interview methods: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Choosing between these forms in conducting a qualitative study is the task of the researcher, who can determine the appropriate technique to be used according to the research context. In qualitative research, people use interviews to find out things that cannot be observed (Patton, 2002). Patton furthermore adds that researchers cannot observe feelings, thoughts or even situations that “preclude the presence of an observer” (p. 341). Therefore, the interview tends to be a suitable tool in allowing researchers to interact freely with the interviewees to gain an in-depth understanding of their feelings, thoughts and perspectives.

Roulston (2010, p. 202) also states that using interviews in qualitative research will facilitate the interaction between the researcher and his participants, for example, “interviewers asked questions in effective ways to elicit the data required to respond to research questions, and both speakers adequately understood one another’s intended meanings”. The current study uses a semi-structured interview technique to examine the IMIW’s experiences with English learning (particularly in the women-only classes) and use in Australia and the factors that might influence this process. Using such a technique helps the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the research topic as it helps him/her to obtain adequate information from authentic resources, and in a comfortable and time-rich way.

Nevertheless, some researchers criticize the use of interviews in qualitative studies. Roulston (2010, p. 205), for example, states that during interviews, research participants might not tell the truth and may deliberately mislead the researcher. He further adds that the researcher’s subjectivity and beliefs may bias the data through the way questions are sequenced and formulated.

As discussed earlier, the present study employs a semi-structured interview technique with open-ended questions. This technique enables the researcher to interact with the research participants comfortably and without rushing. The interviews were also conducted in Arabic and by a female facilitator who is not known to the participants. This gave the participants the freedom to express their feelings, thoughts and perspective in their L1 and without any obligation/commitments towards the researcher.

4.7.2.1 Design of the interview

The aim of the interviews is to collect as much information as possible to provide complete answers to the research questions. The questions in the interviews were based on the participants' answers to the questionnaire questions. That is, for each single participant, questions were developed based on her answers to the questionnaire items in order to obtain more information about the topic. An example of this is the following: if a participant answers "Strongly Agree" to the item in the questionnaire which states, "Studying English is important because it will enhance my participation in daily activities in Australia," then the open-ended questions might be: "How do you think that English will enhance your participation in daily activities in Australia? Can you tell me more about this?"

In the interviews, questions asked were focusing on three major components, in combination with the research questions. The first set of questions investigates the IMIWs' experience with English and their attitudes towards learning and using this language. The second examines their Integrative Orientation towards English and its group (the Australians). The third examines their experiences with the women-only English classes in Melbourne and their views and perspectives regarding this initiative, as well as their information about the availability of such programs in their areas of living and whether they utilize them or not.

4.7.3 Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a research technique that collects data through an informal discussion among a group of selected individuals about a particular topic where “participants are encouraged to talk to each other instead of answering the moderators’ questions” (Liamputtong, 2011, p. 3.) This method involves the use of in-depth, group interviews in which participants are selected because they are a “purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population” (Lederman, 1990, p. 117). The FGD technique has many advantages, such as highlighting “respondents’ attitudes, priorities, and [their] framework of understanding” and exploring differences between participants in regard to the research topic, as they report their ideas and views in a direct and open situation (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 116). Furthermore, a FGD enables in-depth discussions as they are, involving a small number of people, which places the focus on a specific area of interest and allows the participants to discuss the topic in greater detail.

The participants of this study share similar cultural, ethnic, religious and – to some extent – educational backgrounds. This kind of discussion technique helps them share their views and perceptions with each other in a comfortable and safe environment. This comfort “weeds out false or extreme views” as the participants encourage each other to discuss topics in a very open and direct way (Flick, 2002, p. 169). Flick (2002) adds that the FGD technique provides a situation for discussion which is in a more natural environment than a specific interview situation, this allowing the topic to be received and grasped more easily.

This kind of data collection method is very suitable to the present study which seeks to explore different views and opinions on a real life phenomenon, the IMIW’s English learning in Australia. The researcher- participants and participant- participant interaction provides the research with very accurate and rich information regarding the participants’ English learning in Australia in general and the women-English classes in particular. Most importantly, the FGD technique offers the research participants a unique and “safe environment” to share their ideas, attitudes, as well as their experience

in English learning in Australia in the company of other women who most likely share a similar cultural background also.

Despite the advantages of using FGD in qualitative research, some researchers criticise this method. Ho (2006) for example explored the reliability and validity of the FGD as a qualitative research methodology in ESL research studies. She argues that since it is doubtful if all participants will be highly involved with the topic, not all the participants' viewpoints might be heard. She adds that the FGD may be unnatural because discussions are controlled to a large extent by the facilitator which may cause the research not to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' opinions or experiences" (p. 3).

In the current study, it was hard for me as a researcher to avoid these disadvantages due to, firstly, being an Iraqi male from the same community of the participants and, secondly, sharing the same religion and cultural background as the participants. In response to these valuable criticisms, I will summarise some of the strategies I followed to minimise any risk of invalidating the study:

1. The participants were given the freedom to interact with each other to share their views and experiences in a nonjudgmental way, while the discussion facilitator was instructed to be a good listener, as suggested by Ivanoff and Hultberg (2009)
2. A female researcher was used to facilitate the FGD. This was designed to give the participants more freedom, as well as a sense of safety, in discussing the issues regarding their experiences in learning and the use of English in Australia within a female-only environment.
3. The facilitator made remarkable efforts during the discussions to give each participant the chance to speak. This is in light of Liamputtong's (2007) argument that the FGD technique needs to be used to "give a voice to marginalised groups" (p. 7).

4.7.3.1 Organising and conducting the Focus Group Discussion

The FGD was conducted after finishing the interview sessions, which involved both administering the questionnaire as well as interviewing the participants. The questions that were discussed were driven from the participants answers to the questionnaire and interview questions. This sequence was used to give the participants more freedom to talk about the topic in detail. The FGD was conducted in Arabic and was facilitated by a professional female researcher who was very familiar with the aims as well as the context of the study.

The discussion further explored patterns and themes relating to the participants experience with English learning in Australia, and particularly access to women-only English classes. The discussion also explored how the English learning in Australia shaped (and is shaping) their social identities in their new country and how it is empowering them to be more active and engaged in Australian society.

The discussion facilitator was directed to be very flexible, objective, non-directive, patient, calm, reassuring, warm, and caring. This was in order to conduct the discussion in a very comfortable and safe environment to ensure more engagement from the participants. The interviewer also constantly encouraged each participant to take part in the discussion, and no single participant was allowed to dominate the discussion.

4.8 Triangulation

Triangulation means combining different methods of data collection in a study to explore different aspects of the researched topic. Triangulation also increases the reliability and validity of the research through the use of a variety of methods to collect data and to capture different views of the same phenomenon. In the current study, the use of three different methods helped the researcher to obtain more in-depth understanding of the issues affecting the participants' English learning journey in Australia. Triangulation also improves the quality of the study in terms of its accuracy, validity, and reliability.

Flick (2002) highlights that in qualitative research, and especially in education, triangulation is widely used as a means of linking different qualitative, or qualitative and quantitative methods. He states that qualitative research is very effective in the study of complex fields of investigation, especially in social contexts as the case with this current study. He states that, "... the special appeal of triangulation is that it makes it possible to go beyond the limitations of a single method by combining several methods and giving them equal relevance" (2002, p. 16). Hence, by using three different data collection methods, the research obtains richer and more varied data directly from the participants (the IMIW). This is important in providing a complete understanding of these women's experiences in regard to accessing the women-only classes in Australia.

Morgan (1996) suggests four ways of combining other data collection methods with or without FGDs. In the first combination, surveys are the primary method and focus groups serve in a preliminary capacity. In the second combination, focus groups are the primary method and surveys provide preliminary inputs that guide their application. The third combination once again uses surveys as the primary method, but the focus groups now act as a follow-up that assists in interpreting the survey results. The final combination uses focus groups as the primary method and surveys as a source of follow-up data. In this current study, the questionnaire is used as a preliminary inputs and the interviews and the FGD are used as the primary methods to interpret the data – "get[ting] closer to the data" (Ivanoff, 2006) – as well as to "uncover aspects of understanding" that might otherwise remain hidden in the questionnaire.

Creswell et al. (2007) present a very useful design of triangulation which they call the "concurrent triangulation design". In this design, the researcher uses different methods "in an attempt to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings within a single study". Using this method, the researcher uses separate quantitative and qualitative methods as a means to "offset" the weaknesses that might come from using one method, with the strengths of the other method. That is, the quantitative data collection and qualitative data collection are "concurrent", taking place during one phase of the research study

(Creswell, 2007, p. 183). This design usually integrates the results of the two methods during the interpretation stage.

Following Creswell's concurrent triangulation design, the current study combines both quantitative and qualitative data in one single phase. The quantitative data that were collected using the questionnaire were used as the basis for the follow-up qualitative data that were collected through using the individual interviews and the FGD. In other words, based on their answers to the questionnaire items, the participants, during the interviews and the FGD, were asked more questions about their views and opinions on the questionnaire topics and the reasons behind their perspectives.

4.9 Data collection

The study data was collected directly from the respondents over two stages. In the first stage, 100 copies of the questionnaire were administered to 100 Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women in Melbourne. Then, in the second stage, the individual interviews and the focus group discussion took place. Based on their questionnaire answers, eight women were chosen to make up the focus group of the study.

The questionnaire items were in Arabic and the participants were given the choice to write/not write their names on the questionnaire paper. The paper was distributed to these women on various occasions, specifically during religious and community meetings. Only those who showed interest in completing the questionnaire forms were given copies. This was done in order to ensure complete responses from the participants. As mentioned above, the questionnaire items were written in the Arabic language, direct and asked about three major issues: Attitudes Towards English, Integrative Orientation, and women-only classes. The participants were asked to tick one box per item in the five point Likert-scale questionnaires, where the answer options ranged from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". The 100 copies were returned to the researcher but some of them with no names or incomplete answers.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants in the Arabic language and on a one-to-one basis. That is, each participant was interviewed separately and tape-recorded for transcription purposes. For the first group of participants, the interviews were conducted at the place of their study. For the second group, public libraries in the residence localities of the participants were chosen for the interviews. The interview time was approximately 30 minutes and the questions were based on the participants' answers to the questionnaire items. That is, for each single participant, questions were developed based on her answers to the questionnaire items in order to obtain more information about her answers to each specific item on the questionnaire. An example of these questions: If a participant answered "Strongly Agree" to the item in the questionnaire, "Studying English is important because it will enhance my participation in daily activities in Australia", the open-ended questions might be: "How do you think that English is useful to enhance your social participation in Australia?" "Can you tell me more about this?"

After completing the interviews, all the participants were invited to a group discussion where they shared natural and rich information with a variety of opinions and views on English learning in Australia and the women-English classes, and the factors that affected each participant's decision to access or not to access these classes. This group discussion event offered the researcher the opportunity to interact directly with all participants to explore their views and perceptions about the English learning and use in Australia and particularly the women-only English classes available to immigrant women. The discussion was done at the library of one of the teaching institutions where the participants were learning their English. The place was carefully chosen to enable all participants to feel free and comfortable in sharing their ideas and opinions without feeling under pressure.

All participants were invited to attend the discussion but only six participants came. The other two did not turn up due to personal issues. Similar to what has been done in the interviews, the discussion was tape-recorded and the interviewer took notes and information about the session to be used in data reporting and analysing during later

stages. Interesting and important responses from each participant were also written down by the interviewer and were used to enhance and to “heat-up” the discussion.

4.10 Data analysis

Following Morgan’s (1996) suggestion of combining methods, the study used the survey as the preliminary method and the individual interviews and the FGD as a follow-up. The data were collected in two stages following Creswell et al.’s (2007) design of triangulation, the “concurrent triangulation design”. The questionnaire, interviews and the group discussion were all conducted in Arabic. The data from the questionnaire were translated into English, summarized, and tabled to identify the focus group for the study, as well as to get an overall idea about the IMIW’s attitudes and perspectives on English learning in Australia and the women-only classes. The data from the interviews and the group discussion were transcribed and translated into English. It was then coded and categorized, based on themes. The patterns and themes that were produced from the data were then analysed based on the *concurrent triangulation design* by referring to relevant literature and in accordance with the research questions.

Referring back to the research questions was very helpful as a starting point to identify the themes. Some of the themes also arose from the literature that was reviewed. However, rather than creating categories prior to the identification of themes, the researcher identified all themes within the collected data. In other words, all the themes were grounded from the data. For example, in developing themes in relation to the sociocultural factors that influence the access of the participants in the women-only classes, the themes that were developed (e.g. religious restrictions, home duties, support networks, etc.) were purely based on thorough analysis of the participants’ stories and personal experiences that they related during the focus group discussion or individual interviews.

Flick (2002) states that the inductive data analysis involves three phases; open coding where all themes are captured and categorised; axial coding where the categories are interconnected with each other; and selective coding where only

relevant and potential themes are selected for discussion. Selective coding, Flick (2002) adds, requires ample understanding of the issues by the researcher. Therefore, referring to the literature review constantly was essential.

Based on these three phases of data analysis, the researcher used the following process when developing the open, axial, and selective codes. All the interview transcripts and transcripts of the focus group discussion were first set up as separate word document files. He then started the open coding process by working on the hard copies of the data to allow patterns and themes to emerge. The researcher immersed himself in the data by repeatedly listening to the audio files and reading the questionnaire summary and the interview and the group discussion transcripts. Different coloured pens were used to highlight various emerging concepts and themes. The themes that emerged from the thorough analyse of the transcripts were used for matching and cross referencing to identify similarities and differences. The themes that were very similar or very different were highlighted and discussed in the research findings in accordance with the research questions and overall aims.

4.11 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Alhojailan (2012) further adds that thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis that is used to “analyse classifications and present themes that relate to the data” (p. 10) as well as illustrating them (data) in great detail using interpretation techniques. In qualitative research, thematic analysis is widely used as it is considered the most appropriate method for any study that aims to investigate using interpretations. Based on this, thematic analysis allows the researcher to relate an analysis of the frequency of a theme to the whole content of the data. This enhances the accuracy and intricacy of the data, as well as the understanding of the data. As qualitative research requires understanding and collecting different aspects and data, using thematic analysis in this study provides an opportunity to understand the potential of any issue more widely (Alhojailan, 2012, p. 10). In their discussing of the usefulness of using thematic analysis in qualitative research, Namey et al. (2008) state:

“Thematic analysis moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas. Codes developed for ideas or themes are then applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis, which may include comparing the relative frequencies of themes or topics within a data set, looking for code co-occurrence, or graphically displaying code relationships” (p.138).

In this study, using Thematic Analysis enables the researcher to link the various concepts and opinions of the participants and compare these with the data that has been gathered in different situations at different times during the project. All possibilities for interpretation are possible. The process of analysing data through using the thematic analysis approach was done through the following six phases: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

Methodologists argue that the thematic analysis approach is very useful in analysing data that are produced through interviews and focus groups. This is because the verbal data can be transcribed, and therefore enable this technique to successfully summarise key features of that set of data. Thematic analysis is also flexible and productive in data interpretation, the analysis of different data stages, coding and categorising. In fact, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that “one of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility” (p. 78). Thematic analysis offers flexibility for starting data analysis at any time during the project, where there is no association between the data gathered and the result of the process itself (Alhojailan, 2012). Some of the strengths associated with thematic analysis are: it is a tool to use across various methods, it is suitable even for novice qualitative researchers, and it provides a wide range of analytic options (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006)

Thematic analysis helped this researcher to study the data in depth and analyse and interpret the participants’ stories more accurately and successfully. In so doing, it

helped the researcher to read behind what the participants said in order to understand how they perceive their English learning in Australia and the women-only classes. Before interpreting the results, this researcher carefully examined the data to capture all the similarities, differences, and emergent themes. As the study aims to collect information to investigate the sociocultural variables that affect the IMIW's access to the women-only English classes in Australia, and to compare different views and perspectives, this approach was considered to be the most appropriate in analysing and reporting the data.

4.12 Positioning myself in relation to research reliability and validity

This current study extends my Masters' research and aims at providing more in-depth understanding of the issues influencing the Muslim women's English learning, and pointing to the best ways to optimize the available English programs to include more women learners. This study also took place in the Iraqi community in Melbourne city where I live and targeted the Immigrant Muslim Women who arrived in Australia within the last five years to explore their experiences with the women-only classes. In short, I have two roles in this study, the researcher and being a community member. My role as a researcher was to collect and analyse information from my participants. To do so, I obtained ethical approval from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC). As a community member, I tried to maintain a subjective relationship with participants and avoid any kind of bias and/or power relations.

Even though I am a part of the community I have researched, I have positioned myself as both an insider and an outsider, to provide a complete picture of these immigrant women's English learning. I started this study as a researcher from Monash University and aimed to do the research from the perspective of an objective observer. That is, I intended to do the research from an outsider's position without involving myself in the real-life situations of the problem and the research participants. This is an attempt to avoid any bias in collecting, categorising and analysing my data, in order to provide the study with findings that are of greater reliability and validity.

To enhance the validity and reliability of this research, I also made it clear to the participants that their participation is completely voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw from participation at any stage. The participants were also given the freedom to answer/not answer the questions that were directed to them during the interviews or focus group discussion. For example, if a participant felt embarrassed to answer a certain question, the researcher made it clear to her that she did not have to give her answer now, and that she can discuss it with the researcher confidentially at any time she wants. This is because some topics are sensitive and cultural and personal issues are highly respected by the research team.

Furthermore, the triangulation obtained by employing the three different methods of data collection increased the reliability and validity of the research by aiding in capturing the varying accounts of these immigrants' English learning journey in Australia. It also enhanced research credibility as the use of different methods helps offset any limitation that might occur through using only one method. Finally, the researcher gave the participants the right to check the transcripts of their answers in both the interviews and the focus group discussion. This was to offer them the opportunity to identify if there was anything missing, added to, or changed as a result of the transcription process.

4.13 Ethical issues

Despite getting ethical approval from Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC), using a female facilitator, and my endeavours to avoid potential ethical issues, there are some limitations in my research. First, the participants might not have given the facilitator honest responses, from fear of disagreeing with her, as she is from their Iraqi community group. The facilitator also might have inadvertently imposed her views or opinions on the participants during the interviews or the group discussion. Hence, the issue of power relationships between the facilitator and the research participants might come into play. Thus, questions as to the reliability of the research might be asked at the end of the project.

Second, I might have thoughts and perspectives about ESL in Australia that are similar to those of my participants', as I myself used to be a language learner in Australia. I also provided the translation for this study. Thus, the way in which I translated and interpreted the data might also be influenced by my experience with ELL in Australia. I might have brought into the research my personal conception as well as a biased view on Iraqis' English learning – with this view having been shaped by my own experiences. Third, only eight IMIWs were chosen to take part in the research discussions, and only six actually participated. This limited number might have limited the results of my research. Thus, generalizing the findings to cover all Muslim immigrant women or to cover a larger population of immigrants may not be appropriate in this case.

To minimize such potential ethical issues, the researcher and the facilitator tried hard to avoid any relation of power that might occur during the interviews. For instance, the facilitator interviewed each participant separately to avoid any obligation the participant might feel towards the facilitator as well as the Iraqi community, to which they both belong. The use of a female researcher (PhD student at Monash University) to facilitate the interviews and the group discussion gave the participants more comfort and freedom in discussing their own personal experiences. Finally, the researcher assured the participants that their real names would not be used in the research and that they are free to answer the questions as they like because they will retain their anonymity, and their status in the community will not be affected.

Chapter Five: Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women's attitudes and perspectives on English learning and use in Australia

5. Overview

This chapter presents the results obtained from both the questionnaire and the interviews in regard to the Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women's attitudes and perspectives on English learning and use in Australia. It also discusses this group's willingness to learn the English language in Australia as well as their readiness to search for and join the English classes when they were provided with that opportunity. The chapter deals with research question one: To what extent do the IMIW's value English and have commitments to improving or developing their English language skills in Australia? In what follows, results from the questionnaire and the interviews will be presented to provide a wider understanding of these immigrants' English learning experiences in Australia. The findings will be reported first with some supported quotes from the participants and then discussed based on the relevant literature.

5.1 IMIW's Attitudes towards English and its cultural group

The results of the questionnaire showed that the IMIW have very positive **attitudes towards English** and its use in Australia. It also revealed that this group of immigrants have integrated well into Australian society. Two variables that are associated with the IMIW's attitudes and perspectives towards English and its cultural group (the Australians) were measured in the questionnaire. These variables are the participants' Attitudes Towards English learning, and their Integrativeness towards the L2 target community. These variables were adopted from the AMTB developed by Gardner and his associates (Gardner, 1985). Key findings from the questionnaire are coded in Table. 3 below. For each variable, only the items where participants showed a high level of agreement or disagreement are reported and coded in the table.

Eight Likert-scale items ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" were used to measure the participants' attitudes toward learning English in Australia. Four items are positive and the remaining four are negative. 63% of the participants answered

"Agree" and 29 "Strongly Agree" to the statement that they enjoy learning English. Similarly, 74% of the participants answered "Disagree" and 13% answered "Strongly Disagree" to the statement that learning English is a waste of time (Table 3). These results explicitly show that the IMIW in Australia have positive attitudes towards English learning and do not think that it wastes their time.

Integrativeness was also reported as a remarkable variable in the questionnaire results. Five Likert-scale items ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" were used to measure the IMIW's integrativeness towards the L2 community (in Australia). The results revealed two statements about which the participants clearly expressed their opinions. That is, 72% of the participants answered "Agree" and 19% "Strongly Agree" to the statement that studying English will enhance their participation in daily activities in the Australia society. Likewise, 84% of them answered "Agree" and 13% ticked "Strongly Agree" to the statement that studying English is important because it will enable them to communicate with English speaking Australians. (Table 3). Examining these findings, the IMIW in Australia have a very high desire for "Identification" within the Australian community (Gardner, 2007, P. 15). This can be seen clearly in the table below.

Table. 3 Key findings from the questionnaire

Variable	MTBA measure	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Attitudes towards English	-I really enjoy learning English.	29	63	5	3	-
	-Learning English is a waste of time	-	1	12	74	13
Integrativeness	• Studying English is important because it will enhance my participation in daily activities in the Australia society	19	72	6	3	-
	• Studying English is important because it will enable me to communicate with English speaking Australians	84	13	3	-	-
Women-only English programs	• I have heard about the women-only English programs in Melbourne	-	17		83	-
	• I am currently enrolled in a women-only English class	-	12		88	-
	• I will enrol in these programs when they become available in my area	11	57	9	23	-

The interviews and the focus group discussion provide similar results. The data obtained from interviewing the IMIW revealed some factors that play an important role in their English learning and use in Australia. The need for **Successful Communication** in the Australian English speaking society was one of the most reported motives in the IMIW's learning of English in Australia. Most of the participants reported that they want to learn English to communicate successfully in the Australian community. Fatima (38, mother) for instance, reported that for the new immigrant to survive in the Australian community, she has to master at least the basic level of English. She quoted:

English is very important in our daily communications here in Australia. Whenever we go, for example ... appointments or even when we go shopping, we will need English to communicate with the people in these places to understand them and tell them what you want. (Fatima, interview)

Here, Fatima explains how important her English is in her “daily communications” in Australia. As discussed earlier, most Iraqi immigrants live within their own communities where they have easy access to services that use the Arabic language as a medium of communication, such as in medical clinics or supermarkets that are run by Arab people. However, the researched IMIW's showed great interest in mastering English not only to do their basic daily business, but also in order to be good communicators out in the broader Australian society. As Fatima clearly states, she needs the language “to communicate with the people in these places to understand them and tell them what you want”. Fatima tells here that she does not need English to go to buy food from the grocery or to talk to her doctor. In contrast, her need for English goes beyond that to include going shopping or attending different appointments by herself. This is a big dream for a new immigrant with very “poor” English skills in an English-speaking country.

Najat (34, mother) reported a similar view. (Najat has four children, all are going to schools.) She stated that, in addition to her need to use English to be a good communicator in the new community, she wants to master the language to be able to participate in activities such as parent-teacher meetings at her children's schools.

She reported:

Sometimes I attend teacher-parents meetings at my kid's schools. There I feel that I need to master English to understand what is going on in the meetings as well as to express to the teachers my concerns about my children's study. (Najat, interview.)

This is another example of the importance of English in these immigrants' daily life communications in Australia. It is generally acknowledged that parent-teacher meetings are very important for families to follow up their children's study. Despite her poor English skills, Najat used to go by herself to attend the meetings because her husband was busy at work. She used her very basic English to communicate with the teachers to ask questions about her children's progress. However, she explains in this quote that she wants to know as much English as possible to become a good communicator at these meetings. Furthermore, Najat's desire to be a good communicator in these meetings is not only linked to her asking questions about her children's progress. As she added in the interview, she would sometimes "use my children to interpret for me in these meetings". This, according to her, is "embarrassing" as she wants to be independent and does not want her children to do her work. She also does not want them to be "embarrassed" by seeing their mother unable to communicate with the teachers. She said:

Sometimes I use my children to interpret for me in these meetings. You know, this is very embarrassing because it is not good for the kids to see me unable to communicate with the teacher. It might embarrass them in front of their friends. I also do not feel comfortable using them to do the work for me. (Najat, interview.)

The data also revealed that keeping in touch with **friends/acquaintances** is another important factor which plays an important role in the IMIW's learning of English. As

discussed in the previous sections, these immigrants have positive attitudes towards Australian society and want to increase their social participation. Hence, English plays a major role in this as it is the lingua franca in this country and everyone speaks it in formal as well as informal activities. As well as this, some of the researched IMIW stated that they have English speaking friends/acquaintances and need English to communicate with and stay in touch with them.

Afaf (54, mother) for example reported:

Yeah, you right, English is very important in the society. For example, during my study I met some English speaking people. They do not speak Arabic, so I have to learn English to be able to keep in touch with them because it is the only language we can use to understand each other. (Afaf, group discussion.)

Afaf in this example provides another necessary reason for English in the immigrants' lives in Australia. Their need to stay in contact with their non-Arab friends cannot be maintained without learning and using the English language. Those English-speaking people might be teachers, school officers, colleagues, or shop-owners in their area. Regardless of the identity of the others, socialising with others in one's society is human nature. Hence – and to develop their English skills – these immigrants have a great desire to stay in contact with their acquaintances from non-Arabic backgrounds where they can both practise their new language and engage more in the Australian social life.

During the group discussion, Suad (56, mother) raised the need to stay in touch with the English speaking neighbours as being another very important issue in regard to the need for English in the immigrants' daily lives. Queen immediately agreed with her. Queen's family has recently moved to a new house where all the neighbours are English-speaking. According to Queen, one of her motives for learning the language is to be able to communicate with her neighbours. Queen is a mother of three children. The youngest one is just nine months old. Queen spends most of her time at home doing house-keeping work including working in the front and back yards. She communicates a lot with her neighbours during this time as she added:

You right Suad; I always need English to communicate with my neighbours. For example, when I work at my garden, I see my neighbours around, so we start chatting. It is funny how we communicate because I speak very little English, but we manage to understand each other. (Queen, group discussion.)

Understanding **Australian culture** is also another motive in the IMIW's need to learn English. Almost all the participants showed an explicit interest in the Australian culture. The findings from the interviews indicate that they make use of the English language to know more about the Australian culture and values. According to the participants, in addition to the information they get from direct interaction with English speaking Australians, their study of English includes learning Australian culture and values through the authentic materials the teachers use, as well as through the teachers' behaviours and explanations. Hawra (52, mother) for example reported:

We now live in Australia, I think it is important to know more about the Australian way of life so that we can behave well in the community. At the school, they teach us a lot about the Australian culture because some of the materials we study are derived from Australian culture. (Hawra, interview.)

It is noticeable, from examining this quote, that English learning in Australia involves learning about the Australian culture and way of life. According to the study participants, this is highly welcomed by them. As they stated/explained, the researched IMIW have a willingness to understand the Australians habits and customs in order to be able to behave appropriately in Australian society.

Almost all the participants agree that since they live in Australia, it is vital for them to know the Australian culture to live successfully in this new society. They also agree that English is the primary means by which they can know and understand the Australian values and traditions. Janit (21, wife), for instance, reported this clearly as follows:

As we live in Australia, it is very important to understand the behaviours of the Australian people in order to behave well in this new community. I think that we cannot do this without learning the English language because it is the language of those people, and to understand their culture we need to be able to speak their language. (Janit, interview.)

Janit, in this example, explains that she has a desire to know the Australian culture because she wants to integrate into Australian society and behave according to its norms and traditions. At the same time, she recognises that she “cannot do this without learning the English language” because, according to her, English is the spoken language of the Australians and to be able to “understand their culture we need to be able to speak their language”. Such examples clearly indicate that the researched IMIW have a strong "Integrativeness" towards English and its cultural group where they live (the Australians). Nevertheless, their integrativeness towards the Australians as well as their desire to integrate into the Australian society does not involve withdrawal from their own culture. Indeed, the researched IMIW showed a remarkable “hold up” for their Arabic/Islamic culture alongside their desire to integrate into the new society (this will be discussed in details later in this study). They felt they could manage a balance between these two cultures. That is, they could assert themselves as Muslims with special traditions and values and at the same time integrate successfully into Australian society and learn its language (English).

In addition to the noticeable integrativeness in the IMIW’s English learning in Australia, the data also showed some instrumentality in this group’s learning of this language. For example, some of the interviewed women stated that English competency is a critical need in **getting good jobs** in Australia. Janit (21, wife), for instance, provides a significant example in the importance of English in the IMIW’s employment in Australia. Janit is a young wife and has no children. She has a bachelor’s degree in accounting from Lebanon. Janit is a very social woman and loves to be engaged in community activities, further studies and work. She understands that English is critical in this aspect. She reported:

I would like to complete my study here in Australia and get a job but my English is not good. You know, here they employ only those who have Australian qualifications with ... good English because without good English, no one will hire you. I want to work in childcare service but need to get the Certificate 3 first which I plan to join when I finish my English classes. (Janit, interview.)

This quote clearly shows that Janit's need for English to get employment in Australia is critical. She is a university graduate and has no children and is very motivated to work in Australia, namely in childcare services. But her low English skills is a major obstacle in this aspect. Janit's English learning journey in Australia is not successful to a degree. She firstly joined the Epping TAFE for her 510 free hours of English entitlement but then left to join the women-only classes at the Broadmeadows Women House. In this example she thinks that it is very difficult for her to get a job in Australia without having at least basic English. She clearly refers to this issue by saying "without English, no one will hire you". Janit is a very enthusiastic person and works hard towards achieving her goals. She wants to get employment and settle in this country but her English is not helping her and that is why she plans to continue her education in Australia, so that she will be qualified to get the job she wants.

Even though some of the busy mothers that we interviewed have less motivation to enter workplaces due to their numerous home responsibilities, they showed a similar view to that of their peers on the necessity of English in getting good jobs. Najat, (34, mother), for instance, agrees that English is very important in finding a good job. During the group discussion, Najat stated that English is essential in getting a good job in Australia. She added that in addition to the importance of English in workplaces, it is also important in completing the application process and applying for the job. She reported:

I think that to apply for jobs here in Australia you need a good qualification and good English skills to complete the application

process and especially the interview, then the big challenge comes in workplace when you need a good English to survive the work. (Najat, interview.)

As mentioned above, Najat is a mother of four children, all are school aged. She does not intend to work in Australia now but is still seeking to have enough information about the job requirements in this country for future employment. She told the interviewer that she plans to work when her children become old enough to take care of themselves. This proves that the IMIW have long term goals in their settlement in Australia. In other words, they explicitly showed in their contributions in both the individual interviews and the group discussion that their learning of English is for them to settle successfully in Australia, and this includes finding a good job and participating effectively in Australian social life.

The need for English for possible **future studies** was also found to be influencing the IMIW's second language learning in Australia. It motivates them to learn more English to succeed in their future study, as it is the dominant language in all Australian teaching institutes and the golden key to success in these institutes. If we take Janit again, as an example, we see that she is a university graduate and has an ambition to complete her study in Australia and get a good job. In her interview Janit makes it clear that English is very important in her future study because it qualifies her to enter the university that she wants. She added that she needs more English to succeed in her study as well.

As I said before, I love to complete my study here. So, yeah ... I think only with a good English I can do that as well because most of the study course required specific levels of English to get entry to these courses. So you have to prove a good English to study the course you like. (Janit, interview.)

As mentioned earlier, many of the researched IMIW arrived in Australia with very little education in both their first and second language. However, this does not mean that they do not have the ambition to continue their education in Australia. It is well known that education in Australia is supported by the government. Hence, these immigrants feel

that this is a good time for them to continue their education and get good qualifications to help them become successful citizens in this new country. This can be seen clearly in Janit's quote, "As I said before, I love to complete my study here. So, yeah ... I think only with a good English I can do that". As was mentioned before, Janit is very motivated to learn English and has a significant desire to integrate with this language and its cultural group. Nevertheless, we can see some instrumentality in her learning now. This supports Gardner's (1985) contention that instrumental and integrative motivations are sometimes collaborate in motivating L2 learners towards learning the second language. (This will be discussed later in this chapter)

Some other participants also agreed that English plays a key role in their future study in Australia. Queen (31, mother), for example, showed similar instrumentality in her study of the English language. Queen is a high school graduate from Iraq. She could not continue her study back home, due to early marriage. Despite her numerous home responsibilities (as a mother of three children including a young babe) Queen dreams of completing her study and getting a good qualification in Australia. In her input during the group discussion, Queen reported that English will help the immigrants to be successful in their study by helping to enable them do their homework, presentations and other study activities successfully. She mentioned:

I have plans to continue my education in Australia. I think English is very important if we want to study at the Australian universities. It will help us pass the study successfully because it will help us do the presentations, homework, class activities ... etc. very successfully. (Queen, group discussion)

Despite the fact that these immigrants are so busy with their children and home duties, such quotes show that they are also motivated to engage more in the Australian social life and particularly for accessing employment and future study opportunities. These quotes show that their use of English goes beyond their basic daily needs to include more practical uses such as in employment and education. The next section will further discuss these immigrants' needs for English and their motivations towards learning and

using this language. It will also discuss how integrativeness and instrumentality are correlated together in motivating them towards more learning of this language.

The study findings reveal that the researched IMIW not only have integrative and instrumental motivation for learning the English language, but that they also have a significant willingness and/or readiness to grasp any available opportunity for learning the language. This comes from their need, as the majority of them stated, to be able to speak the language in the new society that they have arrived in. Next, I will discuss in more detail these immigrants' willingness to master the English language regardless of the challenges that they are facing in their new life in their new country, as well as their readiness to start studying in their very early days in Australia.

5.2 IMIW's willingness to learn English in Australia

The previous section discussed how the researched IMIW view English learning and use in Australia. The results showed that IMIW have a significant integrativeness towards the English language as well as to the Australian community. This leads us to the next inquiry in this chapter, which is their "willingness" to learn and use this language. Some of the research participants showed a remarkable willingness to master English regardless of the difficulties they might face in their English learning journey. Fatima (38, mother) for instance quoted:

"I live in Australia now and it is very important to know English because it is the only means by which we can communicate with those people [the English speaking Australians] and understand their values and traditions". (Fatima, interview.)

As explained earlier, Fatima is a very busy mother and has numerous home and family duties that make it very difficult for her to commit to the full time study of English. Despite that, Fatima is very persistent in her English learning. She has four children, all of them are under ten. One is going to kindergarten, two are going to primary schools and one is just one year old who keeps her very busy at home. Despite this (as well as other house and husband requirements), Fatima did not stop learning English. Soon after she arrived in Australia, she and her husband joined the AMES language school in

Noble Park. As new arrivals, the family did not have a car at that time. So they used to take the children to their schools by bus and then leave the young baby at the childcare service which is attached to the language school, and then go to their classes.

At the language school, Fatima, could not study for a full day. She was leaving early to pick up her young baby from childcare. It is a cultural norm that Muslim mothers do not leave young babies at the hands of childcare educators. This is due to the picture of the mother in Islam as the primary carer for the family. This picture might become tarnished if she left her responsibilities (taking care of her baby) to “strangers”.

However, because of her extreme need to learn English, she agreed to leave him at the childcare for a few hours a day only. Fatima was very keen to learn the language and was doing her homework as well as other activities regularly after finishing her house duties. When asked about the reason why she was so keen to learn English and why she sees learning English as so important to her, she explained even in more detail, as follows:

Yeah, as I explained to you, it is very important to learn the English here because you live in this country now and need English whenever you go to communicate with other people to understand what they say and express to them what you want. Even at my kids' schools, I need English to communicate with the teachers and ask about their progress and also help them with their homework. (Fatima, interview.)

From her quotes, Fatima explains that English is so important to the success of her daily life in Australia. She recognises that she is now in an English speaking country where English is the only language of communication in both formal and informal settings. Even though Fatima is not well-educated and her education in both first and second languages is at a low level, she insisted on learning English and committed to a “short-time” of daily learning. Her commitment to this learning is because, according to her, she needs English to communicate with her co-residents and school teachers “to

understand what they say and express to them what you want” as well as to be able to do her homework and help in guiding her children in their homework.

Fatima could not cope for a long time with her mainstream English classes because of her heavy family commitments. Her English study at the Noble Park AMES language school was for a few months only and then she left to start new part-time studies at the women-only program in Dandenong which is run by the Dandenong Neighbourhood House. As stated earlier, the reasons why she left her school at Noble Park in favour of the Dandenong women-only classes will be discussed in detail later in this research study. What is important to note now, however, is that despite the pain, the suffering, and the long and difficult travel needs, Fatima did not quit her English learning. This indicates her great willingness to learn the new language in her new country.

Najat (34, mother) gave similar views about the need to master English in Australia. During the focus group discussion, Najat reported interesting data about her need of English. She said:

Yeah ... English is very important here, especially for those who have kids at school. For example, my kids, they are always on computer and internet. I want to know what they are doing on the internet! Sometimes I try to read what they do but can't understand it. I ask them to do their homework instead, but, again they ask me to help which makes it hard for me because I don't have good English. (Najat, interview.)

Najat's need for English in this case is very critical. She needs the language to know what her children are doing on the internet and also for helping them do their homework. According to her, she cannot do these things without acquiring at least the basic English skills. Similar to Fatima, Najat could not cope with the mainstream English school because of her home duties as well as other cultural factors, and is now studying English at the Broadmeadows Women's House. She recently joined the women-only classes at this community centre and started learning English with immigrant women peers who are mostly from her cultural background. The classes are held on a two-days

a week basis which makes it easy for her to balance between home responsibilities with English study. Najat's need to learn English was not met by the mainstream classes. However, her great willingness to master this language was stronger than the difficulties she was facing in mainstream classes. She recognizes that without English she will not be able to help her children with their homework or monitor their internet use.

Indeed, Najat said more about her need to learn English apart from the need to monitor the children's internet access and help them with homework. She did mention the importance of English in her daily life for tasks such as communicating with the doctors at the clinics, teachers at the schools or shop owners when going outside for shopping. Nevertheless, her need of English with her children's schooling is of special importance to her because she wants to keep an eye on their education as well as their morals. With this in mind, it can be argued that Najat's willingness to learn and master English was similar to other members of her community in terms of their need of English in their daily life communications, as well as in regard to their children's schooling, and in other situations.

Apart from the variety of English language needs these immigrants have, they all agree that their daily life in Australia will be not successful without acquiring good skills in the English language. Whether to communicate with doctors or teachers, helping with their children's homework or monitoring their children's Internet access, these immigrants provide us with fruitful examples of the IMIW's needs towards English learning and use in Australia. Their need of English is remarkable to a degree that they have a higher willingness to join English learning classes regardless of the difficulties they might face. In what follows, more discussion on these immigrants' needs and desire for English learning and use will be presented, with reference to the current literature that examine the Muslim immigrants English learning in particular, and immigrants learning in general.

The significant willingness to learn English that these immigrant have was not the only motivator in their access to English classes in Australia. The results obtained from the participants showed that their willingness to learn English was supported by a unique

“readiness” to take any available opportunity to learn the language. If we take Fatima again as an example, she lives in Dandenong North, has no car and has a very young child. However she joined the English classes at the Noble Park AMES language centre shortly after her arrival in Australia. This shows how ready this woman was to take this English learning opportunity that was offered to her. After two months of continuous learning at that centre, Fatima moved to the women-only English classes in Dandenong due to certain social-related factors (which will be discussed later). Her going to the new classes was, again, not easy. She described it as follows:

I usually come by bus, I walk from my home to the bus station which is about ten minutes away from my home and then take the bus. I do the same thing on my way home. You know English is very important so I need to come to school to learn this language regardless of the place. (Fatima, interview.)

This unique commitment to English learning reveals how this Muslim woman was ready to learn the English language regardless of the difficulties she was facing. Despite the long distance of travel between her house and the English classes, Fatima was going every week by bus to attend the sessions. Her readiness to join the English classes comes from her significant need for this language as well as from her understanding that the English language is vital to her life in Australia, as she puts clearly, “I need to come to school to learn this language regardless of the place.”

Similar views were reported by Janit who was ready to join English classes anywhere in Melbourne to learn English. As she stated in the interview, she came to Australia with little English skill and was very keen to improve her language as soon as she could. She reported that when her husband told her that she could study English for free at the Epping TAFE, she immediately registered her name and started using her free English entitlement.

She cited:

Soon after I arrived in Australia, I asked about English learning and my husband told me that I can learn English for 510 hours for free at the Epping TAFE, which was about 10KM away from my home. I immediately told him to register my name because I was so keen to learn the language as soon as possible to be able to communicate outside in the society. (Janit, interview.)

In this quote, Janit was ready to start English learning “as soon as possible” after her arrival in Australia. In her early days in Australia, she asked about English classes in the area and was told by her husband about the free English classes at the TAFE institute in her suburb. Even though, the TAFE institute was away from her and she was not having a car at that time, she registered herself “immediately” and started using her free hours. This is unique if we take in consideration how difficult it is for immigrants to cope with school in the very first days in their new country. However, Janit was very brave to take this step and joined the classes shortly after her husband told her about it. As she stated, she was “very keen to learn the language as soon as possible” because she recognizes the need to learn this language to “communicate outside in the society”.

The same participant, Janit, started then to have problems in her study at the TAFE school. However, she did not leave her classes and continued until she knew about the women-only classes in Broadmeadows which she joined later (as mentioned earlier). Janit was ready to travel from Epping where she is living, to Broadmeadows to continue her English learning. Now she is studying English at the BWH and comes to school by bus two days a week to learn. This, also, shows a unique readiness to commit to English learning despite the difficulties this immigrant is facing in her English learning in Australia.

I then moved to the Broadmeadows Women[s] House to join the women-only classes there. Broadmeadows is far from my home but I go there two days a week to attend the classes. I love the

women-only classes because they are more comfortable and some of my close friends are studying there. (Janit, interview.)

Despite the long distance between her house and the Broadmeadows learning centre, Janit was travelling everyday by bus to attend her classes. This is very interesting and shows how determined this woman was. According to her, she loves English learning and loves going to school for many reasons, most importantly it is because she wants to improve her language skills to be able to find jobs and communicate successfully in Australia. Janit also looks at the classes as a “more comfortable” place where she can meet up with friends and spend good times with them because, as she reported, “some of my close friends are studying there”

Another participant, Afaf (52, mother) showed similar determination to attend English classes regardless of any possible difficulties. Afaf is a middle-aged woman and has many home duties as well as some health issues. Despite that, Afaf studied English for more than three months at the Berwick TAFE in her early days in Australia. As in the case of Fatima and Janit, Afaf did not have a car at that time, so she used to take the bus to her school. She documented:

Yeah, I studied English for three months at the Berwick TAFE. The classes starting at 9am every day but I couldn't be at school on time. I had to prepare the lunch boxes for the kids and wait them until they leave then I can go. I used to go by bus because I did not have a car. I enjoyed my classes because I learnt a lot there but then couldn't continue because of my sickness and now have a volunteer tutor who comes to my home once a day to teach me English. (Afaf, interview.)

Afaf was studying English full time at the TAFE. Every day she used to get up early to help her children go to school, then, she takes the bus to her own classes. According to Afaf, she was enjoying going to the school every day because it helped her acquire

more English and practise it with her peers. Afaf could not commit to everyday schooling due to her illness. However, she did not leave English study and was ready to take any other option to learn the language. The TAFE school then offered her the volunteer tutoring service if she was willing to continue study. Indeed, the volunteer tutor was a good opportunity for her to continue learning English and she accepted the offer with no hesitation. Now Afaf has a “volunteer tutor who comes to my home once a day to teach me English”.

Afaf has a good support network at home. She has her husband who speaks English better than her. She also has her seven children who are now all going to school and who have acquired good English skills from their studying. However, Afaf did not rely on them for her English communication. The researcher asked her about this point in the interview. The following short conversation happened between the researcher and Afaf :

***Researcher:** So you go every day to the language school by bus!
What motivates you to do that? You could just use your husband or children to interpret for you when you need?*

***Afaf:** It is not only the need to understand what the other's say.
Many times I go by myself to the shopping centre, or sometimes to the doctor's appointment. I can't just wait for my husband or one of the children to be free to accompany me.*

***Researcher:** you mean you prefer to do things by yourself?*

***Afaf:** Yes, I love to learn new things and be more independent, I do not like to lean on the others to do my stuff, even if they are members of my family.*

From this short conversation, we can understand that Afaf (and many other IMIW) does not want to be dependent on others for her English communications needs. This might explain her significant willingness to learn English as well as her readiness to join any

English learning opportunities offered to her. Her desire to be “more independent” in her life pushes her to learn more English despite the obstacles she was facing in her learning. According to her, she does not want to “lean on the others to do my stuff, even if they are members of my family” or to “wait for my husband or one of the children to be free to go with me”. This is interesting as it shows how this woman is determined to learn English. Her “desire” to be a successful communicator in this new society, which she explicitly stated in her comments, made her take the first learning opportunity that was offered to her at the TAFE centre and then the second one – “the volunteer tutor service”.

5.3 Discussion

As can be seen, data from both the questionnaire and the interviews revealed that most of the researched IMIWs have positive attitudes towards English and its speakers. This includes all the researched participating women, regardless of their age or whether they were enrolled or not at the women-only classes. Many social attributes contribute to sustaining the IMIWs’ positive attitudes towards English and its users in Australia, and integrativeness towards English and its cultural group has been identified as a remarkable motivation in IMIWs’ English learning. The data from this study shows that most of the participants learn English because of integrative motivators such as communicating successfully in the Australian community, wanting to get more Australian English speaking friends, and knowing more about Australian culture. These findings are consistent with Gardner’s (1985) notion of integrativeness or "Openness to Cultural Identification", as he has lately re-named it (Gardner, 2007, p. 15). Gardner (2001a) argues that integrative motivation plays a determining role in mastering a L2 in a L2 setting where the learners have direct contact with the target language group. This can be seen clearly in the findings of this study.

However, is it only integrativeness that motivates the IMIW to learn and use English in Australia? The findings also show some instrumentality in their English learning. That is, factors such as getting a good job and future study were also reported as strong motivators in the participants’ learning of English. Even though Gardner (2001a) made

a clear distinction between Integrative and Instrumental motivation in his theory, he later acknowledged that each of these influences the other in a two-way process (Gardner et al., 2004). The data from this study supports the contention that both integrative and instrumental motivators are powerful predictors of the IMIW's achievements in English learning. The findings are also consistent with Dornyei (2010) and Lamb's (2004) contention that Integrative and Instrumental motivations can hardly be separated.

The findings from this study revealed that social factors, e.g. successful communicating, making friends, knowing Australian culture, getting good jobs, and future study, are highly correlated and have an interrelated effect in the IMIW's learning of English in Australia. This also offers strong support to Vygotsky's contention that social setting plays an important role in the immigrant's L2 learning and use. Almost all the participant IMIW have strong desires to integrate within the Australian community for many socially related reasons, as mentioned by the participants. As discussed earlier, some of the participants are well-educated, for example one of them is a university graduate, another is a high school graduate. This might explain the instrumentality they have in their English learning

Examples of this integrativeness-instrumentality correlation are: "As we live in Australia, it is very important to understand the behaviours of the Australian people" (Janit – clearly an integrative motivation). The same participant then reported an instrumental orientation, "I plan to improve my English skills as [soon] possible [so] I can ... get a good job here in this country" (Janit, clearly an instrumental motivation). Another participant (Queen) also reported "I always need English to communicate with my neighbours." The same participant – on the other hand – showed clear instrumentality in her answers to utility-oriented questions. For example, "You right, I have plans to continue my education in Australia, I think English is very important if we want to study at the Australian universities" (Queen).

As Norton (1995) points out, another consideration is the effect the host community has on L2 learners in countries where the host community is the one which owns the target language, as in the case in English speaking countries such as Australia. Gardner argues

that learning L2 involves “identification” into the target group (2007, p. 11). However, if the target group rejects this identification, there will not be successful L2 learning. This is because of the negative attitudes that L2 learners might feel are being directed towards them by the target community. This perception decreases learners’ motivations towards learning the target language. In contrast, if the target group welcomes this identification, the L2 learning will be facilitated, as the learners will have positive attitudes towards the target language and its group, which in turn will motivate them to more learning.

Indeed, the data obtained from the researched IMIW shows that Australian society is very helpful and welcoming to the immigrants, especially in regard to English learning and use. As we noticed from these immigrants’ quotes, their neighbours, English-speaking friends as well as the shop-owners, all supported them in their practising of English. This is interesting if we take into account the low level of English these immigrants have and the very broken English that they speak. The English-speaking Australians showed remarkable ability to understand these immigrants language needs and satisfy them by simple and easy communication with them, to enable them improve their communication skills. Norton (2013) states that immigrants usually use the new language to assert themselves as “legitimate” speakers in the new society. Therefore it could be argued here that these immigrants use of English is to prove themselves as successful residents in the Australian society. The achievement of this goal is something that English-speaking Australians, whatever their cultural background, proved to be supportive of.

In fact, successful integration for these immigrants’ with their remarkable attitudes towards English and its cultural group, as well as their readiness to study the language even in their early days in Australia, did not happen without the encouragement and support of the wider Australian society. As Gardner (1995), Norton (2013) and Vygotsky (1991) noticed, the role of social interaction with other (English speaking) individuals in the target society is vital in L2 learning. In addition to that, these immigrants cognitive needs to be “legitimate” speakers (Norton, 1995) in this new society was also a big motivator in their endeavours to master this new language. More

discussion on these immigrants work to position themselves, as well as the others, in Australian society through the use of the English language, as well as the role of the social interactions in this process, will be presented in Chapter Eight of this study.

Chapter Six: Sociocultural Factors affecting the access of Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women to women-only classes

6. Overview

This chapter discusses the sociocultural factors that were found to be affecting the access of IMIW to the women-only English classes. This relates to the second research question: What sociocultural factors influence IMIWs' access to the women-only English language literacy programs. Four sociocultural variables that have emerged from analysing the data as factors which strongly influence the IMIW's access to women-only English classes. These variables are:

- Family and home commitments
- Support networks
- Availability of information
- Provision of classes
- Maturity and literacy

Even though the focus of the study is on women-only classes, in this chapter I discuss each variable's role in both mainstream and women-only English classes. The reason for this is to examine the different influences of each variable in both settings, based on the assumption that most of the variables operate differently from one setting to another. In examining the different influences of each variable, a more complete picture of the IMIW's experience in both mainstream and women-only settings is presented.

6.1 Family and home commitments

6.1.1 Mainstream classes

Family and home commitments have been widely considered as a major obstacle to Muslim women accessing English language classes in Australia, as well as worldwide (Bao, Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2012; Brown, 2006; Mansouri & Wood, 2008; Mc Cue, 2008). Interview data points to the fact that some of the participants of this study stated

that they could not attend or complete free English classes offered to them because of their home and family responsibilities. Hawra (52, mother) for example, stated that she was extremely busy taking care of her children as well as undertaking other home duties. When she was asked about the reason she could not attend the free English classes, she answered:

I have seven children; all of them are going to schools every day. You know... I have to wake up early and make breakfast for them as well as prepare their lunch boxes, and then I have to cook, clean and do other home duties. My husband goes to work every day as well, so I have to do shopping sometimes. I did not have time to go every day to school. Thank God they have home tutoring service that I used and now [I] have a volunteer tutor coming once a week to teach me English. (Hawra, interview.)

As she highlights in her comment, Hawra did not "have time to go every day to school." She has seven children that are all "going to school every day". Her husband also "goes to work every day". She studied English at the Dandenong AMES for about two months on a part time basis. However, she could not continue because of her numerous home and child duties. Being so busy with her children as well as her home duties, Hawra preferred to have the volunteer tutor at home instead of going "every day" to school.

As shown by Aneta et al. (2001) immigrant women have fewer opportunities to attend English classes (p. 25). Pavlenko and Pillar in their research (2001) argued that this is typical in multicultural communities where men usually have "privileged access" to learning (p. 24). In this case of IMIW, these women have instrumental motivation (the need to learn) English, while the men have both instrumental and integrative motivation, because they have both the need and the desire, because of less restrictions on the feasibility of them attending English classes. Home duties were obviously a significant factor in Hawra's life. Having seven children would drain any mother. In Iraq, there may have been family support which is not available in her new country, Australia.

Yet it is not just support that may be needed to allow Hawra the time to attend English classes. It is culture-sensitive support that is needed. The difficulties Hawra has faced are hard to overcome, but they are worsened by the fact that she needs to learn English, she needs to learn the language of her new country. Likewise, Fatima (38, mother) stated in her interview that one of the main reasons why she could not attend her “510 free English classes” was that:

"You know ... I'm too busy with my baby as well as with the other kids ... you know they go to school every day ... I'm too busy and do not have enough time to go to school. (Fatima, interview.)"

Fatima is married and has four children. She has been in Australia for only one year. She has a very young baby (9 months old), one kindergarten child and two school-aged children. Her husband is also going to school every day. Similar to Hawra, Fatima is "too busy" with her little child as well as other household chores. This makes it too difficult to utilize her 510 hours of free English entitlement. In Iraqi culture, women do not leave their babies in the hands of other women such as childcare educators or babysitters. It is a cultural norm that the mother is the best person to take care of the baby and to leave the child in the hands of others is considered as carelessness.

In a way it may be fair to say that Iraqi Muslim women living in Australia are displaced from a culturally sensitive environment, to one that is less sensitive. In their attempts to assimilate into Australian society they have cultural differences to face, the struggle of fitting in while maintaining their beliefs and their own culture, and the need to find both the time and the circumstances to learn English. In the face of this, Fatima preferred to stay home taking care of her young baby, cook and do other home duties. Her husband used to do everything for her such as shopping, driving the children to school and managing other family issues. He also used to interpret for her when they attended medical and other appointments.

Fatima recognizes the need for English in her settlement and social life in Australia. So she and (her husband) started looking for classes that were suitable for her to join. She added:

Even though my husband was doing everything for me including interpreting when we go outside, I needed to speak English very desperately because, you know, English is crucial here in Australia. We looked for months for classes that are flexible in time and near my house so I can join. (Fatima, interview.)

The data from this quote indicate that Fatima was looking for English classes that were “flexible in time” and nearby because she was otherwise unable to commit to everyday classes. Five months after their arrival in Australia, her husband knew about the women-only classes at the Dandenong Neighbourhood House in Dandenong where they live. Fatima is now studying English at this centre two days a week. Fatima found women-only classes which are culturally acceptable, as well as the situation where the time and the location of these classes were suitable. Her experience with women-only classes at the Dandenong Neighbourhood House, and further factors that motivated her to join the course, will be discussed in this next section.

Queen (31, mother) has a similar story to that of Fatima. Queen arrived in Australia seven months before this research began. She is now pregnant and has two school-aged girls. She lives with her family in the suburb of Hallam (10 km south-east of Dandenong). As new arrivals, Queen's family do not have a car. Her husband registered himself at the AMES language school at Dandenong which he attends by bus. Their children also are registered at a nearby local school where their father takes them before going to his school. Feeling so tired from pregnancy as well as busy with her home and family duties, Queen does not go with her husband to the language school. She is waiting until after her baby is born, then she will start her English studies.

However, having a young baby is problematic for Queen as she cannot leave him/her at the child care centre or with a babysitter because of her cultural beliefs, as discussed above. Queen is now staying home and learning English from her husband as well as her children.

I want to learn English, but I cannot go to language school now. I am sick and tired most of the time because of my pregnancy. I am also busy with my children and home. I sometimes ask my husband and children to teach me some English words so I can use [them] when I go out by myself. I heard from my friend Fatima about the women-only classes at the Dandenong Neighbourhood House but [I am] waiting until I give birth and then [I] will join them. (Queen, interview.)

Queen knew about the women-only classes in Dandenong. However, she is still unable to join them because of her pregnancy. She recognizes the need to learn English and wants to learn it as soon as possible, and that is why she always asks her husband and children to teach her the important and most usable words for communicating in the Australian society when she is out by herself.

Queen's situation highlights the difficulties immigrants encounter when settling in a new land. What she highlights having to deal with are not only issues similar to those confronted by Hawra and Fatima, but she also details transport issues, a problem many poorly resourced immigrants must face.

6.1.2 Women-only classes

In the previous section, I talked about the difficulties Fatima had in her English learning due to her heavy family responsibilities. It was a few months after their arrival in Australia that her husband found out (from a friend) that the Dandenong Neighbourhood House was offering free English classes for immigrant women at a local school in Dandenong. When she was told about these classes by her husband, Fatima was very happy and joined them immediately.

She emphasised:

When my husband told me about the women-only classes at the Dandenong Neighbourhood House, I was very keen to register my name. You know English is very important here in this country, and with my situation it is tough for me to attend formal classes at the AMES. (Fatima, interview.)

It is worth mentioning that the women-only classes taught by the Dandenong Neighbourhood House are held two days a week at a local school in the Dandenong area where Fatima and her family live. As Fatima says in her comment, she was very happy to know about such classes and "keen" to attend them.

Being able to attend such classes is a relief for Iraqi Muslim women such as Fatima, and perhaps for other Muslim women and women from all backgrounds. This research is only concerned with Iraqi Muslim women but further research may uncover a need to look more deeply at various migrant groups in Australia. Australia is a multi-cultural nation, always adjusting to and changing with the needs of migrants. The subjects of this research such as Fatima are first-hand examples of migrants adjusting to a new society. They live out the difficulties that may be unknown to older Australians, and Fatima's excitement at finding culturally suitable English classes is an example of a breakthrough in these difficulties.

The women-only English classes for Muslim women helps overcome one of their biggest problems, which is being able to study English so that they are enabled to settle within their new country where English needs to be known by everyone. Like Fatima, Queen was also very keen to join these classes after she gives birth.

She reported:

I heard from my friend Fatima about the women-only classes at the Dandenong Neighbourhood House, but I am waiting until I give birth and then [I] will join them. I also knew from her that they have a childcare service in the centre, which is very good

as there will be someone to take care of my child while I am studying. (Queen, interview.)

It can be seen clearly from Queen's quote that she likes the women-only classes at the DNH (Dandenong Neighbourhood House) and wishes to join them as soon as possible, but is unable to do so due to her pregnancy. Queen considers these classes as a "good opportunity" that she will take when the suitable time comes (after the birth of her baby in her situation). According to her, the light study load (two days a week), as well as the availability of childcare services, are the main reasons why she thinks this kind of class is very suitable to her.

In fact, the availability of childcare services is very important to Queen. As discussed above, leaving a new born baby at the childcare centre for long periods is very uncommon in Muslim culture in general and Iraqi culture in particular. So, when the DNH offers such a service inside the centre, it provides Queen with a "magic" solution to her problem, with the short periods of study and the near distance between the DNH and Queens' house assisting her to study while still being able to carry on with her family duties.

Suad (56, mother) also views the women-only classes as a good opportunity to study and do home responsibilities at the same time. Suad currently has a home tutor to teach her English. She is a mother of five children and lives in Dandenong. Two of her children are going to TAFE, one is going to a high school, and two are going to a primary school. Although most of her children are older and can take care of themselves to some extent, she is always busy with home duties. She preferred to have a home tutor because she does not like to commit to everyday schooling at her age and with these home duties. Up to the time when she was asked to take part in the study, Suad was not aware of the availability of women-only classes in her area.

She only heard about them from this researcher when she was first told about the nature of the project. During the group discussion, Suad pointed out:

I think is a good thing ... only two days a week and in Dandenong, yeah ... it is really a good thing, I think we can go there and still be able to take care of our kids and house. (Suad, group discussion.)

However, although Suad now knows about the women-only classes in her area, she does not show any desire to attend the classes at this current time. She continued:

But I think I will not attend them [the women-only classes] now. I am happy with my home tutor, she teaches me most of the important words that I need to communicate outside ... but maybe in the future, who knows. (Suad, group discussion.)

Suad is clearly not motivated to learn English in a mainstream English school at this stage. Her age, children, home duties, as well as her unwillingness to commit to everyday schooling, has helped her decide to remain with her home tutor. She is settled with her tutor now, but if she did not already have a tutor she may have been just as excited and as ready as some of the other women to take up a place in one of the women-only English classes. However, although Suad is not willing to attend the women-only classes “now”, she still views them as a “good thing” because they provide her with good possible solutions to the issues that affect her participation in the mainstream classes.

6.1.3 Discussion

As discussed earlier, most of the participants of this study are mothers with children; some of them had newborn or very young babies. This means that these women have lots of home duties including taking care of children, cleaning and cooking. Despite their great need to learn English, many of them chose to leave or postpone their English classes in favour of staying home and taking care of children and attending to home duties. Some of them were very passionate to learn the language and asked for a home tutor to teach them English at home. However, home tutoring is a very basic form of

study and teaches only the minimum skills of the language. This is because a session with a home tutor usually takes place only once a week for only one or two hours, and at the learner's house where the learner is usually busy with her children, or other household tasks, and is not able to pay much attention to the teacher.

The findings of this study are similar to those of many studies that examine the effect of family and children on Muslim Immigrant Women's English learning in Australia in general, and on the Iraqis in particular (e.g. Macrae, 2002; McCue, 2008; Vanessa et al. 2009). For example, Vanessa et al. (2009) contend that the availability of childcare services is an essential element in the Iraqi immigrant women's English learning in Australia. In a study examining settlement issues of Iraqis in Victoria, Vanessa et al. reported that many Iraqi immigrant women could not attend their English classes because of their home duties including taking care of children. The findings from this study also supports research by McCue (2008) which found that family commitments, as well as raising children, caused many Iraqi immigrant women to be "not accessing their approved quota of free ESL classes" (p. 33.)

Almost all the studies that have examined the influence of family commitments on Muslim women's English learning were focusing on mainstream classes. The current study presents significant findings as to the role which women-only classes play in motivating the Iraqi Muslim women's English learning. On the one hand, this group of immigrant women has apparent difficulty in utilizing its free (mainstream) English entitlement due to family commitments. On the other hand, the women-only classes offer many motivators to attract the Muslim women to the English classes. It is a difficult decision for many of the IMIW. It certainly appears, though, that the option of women-only English classes needs to be an option made readily available to the women. Examining these women's stories, it can be argued that the childcare services,

as well as the flexibility in time and location that the women-only programs offer, are fundamental factors in motivating these women to learn the English language. These services provide them with a "golden opportunity" to study and undertake their home responsibilities at the same time.

In Islam, the family is the core unit and each member has specific roles and responsibilities within this unit. The mother's primary role, for example, is motherhood, while the husband's role is to secure the family income and provide for the family's necessary needs. In Australia, Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women (as well as Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Men) continue to follow the same tradition and focus on raising children and household issues. This is the same in many and maybe all cultures. However, while men are given the priority in learning English because of work needs, women can be left behind. In a culturally sensitive environment – it can be almost impossible for women to carry out their roles with their children and in the home, as well as finding the time and acceptable circumstances for them to learn English.

With all this in mind, and their remarkable determination to attend English classes (whether mainstream full-time classes or part-time women-only classes) these women's approach to their obstacles is very interesting. The sociocultural perspective on second language learning presents a good understanding of this. Vygotsky (1991) argues that learning L2 restructures the social behaviours of the learners and shapes their relationship with the world around them. This might explain these women's perceived need to "strive" to use English in Australia. Again, on the one hand they are aware that they have too many challenges in their L2 learning, such as conflict with their commitment towards their homes and families.

On the other hand, they are determined to use all the available resources (solutions) to handle the situation, including re-structuring their lifestyle, social and family relations, and their family responsibilities, in order to thrive in their new environment. The findings from this study show that the researched IMIW have very positive attitudes towards the English language and its cultural group (the Australians) and that they utilise every available opportunity to use this language in the outer Australian society. In light of Vygotsky's contention, these women are "re-constructing" their social behaviours and adapting to a new way of life that engages them more in Australian society despite their daily home responsibilities. Their relationships with their families as well as with their social networks are also re-constructed. Even though their

attendance at the English classes (the women-only classes in this case) is very minimal (usually one or two days a week), it impacts on their family lives. This short time of study at the English school affects the daily routine of their families. The husbands are now required to “cover” these women’s absence and do some of their home duties. In the Iraqi Muslim culture, such behaviour rarely happens as the mothers bear the sole responsibility for the housekeeping. But now the situation is different. This restructuring in these Muslim families is because of their learning of the new language which strongly supports the above-mentioned sociocultural argument of individuals’ L2 learning. It also comes in line with Rogoff’s (1995) argument that learning a new language affects the learners’ interpersonal relationships with the people around them.

6.2 Support network

6.2.1 Mainstream classes

As a very cohesive group, Iraqi Muslim Immigrants in Melbourne, especially women, have strong social relationships. According to the study findings, the support networks of the interviewed women play an important role in their access to both mainstream and women-only English classes. There are many ways in which social networks affect this group's English learning. In mainstream English classes, the support networks of the IMIW act as a discouraging factor in their access to English classes. First of all, their socialization and communication are always within their Iraqi group and in the Arabic language which makes them use less English in external domains, and therefore reduces their need to learn English.

Hence, when it comes to everyday language study, especially when the school is not near or when the class is mixed-gender, they start problematizing their need to learn much English, as Suad explained:

I have lots of Iraqi women friends in Dandenong. We always meet and go shopping together. I spend most of the time with my friends or at home with my family ... We speak Arabic of course ... Sometimes I feel no need to learn much English, the basic things are enough for me. (Suad, interview.)

Suad feels she has a good network of friends. She spends a lot of time with friends, even when she goes shopping. According to her, she feels “no need to learn much English” as her communication with the English speaking community is very limited. She believes that the “basic things” of the English language are enough for her. (The basic things she refers to here are the minimum English skills that she can get from learning the language). The consequences of these views are explicitly seen in Suad’s English learning in her new country. She did not go to regular English classes and, instead, preferred to have a home tutor to teach her English. She perceives mastering English as unnecessary considering she can do her daily needs with minimal English skills acquired from her volunteer tutor.

Afaf (54, mother) reported similar findings when she talked about the role of her social networks in her English learning. She said:

I don't think I need to master English. I spend most of my time at home. I have many relatives and friends who come to visit me from time to time. We speak Arabic at home, and all my friends are Iraqis, so we speak Arabic as well. When I go shopping or to the doctor, usually my husband goes with me, and if he is not available, I take one of my children to interpret for me. (Afaf, interview.)

From reading Afaf’s quote, we can understand that her lack of need for English comes, mostly, from her large and extended social network. She has children, a husband and many friends from her national background. All of these people are from an Arabic background and speak Arabic with her. Even when she goes outside there is always someone beside her to interpret. This has significantly affected her need to master English, and caused her to quit classes after three months of joining. It should be noted that, as explained, other factors such as illness and age contributed to Afaf leaving her classes. Ironically, with the support she has there is perhaps more opportunity for her to learn English, but less perceived need. Thus it takes on a lesser priority.

6.2.2 Women-only classes

In women-only classes the story is different. Most of the interviewed women indicated that their support networks encouraged their access to such classes. The nature of the classes as women-only environments, as well as their flexibility in time and location, make them (religiously and culturally) welcome within the Iraqi community, especially by women. As discussed earlier, most of the women-only classes run twice a week at local centres or community-based organizations. These providers usually supply free transportation to the learners as well as on-site childcare services. Such services are vital to Muslim women. Hence none of the interviewed participants reported that their social networks objected to her doing the classes. In fact, some of the participants who enrolled in the women-only classes stated that they enjoyed them as they used to meet their friends at the classes and socialize with them. Najat (34, mother), for example, reported:

I like going to the women-only classes in BWH. I have lots of friends going to that centre to learn sewing, Arts or English. It's a good place that we can meet at, especially when it has a childcare service to look after our kids. (Najat, group discussion.)

In this example, the community centre which runs the women-only classes is also running other programs for the women such as sewing and arts. The Centre also has an on-site childcare service. Therefore, the women in that area are going to learn many things in addition to learning the language directly, and learning and practising the language through learning other things. The centre is not just a place for learning; it's also a place for meeting, socializing, and having fun; thus satisfying Gardner's understanding of integrative motivation (to study English) (Gardner, 2001).

This explains why the women's networks always support going to such centres to learn the language. This is, of course, in addition to the religious and cultural acceptance of such centres by most of the Muslim women, as Hamida reported:

The centre is a magnificent place to learn the language ... you know, it is only women learners which is very good ... because we do not feel comfortable if there are males with us in the class. Almost everybody encouraged me to join the classes, including my family and my friends ... actually, some of my friends are studying with me now in the same classes ... we enjoy the study very much. (Hamida, interview.)

Hamida here indicates that these classes are okay in terms of culture and religion. While Hamida quit her classes at the TAFE due to being uncomfortable with the mixed-gender nature of the classes, she is now very comfortable with the women-only environment, as some of her friends are also. Going to the community centre to learn has become a good habit for Hamida and many of the Muslim women in the area. The women-only environment encourages Muslim women to attend and learn as it eliminates much of the embarrassment that might occur from male presences. Such an environment is also welcomed by the Muslim women's families. The husbands, as well as the children, feel comfortable seeing their wife or mother learning the language in a very safe and joyful setting.

6.2.3 Discussion

The data of the study showed that the support networks of the IMIW have the potential to limit their participation in mainstream English learning programs. Nevertheless, the results also showed that it encouraged their participation in the women-only classes. These interesting findings come from the suggestion that women-only classes are culturally and religiously accepted by most of the Muslim women as they view such classes as a good place to attend and learn in a female only environment, without any "embarrassment" or "restrictions" that might occur from males' company.

Not all the interviewed women reported that their social networks had a similar influence on their access to English learning. Women with strong networks, for example, said that their social networks limited their participation in the mainstream English

classes. According to the research data, this might happen when their support networks limit their need for English because of the overwhelming use of Arabic in their social conversation. This diminishes their need for formal English classes as they feel that they do not need English in their daily lives. These findings support Rida and Milton's (2001) contention that the support networks of Muslim women influence their participation in the wider Australian community in general, and their learning of English in particular. (Only a little English is used in general discussion, or in translation from English to Arabic and vice versa).

Rida and Milton argue that this influence of support networks occurs for two reasons. First, it occurs when the women's networks act as a "barrier by fulfilling the language needs of the learner to such an extent that she never perceives a need for English" (p. 42), and second, when her networks of female friends and relatives put pressure on her to perform her daily duties and stress that this is her role according to culture, tradition and religion. This is mostly the case of the IMIW considering their role as the sole responsible person when it comes to housework and raising children, both of which will obviously be affected by mainstream full-time study.

Nonetheless, in women-only classes, this is not the case. The results showed that the researched IMIW were motivated to attend these classes because it is attended by members of their social networks. These are interesting findings when compared to Rida and Milton's. On the one hand this study agrees with their argument that the support networks of Muslim women restrict their access to mainstream English classes by "fulfilling" their English needs and "discouraging" their full-time study by asserting that they have cultural and religious commitments towards their homes and families. On the other hand, it disagrees with them when it comes to the women-only setting. The results showed that the same support networks become encouraging and motivating in regard to accessing the women-only classes.

As discussed earlier, this is because most of the social networks of Muslims see the women-only classes as a good and safe environment for Muslims to learn the language, catch up with friends, and at the same time maintain their family commitments. The

support and encouragement the IMIW get from both their support networks and families is remarkable. Norton (1995) argues that L2 learning empowers the immigrant women and increases their social participation in the target community. The data from this present study reveals that the researched IMIW are very willing to become more socially empowered within the structures of the broader Australian society, as most of the participants in this study clearly stated that they wanted to learn English in order to be more prominent and accepted in the community.

Hamida, for example, reported that she learns the language to “understand others ... communicate with them ... and protect myself” (Hamida, interview). This kind of successful communication out in the new community as well as the “protection” the immigrant women feel when they know the other people’s language cannot be achieved without learning and using the new language. This is a good example of the investment concept that Norton (1995) talks about in her argument about using the new language to gain more power and social capital in the new community.

The support networks of friends and relatives also have similar views. As was discussed in the previous section, the learners’ immediate families, especially their husbands, are very helpful to them in their language learning. The data indicates that most husbands modified their lifestyles and started taking over some of their wives’ home duties just to enable them complete their study. In so doing, these husbands are aiming at being the best for their wives by assisting them to acquire English language skills in this way. This is because they (the IMIW as well as their immediate families) recognize that equipping these immigrants with the English skills will enhance their social participation in the new community (Vygotsky, 1991; Gardner, 1985), give them more social power, and enable them to protect themselves when going out into the community (Norton, 2013).

6.3 Availability of information

6.3.1 Mainstream classes

In Melbourne, most of the newly arrived Iraqi immigrants get settlement officers or case workers assigned to them, from either community-based organizations or settlement agencies, to provide them with the settlement services they need, including access to

English classes. The extended Iraqi community in Melbourne also helps these new immigrants to settle into their new country, and to utilise services available to them such as those providing information and/or services on education, work and medical treatment. In this study, most of the participants indicated that they knew about their free English entitlement either from their "case workers" or from community organization networks. This can be seen clearly from their answers in the questionnaire and in the interviews, as well as in the group discussion. Hamida, for example, said:

Our case worker told us that we can learn English at the TAFE for free if we like. My husband and the case worker did go to the TAFE to register our names. But as I told you before, I did not go because the classes were mixed-gender. (Hamida, interview.)

Within a few days of coming to Australia Hamida's family case worker informed her of the free English classes that were available to their family at Epping TAFE. However, she opted not to attend this free entitlement. It can be seen clearly from her comment that access to information about mainstream English classes was not a problem. The "case workers" and "settlement officers" for the newly arrived immigrants work either as volunteers from community-based organizations, or as employees from settlement agencies. They work with each immigrant family for only six months. However, in some regional and remote areas, immigrants may not get such services. A major part of the settlement officer's job is to inform immigrants about their eligibility for the 510 free English classes offered to them by the Australian government.

Another example is Fatima (38, mother), who reported that she found out about the English classes available to her at the AMES institute from a local community worker, who visited them on the first day of their arrival in Australia:

A local community worker visited us at the hotel in Noble Park where we first stayed in. I remember he told us that we can go to AMES Dandenong to learn English for free and at the same time

we can send our children to Noble Park language school to learn English as well. (Fatima, interview.)

Her husband's cousin also provided the family with enough information about the free English classes available to the parents and their children at the two big language service providers (AMES and TAFE). Regardless of the identity of the informer, these and other examples show that the study participants generally had access to information about the free mainstream English classes available to them. Najat, for instance, referred to this point when she talked about her experience with mixed-gender classes. She stated that their case worker took them to AMES to register their names in the English classes:

After we had arrived in Australia, my husband and I went to register our names in English classes at the AMES with our case worker. (Najat, group discussion.)

In this situation, Najat and her husband were aware of the free English classes available to them at the AMES institute. The settlement case worker in this example was the one who provided Najat's family with information about their entitlement to free English classes at AMES. It can be argued that for most of the participants of the study, access to information about the mainstream English classes was not an issue. This is because the settlement services these immigrants get in their early stages in Australia make their access to information about the mainstream free English classes very easy.

These findings contrast with other studies that examined Iraqi immigrants' English learning in Australia and considered the availability of information as an important factor in their low access to free English entitlement (e.g. Rida & Milton, 2001; Woodlock, 2008). Both studies identified the availability of information as a barrier to refugees' access to English classes in Australia. However, the geographical and social contexts where these studies were conducted are different from those of the current study. Both Rida's and Milton and Woodlock's studies took place in regional Victoria, while the present study takes place in Metropolitan Melbourne. Woodlock (2008) for

example, conducted his study of the settlement experience of newly arrived Iraqi immigrants in the small town of Cobram in regional Victoria. The study concluded that this refugee group has poor access to English classes and that the lack of information available, as well as the inadequate provision of English classes in the town, have contributed to low access of the IMIW to English classes (p. 11).

The current study takes place in metropolitan Melbourne, which has a significant Iraqi community. This may explain why the availability of information about the mainstream free English services available to immigrants is not an issue for most of the research participants as such information is passed on quickly and easily amongst the members of the community. This is, of course, in addition to the role the settlement agencies or community-based organizations play in connecting the newly arrived immigrants to English learning providers; a service that is, mostly, not available in remote or regional areas.

Rida and Milton's (2001) study of Muslim women's access to free English classes in Australia also concluded that "access to information" is one of the factors that affect Muslim women's access to English classes. Rida and Milton's study took place in Perth, Australia, and was based on data collected by interviewing 23 Muslim women from Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, Syria, Egypt, former Yugoslavia and Ethiopia. Applying these research findings to include all Muslim women in Australia in general and Iraqi Muslim women in Melbourne, in particular, is rather questionable. As Rida and Milton stated "it may be difficult to generalize from the study reported here unless researchers also take into account the particular situations" (p. 60).

6.3.2 Women-only classes

Regarding women-only English classes in Melbourne (where the current study takes place), the availability of information is a significant element in the IMIW's access to these classes. Unlike the case of mainstream classes, most of the participating women indicated that they did not know about the women-only English classes beforehand. The results of the questionnaire show that only 17 out of 100 women (17%) who answered

the questionnaire item about having information about the women-only classes ticked “agree”. The remaining (83%) of the women ticked “not agree” which means they had no information about such classes. This is supported by the low level of presence the IMIW have in the women-only classes available to immigrants in Melbourne.

The questionnaire data also show that out of 100 participants, only 12 IMIWs are currently enrolled in these classes. Almost all the study participants who accessed the women-only classes reported that they knew about them from their social networks (friends usually). Only one participant (Hamida) said that her husband asked about women-only classes and was informed by the TAFE receptionist of the availability of such classes at the Broadmeadows Women House. She reported:

I asked my husband to ask for women-only classes and the office in TAFE told him about the classes at the Broadmeadows Women’s House, which I joined. (Hamida, group discussion.)

In this example, Hamida (a motivated learner) and her husband made the effort to find women-only classes in her area. Hamida stated in her interview that her husband then called the Broadmeadows Women’s House for the details of the class and asked them to register his wife. We can understand from this example that the information available about the women-only classes is not easily accessed. Even though it is available, for the participants who were not told through their support networks, obtaining information about the classes required some effort, some motivation on behalf of the learner. Participants such as Fatima reported that she knew about the classes from her husband who knew from a friend of his:

My husband told me about the women-only English classes in Dandenong. He knew about them from a friend of his. You know, we were asking everyone we know about easy and comfortable classes because, as I said before, I cannot go to AMES because of my big responsibilities. (Fatima, interview.)

As stated earlier, Fatima had difficulty in attending her mainstream classes at the AMES institute. She and her husband were looking for an "easy" English course that was more flexible in time, location and study load, so that she could study as well as maintain her family commitments. It was more than three months before they knew (from a friend) about the women-only classes at the Dandenong Neighbourhood House. This clearly indicates that information available to immigrants about the women-only classes in their areas is scanty and mostly transferred through immigrant's networks rather than the local media or public domain.

Similar findings were reported by Janit (21, wife) when she was discussing her experience with the women-only English classes at the Broadmeadows Women's House. In the group discussion, Janit said, "My friend (Najat) told me about the women-only classes at Broadmeadows Women House." And it was Najat who in turn had heard about the classes through her husband. As discussed earlier, the Iraqi community in Australia is a closed and cohesive group. This means that they rely more on each other in communicating the information, including information about English classes. As the data revealed, many of the researched IMIW get the information they need about the English services available to them from their friends.

Janit, in this example, was not aware about the availability of such classes (the women-only classes) in Melbourne, but when her friend (Najat) knew about them, she got the news from her very quickly. This supports the fact that information about such classes is usually available to immigrants through their social networks. Hence, promoting English language services within the community groups through a direct approach is very important in ensuring the maximum participation of immigrants in English learning in Australia. In what follows, more discussion about this issue is presented.

6.3.3 Discussion

Most Iraqi Muslim Women in Melbourne have very little information about women-only English classes in their areas. It is not within the scope of this project, nor its purpose, to examine the reasons why such information is not available to these

immigrants. Nevertheless, a quick review of the literature on the English programs available to immigrants in Australia reveals that the primary teaching source (intensified by the media) is usually the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) which is offered by the Australian government to newly arrived immigrants. The two largest providers of the AMEP are the TAFE and AMES institutions. The Australian government provides funds to the TAFEs and AMES colleges, so that they are able to run their programs and dominate English language learning in Australia.

Smaller programs, such as the women-only ones, are mostly run by non-government organizations or community centres which usually have limited financial resources and much less media presence. Going back to the participants' quotes, they clearly indicate that they all were looking for English classes that are more appropriate and suitable to their religious and cultural needs. In this trend, the very first thing they did was asking their own networks about such classes. This does not mean that the information was not readily available, but that they were not motivated or educated enough to search for it in the public domain. However, according to the research participants, they did not see much advertising of English classes in their communities. Indeed they stated (see quotes above) that the only information they knew when they arrived in Australia was about the English courses available to them at the AMES and TAFE institutes.

The English service providers in Australia are not the only people to be blamed for this lack of information. The government, through its settlement services was also contributing to this problem by promoting only the free mainstream English classes at the AMES and TAFE institutes. As the data showed, most of the participants reported that they got their initial information about English services from their settlement officer who referred them only to the AMES and TAFE classes. In other words, they were directed (in one way or another) to AMES and TAFE language schools by their settlement workers. It is these colleges they hear about when they are informed about their eligibility for free English classes. Hence, when another place offers some "special" English program such as women-only classes, a significant amount of information needs to be distributed to bring the community's attention to the service.

As the IMIW is a close-knit group that has limited social interaction with the rest of Australian society, the availability of information about such “special” classes is vital. Therefore, the English service providers should give more significance to this and promote their English classes within the relevant community groups to ensure that these immigrants get sufficient information about these services. The lack of information about the women-only classes is a major factor in the low access of the IMIW's to these classes. As the number of centres that offer such classes is limited, the availability of information about these classes is critical to raising the public's awareness of them. When immigrants first think of English learning in Australia it is usually the free classes of the main L2 English providers, AMES and TAFE, which they find out about. But when they want classes that meet their cultural and religious needs such as the women-only ones, they have to spend remarkable efforts to find them.

It is in this regard that Gardner's (1985) motivation notion is relevant again. It could be argued that the IMIW should spend more effort searching for information about suitable English classes because they are highly motivated to learn the language. Regardless of their motivational orientation, whether instrumental to find jobs or integrative to identify with the Australian community, these immigrants have shown significant motivation in their English learning in Australia.

These findings also support Rida and Milton's (2001) argument that the support networks of immigrants play a key role in their access to English services. The data revealed that the information provided to these immigrants by their networks of friends and relatives regarding the availability of the women-only classes in their areas helped them access the classes. It also helped them enhance their social participation in Australian society through direct interaction with their non-Muslim teachers and peers. This enhancement in their social participation through the language learning is also explained by the Vygotsky (1991) sociocultural theory and Norton's (1995) investment theory. Both theories assert that L2 learning and use enhances the social participation of the learners and make them active participants in the target community: which seems to be the same in this present study.

6.4 Provision of classes

6.4.1 Mainstream classes

As most of the interviewed participants are mothers with children, the provision of classes in the areas they live in is essential to their access to English classes. Some of the participants indicated that the nearby location of their language school was a strong motive in their access to English classes. Najat for example, stated that the nearby location of the Broadmeadows TAFE was an important factor in her decision to choose this institution to learn English at. In the interview, she highlighted:

You right... the TAFE was very close to my house ... about 900 m only. I used to walk there every day. This short distance between my house and the TAFE helped me a lot as I did not need a car to go there and also did not need my husband to drive me. (Najat, group discussion.)

Najat lives in Broadmeadows and does not have a car or a driver's license. As she stated in her comments, Najat used to walk to her school. This is an ideal situation for a newly arrived immigrant woman with no car or driver's license. The need for close proximity to the place of learning is a finding which is supported by Afaf who studied English at Berwick TAFE for a semester, before she withdrew due to illness. Afaf lives in Narre Warren and the Berwick TAFE where she used to go to learn English is only 2km away from her home. She used to take the bus to go to her school. Being an older woman (54years old) with some health issues, the location of the language school was very important to her, as she indicated:

Thank God that the TAFE is in Berwick and close to my house. I went there for about three months ... It was good, and I learnt some English but I couldn't continue because of my sickness. (Afaf, interview.)

The convenient availability of the language school in Berwick was the most important factor in her decision to join English classes. Her words "Thank God" and "close to my

house" explicitly refer to her comfort and pleasure in knowing of the close proximity of the English classes in her area. Providing free English classes to non-English speakers is not, however, limited to the two most important AMEP providers – TAFE and AMES. There is also a large number of community centres, non-governmental organizations, local councils and many other community service agencies that provide free or low-cost English classes to non-English speakers. Most Australian suburbs (regardless of their size or location) have at least one of these places where non-English speakers can go to learn English. These English services are available to both male and female learners. That is, the classes are usually mixed and not specially designed for only one group. But when it comes to women-only English classes, they are not as readily available.

6.4.2 Women-only classes

The number of women-only English classes in Melbourne is very limited and mostly in the larger suburbs. Almost all the interviewed women who are currently enrolled in the women-only classes live in areas such as Broadmeadows and Dandenong, making it easy for them to use this service. Only one participant, Janit (21, wife), resides outside of these areas. Janit lives in Epping, a suburb that is 20 km away from Broadmeadows. Because the women-only classes are not available in her area, Janit has to come to Broadmeadows to study. Her need to study English is greater than the tiredness that she might get due to her long travel time. She said:

There are no women-only classes in Epping. When my husband asked, they [friends] told him that they are available in Broadmeadows only. I have to go there, despite the long travel because, as I said before, I need such classes to avoid any problems that I might get from mixing with strange males in the TAFE. (Janit, interview.)

As discussed in the previous section, Janit studied English at the TAFE institute in Epping for about one month and then decided to move to the women-only classes in Broadmeadows because she was not feeling comfortable studying with male students.

She and her husband were looking for women-only English classes in Epping but could not find any. They knew from their networks that such classes are available at the Broadmeadows Women House in Broadmeadows. Epping is a very big suburb in northern Melbourne, nevertheless it has no such service. The researcher also searched the internet but could not come across any women-only classes in Epping. Their limited number and availability in large and well-populated areas reveals how rare these classes are in Melbourne. Queen also suffers from the unavailability of women-only classes in her area. Queen lives in the suburb of Hallam.

As she stated earlier:

Yes ... I also heard from Fatima about the women-only classes at Dandenong Neighbourhood House ... I wanted to go there because I love to learn English, but I can't travel this long distance from Hallam to Dandenong when I am pregnant ... Hopefully when I give birth my situation will be changed and I will be able to join.
(Queen, group discussion.)

Queen is not ready to join the women-only English classes in Dandenong because of the long distance between her home and the class location. It takes her at least one hour to arrive at the school in Dandenong, taking into account the waiting time for the bus to come. With her condition of being pregnant, she is unable to travel to Dandenong to attend the classes. She stated that when her friend Fatima told her about the women-only classes in Dandenong, she and her husband tried to find similar classes in their suburb but did not find any.

Another participant, Afaf, reported that she had not known about the women-only English classes. As stated earlier, she only found about them from this researcher's assistant when she was asked to take part in the study. As mentioned before, Afaf studied in English classes at the TAFE institute in Berwick for three months, and then left the school due to health issues. Afaf felt positive about the availability of women-only classes in Dandenong and wished they would be available one day in her area so that she could join them.

I think [it] is a good thing to have such classes that are flexible in time and location. I wish they [were] available in Narre Warren [a major urban centre next to Berwick] so that I can join them. (Afaf, group discussion.)

Afaf indicated that she was still unable to go to Dandenong to study at the women-only classes despite her need to learn the language. The long distance of travel between Dandenong and Narre Warren is a major element in her inability. Afaf wished the women-only classes were available in her area. If they were, she said she would join them straight away.

6.4.3 Discussion

It can be clearly seen from reading their stories that many of the researched IMIW have a great desire to attend the women-only classes. However, the provision of the classes is considered as a major barrier in these immigrants' use of such a service. As these classes are available mostly in big cities, not everyone can utilize them. Home duties, taking care of children, or health issues are all factors that prevent Muslim women from traveling long distances to join the classes if they are not available in their cities or suburbs. I acknowledge that the health situation of some of the participants was a major factor in their hesitation to join the women-only classes in cities other than the ones they live in. However, if such classes were available in their area or close to their residence, their access would be easier.

These findings support those of Taylor (2005) and Woodlock (2008) who both found that the availability of classes is vital in immigrants' access to English language learning in Australia. Taylor's (2005) study examined the settlement experience of Iraqi and Sudanese refugees in regional Victoria. He reported that the limited English language learning opportunities is a major problem for these immigrants settling in Australia (Taylor, 2005, p. 5). Similarly, Woodlock (2008) reported that the inadequate provision of English classes is one of the factors acting as a barrier to Iraqi immigrants' successful settlement (p. 11). Even though Taylor and Woodlock's studies examined

mainstream English services, the situation is relatively similar in women-only classes. On the one hand (as Taylor and Woodlock argue) the limited provision of English classes is negatively affecting immigrants' English learning by reducing the number of learners. On the other hand, it contributes to reducing the access of the IMIW to women-only English classes because of their unavailability in many areas in Melbourne.

The two cases of Afaf and Queen provide good examples of this. They are both willing to study in women-only classes, but unable to do so because of the unavailability of such classes in their areas of residency. They did look for suitable classes but were unable to find some in their areas of living. In light of Gardner's integrative orientation, it is the integratively motivated learner who "expends effort to learn the language" (Gardner, 2001, p. 12). The data showed that most of the IMIW expended remarkable efforts to find suitable classes to join. Their positive attitudes towards English and its use as well as their willingness to communicate successfully in the broader Australian society were big motivators in their journey to find English classes for their learning.

It could be argued that these immigrants' motivation towards learning and using English is influenced by their circumstances, including convenience of attending the classes (their location and times). Despite that, their willingness to learn the language and "identify themselves" (Gardner, 2001) with Australian society was strong enough to enable them to find solutions to this problem, as was explained in the previous sections when some of the participants used the volunteer tutors to teach them English because they were unable to go to formal English classes.

6.5 The role of Maturity and literacy in the IMIW's English learning

Interestingly, the maturity of IMIW was also reported as having a noticeable effect on their learning of English in Australia. For instance, three of the participants stated that they faced some difficulties in learning a new language due to their age and health issues. Afaf (54, mother), for example, studied English for about three months at the TAFE language school. According to her, studying a new language demands commitment to her school and doing homework, in addition to class activities. According to her, it was very difficult to do all this work at this age. She also suffers

from diabetes and high blood pressure, which also restrict her daily movements and make it very hard for her to commit to everyday schooling. When the researcher asked her about the reason why she could not continue her study at the TAFE, she reported:

I could not commit to my study at the TAFE because it is very hard for me to go everyday there. I'm sick most of the time. You know, at this age you start getting a lot of health problems.

(Afaf, interview.)

As mentioned before, Afaf is a mother with a large family (husband and six children) and an extended social network of relatives and friends. She went to the TAFE language school in Berwick for three months only and then left due to her sickness. Her need to English was, also, lower than that of the other participants. This is, according to her, because she sometimes uses her children or husband to interpret for her. It is noteworthy that Afaf has six children, four of them are teenagers and have very good English skills. These findings come in line with Long's (1993) contention that older L2 learners are less successful in their learning than younger ones because they invest less time in their learning.

Suad (56, mother) also stated that she faced difficulties in her English study and could not learn much because of her age. After her arrival in Australia, Suad registered for the volunteer tutoring service that the AMES language school provides to those (including older learners) who, for various reasons, cannot attend formal classes. She said:

I did not go to the AMES school because it is difficult for me to go every day to school. I have the volunteer tutor coming to me every Tuesday to teach me what I need of English in my daily communications. This is much easier for me. (Suad, interview.)

At the time of this research Suad had been using this tutoring service for six months. Similar to Afaf, Suad could not study in the mainstream classes because of factors related to her maturity. This can be seen clearly in her interview responses. The words she used such as "difficult for me to go every day to school" indicate that she is unable

to commit to everyday schooling. Using the word “difficult” here explicitly refers to her inability to do such effort, because of a lack of motivation which accompanies her age – because at her age she has less need for English, and less of an expectation that her need will increase in the future. At her age, Suad is less motivated to commit to everyday schooling because she thinks that what she gets from the volunteer tutor is enough to enable her to communicate with other English-speaking Australians. In light of this, Suad also does not aim to master English and be a good communicator in this new society. All that she needs, according to her, is basic English to help her in “daily communications” with, for instance, doctors, shop owners, bus drivers etc. This also provides a strong support to the authors’ (2011) argument that Iraqi adult L2 learners are less motivated towards mastering English compared to younger ones due to their limited need of English.

In light of the above discussion, it could be argued that maturity has an important role in the IMIW’s learning in Australia. As the data showed, those who are older in age face more challenges (such as health problems) that affect their access to English classes compared to their younger counterparts. One younger learner (Janit, 21 wife), for instance, reported that she was travelling two days a week from Epping to Broadmeadows to attend the English classes without any significant difficulties. On the other hand, Afaf and Suad described their going to the language schools as “hard” and “difficult” which refers to a clear inability to commit to everyday schooling.

Indeed, one can assume that learners’ age plays an important role in their access to English language services as it has the potential to limit their attendance in English classes. The data revealed that older learners are less motivated to master English because of their limited need to use English (as Abdilah, 2011, and Long, 1993, noticed), especially with the availability of volunteers tutors to teach them the language they need for daily communications and family members to interpret for them should they need. All of this does not mean that age in itself is the important factor – but it means that factors associated with maturity affect the IMIWs. These underlying factors

include less perceived need for English in the future, and extra health issues associated with older years, as stated earlier.

Literacy was also reported as another important social factor that critically affected some of the researched IMIW in their English learning in Australia. Two of the participants in this study stated that they could not go to English classes or learn much English because they are illiterate. If we take Suad (56, mother) as an example, again, she reported that in addition to her health problems, her illiteracy in both the Arabic and English languages affected her studying English in Australia. Suad did not go to school in Iraq and did not get any formal learning there. It is noteworthy that millions of Iraqis, particularly women, have been illiterate in the last few centuries due to poverty and a lack of educational opportunities (Qubain, 1979, p. 11).

In Australia, Suad did not want to go to the AMES formal English classes that she was referred to when she arrived in Australia. She preferred instead to have a volunteer tutor to teach her at home. According to her, this was because of her fear of failure in formal learning, in addition to the challenges discussed above. Part of her answer to the researcher's question about the reasons why she did not want to go to the language centre was:

.... also I did not go to school in Iraq... it is too difficult for me to study at schools now. You know, at this age, I can't concentrate well and might not understand the teacher. (Suad, interview.)

As discussed above, Suad has many health and motivation challenges that contributed to her decision not to access the formal English classes that were offered to her by the Australian government when she arrived in this country. This comment by her explicitly shows the effect of literacy in demotivating her to go to these free formal classes. Suad feels that she does not have that "concentration" or ability to understand the teacher's instructions and cope with other students. That is, it is very "difficult" for her as an English illiterate to understand instructions in the English language only.

Similarly, Najat (34, mother) who had only a few years of formal learning in Arabic and little formal learning in English, stated that she found it very difficult to cope with formal English learning in Australia. In the interview, she added that her low level of English was one of the issues why she did not continue her study of English at the TAFE English school. As discussed earlier, Najat's low level of English learning made her feel unable to participate in class activities because, for one reason, she felt "embarrassed" that the other classmates might laugh at her. She added:

As I told you, I did not have good education in Iraq especially in English. I always hesitate to participate in the class activities because the others might laugh at my English. (Najat, interview.)

As can be seen clearly in this quote, Najat's "hesitation" to participate in class activities affected her study to the degree that she felt isolated. Her fear that the "others [classmates] might laugh at my English" made her not only stop participating in class activities, but also leave the school and go to the women-only classes (see 7.3). Such findings agree with De Courcy's (2007) contention that immigrant women's past education have a remarkable effect on their achievement in English learning in Australia. Indeed, the findings from this study support this argument as they found that literacy has a noticeable impact on the IMIW's access to their free English entitlement.

6.6 Chapter summary and discussion of factors

Interview data points to the four factors discussed in this chapter –family and home commitments, support networks, availability of information, and provision of classes – as influencing the IMIW's access to their English learning in general, and to the women-only classes in Melbourne in particular (see Figure 6). Figure 6 shows a site map for this chapter. The five central boxes running from top to bottom are the factors (or variables) discussed. The boxes on the left, under the heading "Mainstream classes" refer to whether the variables have an encouraging or discouraging impact in regard to IMIW's attendance at mainstream English classes. The boxes on the right, under the heading "Women-only classes" refer to whether the variables have an encouraging or

discouraging impact in regard to IMIW's attendance at women-only English classes. From this "map" it can be seen that the variables have differing impacts, depending on whether the classes are mainstream (men and women) or women-only.

The study found that heavy family and home commitments discourages most of the interviewed women's participation in mainstream classes as most of them are mothers with children and have lots of home and family responsibilities. In contrast, in women-only classes no such restrictions were reported as most of the providers of the women-only classes run them on a two-days-a-week basis with on-site childcare services to "take care of our children while we are learning" (Suad, mother). This considers the learners' family and home duties and encourages them to access the women-only classes as it enables them to learn the language without affecting their home or children duties. The support networks of the learners was reported as having a similar influence as that of the two previous factors. On the one hand, some of the participants indicated that their support networks of friends, relatives and family members limit their access to mainstream English learning by removing their need for English language through using the Arabic language instead of English in most conversation within their support networks.

On the other hand, some of the interviewed women stated that their support networks encouraged them to attend the women-only classes. This is because such classes are usually held at community based organizations where women go to meet, socialize, have fun as well as learn other skills such art and sewing. In addition, the women-only environment waives any religious or cultural restrictions and, hence, attending such classes is welcomed by most of the learners' networks. As for the availability of information about the English services offered to immigrants in Australia, almost all the research participants agreed that they have no issue accessing information about mainstream English classes offered to them by the Australian government.

However the study identified that lack of information available about the women-only classes restricts these women's use of these services. The data showed that 83% of the surveyed women did not receive information about the availability of such classes

within their local areas. Similarly, the provision of women-only classes also affects Muslim women's English learning. The data revealed that women-only classes were available only in larger suburbs. This data clearly indicates that the limited number of women-only classes available to IMIW contributed to their low presence in such classes.

In regard to mainstream classes, no such issue was reported as the data showed that Muslim women (as well as other immigrants) have easy access to numerous free English classes in their localities that are funded by the Australian government. Finally, age and literacy were also found to be affecting this group's access to English classes. Some of the participants clearly stated that they could not commit to their daily English schooling due to their illness, age or poor past education in English. This explicitly shows that these two far-reaching factors have a key role in the IMIW's decision to access their free English entitlement in Australia.

In summary, the IMIW's access to English learning in Australia can be said to have been shaped by the social environment they are in (Vygotsky, 1991). The study concludes that their success in accessing this language learning is determined by certain sociocultural factors including the gendered nature of the classes offered to them, their family and home responsibilities, as well as their social networks. . Such findings come in line with Hewagodage and O'Neill's (2010) study which reported that Muslim women do not participate in their English speaking community because of "various cultural and linguistic barriers to learn the English language" and their inability to read and write in English (p. 1). In other words, the IMIW's English learning in Australia is highly influenced by their cultural background, religion, social network, family, etc.

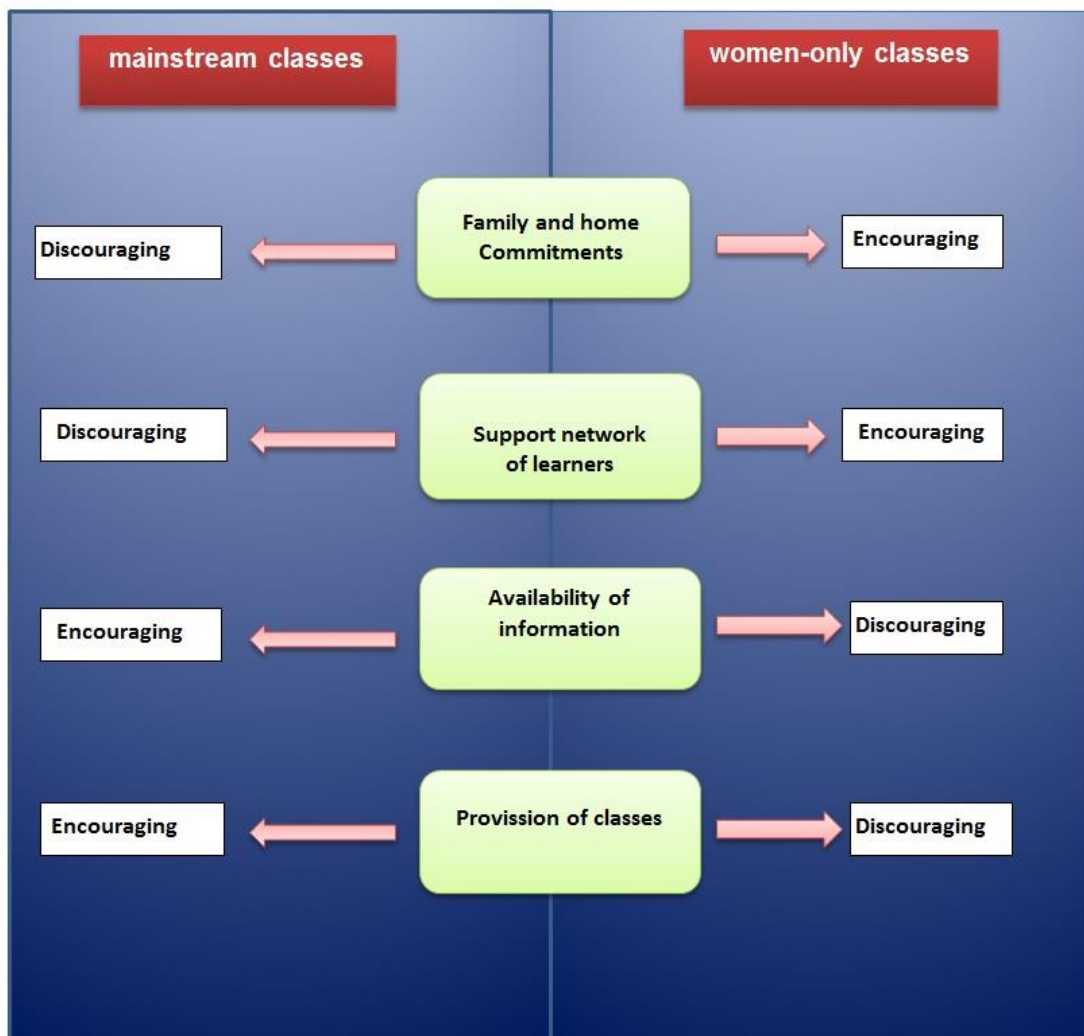


Figure. 6 Findings map

Chapter Seven: Islam and English learning in Australia: Working through the differences

7. Overview

In Australia, current Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research indicates that gender mix is an important factor affecting many Muslim Women in their decisions to access English learning classes. In fact many studies have found that mixed-gender classes is a significant issue for many of these women (Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013; Casimiro et al., 2007; McCue 2008; Rida & Milton, 2001). Casimiro et al., (2007) for example, reported in a study examining the English learning experiences of Muslim women from Iraq, Sudan and Afghanistan in Western Australia, that mixed-gender classes was one of the key factors that caused these women “not to attend” (p. 64) their free English classes as they felt uncomfortable attending mixed-gender classes. Some of the participants of this present study have supported this contention, and likewise expressed an unwillingness to attend mixed-gender classes due to feeling uncomfortable mixing with men they do not know.

In what follows, I discuss the case of three Iraqi Muslim immigrant women’s experiences (Hamida, Najat and Janit), in both mainstream mix-gender classes and women-only classes, in order to examine how Islamic religious norms and traditions affect Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women’s English learning in Australia. This chapter tries to uncover the influence of learners’ gender in Muslim immigrant women’s decisions to study in mainstream or women-only English classes. The three participants were chosen for this work because of the uniqueness of their stories, especially in regard to the role of Islam in shaping their English learning in Australia in general, and in influencing their choosing of the study setting in particular. This chapter aims to provide, within the scope of a case study, a comprehensive picture of the IMIW’s experience in English learning in Australia and the way social factors such as religion, support networks and culture affect their utilising of such services.

Table. 4 Hamida, Najat, and Janit

Participant	Age	Marital Status	Education Level	Mainstream English learning	Enrolment in women-only classes
Janit	21	Married (no children)	Bachelor in accounting	Three months	Yes
Najat	34	Married (four children)	Secondary school	Two months	Yes
Hamida	47	Married (three children)	Diploma in Education	None	Yes

7.1 Why Hamida, Najat, and Janit?

Each of these participants has a different and interesting story. This makes them unique to and their situation significant in relation to Islamic norms and how they affect Muslim women learning English in the west. This is also the main reason behind choosing these three participants, from a larger pool, to be the focus of this chapter.

Hamida, for instance, is significant in terms of her religious commitment in both her country of origin Iraq and Australia. Hamida grew up in a very conservative Islamic family. The environment where she grew up in is a very highly gender segregated one where males and females are completely separate from each other. Even in her schooling, Hamida went only to girls' schools in her primary, secondary and high school years. Despite graduating with above average scores from high school, Hamida's father did not want to send her to the university because of the mixed-gender nature of the universities in Iraq. She instead joined the females-only teacher training institute in her city. In that institute, Hamida met and had friendships with only female peers. It was within this background that Hamida grew up looking at gender mixing as something shameful and against Islamic norms.

After getting her Diploma of teaching, Hamida started working as a teacher at a primary school in her city in Iraq. It was there where she met and socialised with males for the

first time. She also met her husband there. Her husband was a co-teacher at the same school. Hamida was too shy to interact and socialise with men she did not know, and that was one of the reasons her husband loved her and asked for her hand in marriage. Hamida had three other sisters. All of them preferred to not go to university for the same reason. Two of her sisters got married early in their lives.

Not all Iraqi females are similar to Hamida, nor do they follow the same traditions. In Iraq there are some highly religious families which restrict the movements and social life of their daughters. In such families, females are not allowed to go out by themselves. They are also not allowed to study in mixed-gender schools. In so saying, I do not mean that these religious families are oppressing their females. It is the way some families are interpreting the teachings of Islam and implementing these teachings according to their cultural and family traditions. Even though Islam does not favour the free mixing of men and women in social life, there are many settings where such practises are allowed, such as in workplaces, universities, and hospitals.

Viewed in this light, Hamida's family is unique in terms of the way they interpret Islamic norms, as well as in the way they follow them. This has had a huge impact on Hamida's life, to the degree that even when she arrived in Australia, she did not want to study in a mixed-gender setting. Hence, the study of her special case provides this research with an even more insightful look at the role of Islamic teaching and traditions in the lives of its followers, as well as on the way they interpret and follow those teachings and traditions.

Najat's journey in English learning in Australia is also significant. Unlike Hamida, Najat did not get enough English learning in Iraq. She did not even get enough education in her first language, Arabic. Najat came from a poor village family where she spent most of her life taking care of animals and irrigating plants. As discussed above, Najat did not complete her schooling in Iraq. Therefore, her literacy in both Arabic and English was not good enough to enable her to communicate successfully with the outer society. In Australia, and in her first months of arrival, Najat relied mostly on her husband and her children to do everything for her in the outer society,

including interpreting. However, she did not want to become illiterate in English while living in Australia.

In her discussion with the researchers, Najat clearly showed a significant desire to learn English and to be able to communicate successfully, as well as to protect herself when going out without her husband or children accompanying her. As Najat is the kind of woman who has never before been in mixed-gender environments, studying at the TAFE school was very strange and a new experience to her. Nevertheless, Najat did not quit the language learning and continued her studying despite the ongoing embarrassment she was feeling from practising her very poor English skills among the male students in her class. Her determination to learn the language was unique. As will be discussed later, Najat showed a significant need to learn and master the language because she believes that English is vital to a successful life in Australia. This self-determination she holds helps her overcome the embarrassment she feels in her learning, especially during the time she spends in the mainstream TAFE classes.

While looking for women-friendly classes, Najat continued learning the language at this mixed-gender environment. She managed to study for a few months until she came across the women-only classes at the Broadmeadows Women's House (BWH). She joined these classes immediately. Indeed, her days at the TAFE school were not easy. She was facing difficulties understanding the native-speaker teacher's instructions and was unable to participate in class activities. However, she continued at the language school for a few months and learned some basic English to help her survive outside in the community. This gives us an indication that Najat is a very persistent woman. Her strong motivation to learn and use English in Australia, as well as her attitudes towards this language and its community group, is worth investigating as a main element of this chapter.

Janit is a very different case to Hamida and Najat. Janit is a very open and secular woman who has no issues mixing with men she does not know. However, she left the mixed-gender classes and joined the women-only ones. There were many factors and

motivations behind her decision to do so. Most importantly perhaps were the influences of her husband, as well as her social network of female friends. As mentioned above, Janit is a very beautiful, social and active woman. She is surrounded by people, including males, most of the time. The uniqueness of Janit's case is that despite her being "okay" to study in a mixed-gender environment, she left it in favour of joining a women-only one at a community centre.

Janit is a well-educated woman with a bachelor degree in accounting from a Lebanese university. Despite having this degree, her English was not good due to the way she learnt English as a foreign language in that country. Recognising the importance of English in Australia, Janit felt the need to master the language in order to be more independent, especially when going outside by herself. A few weeks after arriving in Australia, Janit joined the mainstream English class at the local TAFE. She was happy learning English at that place and made a large number of friends from both genders. As most of her Iraqi female friends did not like mixing with males they did not know, this caused some embarrassment and misunderstandings for Janit. Her husband also did not like to see her mixing with unknown males, especially when he knew that the TAFE is full of Iraqi students, as this might damage the reputation of the family, as the Iraqi culture does not accept married women socialising with men they do not know.

The decision made by her friend, Najat, to leave the TAFE school and join the women-only classes at the BWH, affected Janit and made her seriously think of moving to these new classes. The encouragement of her husband to follow her friend's step made Janit leave the TAFE classes and join the women-only classes at the BWH. This step is significant in Janit's life as well as in the way she undertakes English language learning and use in Australia. Such a step is also significant in regard to exploring the sociocultural factors that, generally, affect the Iraqi Muslim Immigrants' learning of English in Australia. As discussed earlier, many factors contributed to Janit's decision. One cannot claim that only the effect of her husband or her social network was behind her decision. As she explained in the interviews (which will be discussed later), Janit also felt more confident at the women-only classes. More discussion on this topic (the

three women's decisions to leave the mixed-gender classes and join the women-only classes) will be presented later in this chapter.

7.2 Participants' view on the selection of mainstream classes

It was found that Muslim immigrant women generally prefer to study in single-gender classes rather than in mixed-gender ones. This is the most logical summary of the interview data in regard to the issue of single/mixed-gender English classes. The participants of this study supported this contention, and expressed an unwillingness to attend mixed-gender classes due to feeling uncomfortable mixing with men they did not know.

Hamida (47, mother), for example, said:

When I knew that the English classes at the TAFE are mixed (men and women) I did not go. You know, in Islam [it] is not good for a woman to mix with men that she does not know. It is not good in Islam and also not good for her and her husband's reputation. I asked my husband to ask for women-only classes and the office in TAFE told him about the classes at the Broadmeadows women[s]' house which I joined. (Hamida, interview.)

As discussed earlier, Hamida had migrated to Australia from a very strict Muslim country (Iran) where she spent more than ten years of her life. It can be clearly seen from examining her quote that the mixed-gender nature of the classes was a major factor in her decision not to attend. Coming from an Islamic religious background, Hamida perceived mixing with men she did not know as not good, both for her and her husband's reputation. This is due to the way she grew up in both Iraq and Iran where she learnt that a good wife should refrain from formal relationships with men they do not know and only mix with them in public places.

Generally speaking, this cultural practice is personal, and neither do all Muslims or all Muslim societies follow it. Some Muslim societies, for example in Eastern Europe, do not have such a practice and mixing between men and women is very normal. Iraqi

Muslim Immigrant Women in Australia come from a strongly patriarchal society where husbands and other male relatives have a great influence over women's activities. Hence, Hamida's view on mixing with men at the school and without her husband's knowledge is based on this foundation. Such behaviour, in her view, is damaging her family's reputation because married women should not socialise with men they do not know, especially not without the knowledge of their husbands. She believes this is a show of respect that Muslim women usually like to give to their husbands and their families.

Another participant, Najat, reported similar findings when she talked about her experience in mainstream English classes:

Shortly, after we arrived in Australia, My husband and I went to register our names in English classes at the AMES college with our case worker. They sent me to a class in level1 because my English was very bad. Most of the students in that class were males; however, there were some females from Burma, Afghanistan and Vietnam and no one was from Iraq. I did not feel comfortable and was too shy and embarrassed to sit with stranger men at the same table. I even couldn't participate in the [class] activities because others may laugh at my English.

(Najat, interview.)

Najat, views mixed-gender classes from different lenses. She does not reject the mixed-gender classes for religious reasons only. In addition to being religiously and culturally unacceptable to her, Najat perceives the presence of "stranger men" as something that makes her "uncomfortable" and "embarrassed" in the class. This kind of discomfort is linked to the educational system in Iraq where Najat did her study. In Iraq, females mostly study in female-only schools (and males in male-only schools). The male/female mixing in Iraqi schools is only at primary and most university levels. The secondary schools, high schools and most vocational training institutes are gender segregated. In Australia, the situation was different and Najat was placed in a mixed-gender class in her language school. Being in this new environment, Najat had to socialise and mix

with “stranger males” that she did not know, some of them from non-Muslim backgrounds.

This embarrassing sphere made it difficult for her to socialise with her new classmates, especially the men, due the cultural and religious commitments she holds. The female peers who were with her in the same classroom were from Burma, Afghanistan and Vietnam and none of them spoke Arabic. Because of poor low English skills, Najat could not communicate successfully or make friendships with any of them. Inside the classroom, she also could not participate in class activities due to feeling embarrassed to speak in broken English in front of the men. Such an environment was strange for Najat to the degree that she felt very isolated and uncomfortable in her study. Therefore, when she heard about the women-only classes at the Broadmeadows Women’s House, she immediately joined them and left her study at the TAFE.

Janit (21, wife) had an experience with the mainstream mixed-gender class that was different from that of Hamida and Najat. In the interview, she explained the reason why she left the mainstream classes at the TAFE institute and joined the single-gender classes at the Broadmeadow Women House:

I attended the free English classes at the Epping TAFE for only four weeks. The classes were mixed and there were many male students. You know... if there are males in your classroom, you mix with them in [one] way or another because they are classmates. My husband was not happy with the situation. You know... there are many Iraqis at the TAFE and they might see me mixing with stranger men and “misinterpret” the situation. We did not like others to talk badly about me. (Janit, interview.)

Janit is a young and newly married Iraqi female who lives in the Epping area. She is an attractive and active woman and has no children. When she joined the classes at the TAFE, many of the male students tried to become acquainted with her. The TAFE

school where she was going to was in Epping and many of her Iraqi friends and acquaintances were going to that institute too. Coming from a high class family, Janit views gender mixing as normal behaviour as she used to study and work in mixed-gender environments in Lebanon before migrating to Australia. It is worth noting that the Lebanese society is more secular compared to other Middle-Eastern Muslim societies, possibly because of a history of large populations of none-Muslim communities such as the Christian and the *Druze* who live there.

However, Janit did not like to mix and socialise with males in Epping's school for many reasons. Most of all, she did not like people from her community to see her socialising with the men and "talk badly" about her and her family due to "misinterpreting" this behaviour. She did not want them to think she was not a "good wife". Her husband knew about the male students in her class and was unhappy to see her socialising with them. It is not the purpose of this study to examine why her husband did not like her to mix with the men. It could involve religion, jealousy, reputation or just be to keep his wife safe from the advances of other men. The most important thing here (as far as the study is concerned) is that both Janit and her husband were "not happy with this situation". She continued:

My friend (Najat) told me about the women-only classes at Broadmeadows Women's House, so I immediately left the TAFE and joined them. It is very good to study with women only. (Janit, interview.)

A careful look at her quote reveals that Janit was happy to leave her classes at the TAFE and join the women-only classes that her friend Najat told her about. According to Janit, she found this new environment to be safer and more comfortable. It can be argued that both respecting her husband's will, as well as protecting her family's reputation, were strong motivators behind Janit's decision to leave the TAFE and study in the women-only classes.

7.3 Participants' views on the selection of women-only classes

The research participants generally reported that they felt very comfortable, safe and happy attending the women-only classes at the BWH because of the female-friendly environment in these classes.

Hamida was one of the very first women who had joined these classes. After withdrawing from the mainstream classes at the TAFE, Hamida and her husband started looking for women-only classes in the area. According to her, the receptionist at the TAFE told her husband that the Broadmeadows Women's House (BWH) runs women-only classes at flexible times and in different locations.

She said:

My husband called them (the BWH) and knew that they run the classes two days a week and in two different locations, one of the locations was in my area. I was very happy to know about the classes. They looked suitable to me. You know ... women only participants, free transport and nearby location. It was an excellent opportunity, so I registered my name straightaway. (Hamida interview.)

The women only environment encouraged Hamida to join these classes "straightaway". She furthermore was very happy to attend these classes when she heard about them because they were very "suitable" to her, as she indicated. Hamida added that this suitability was not only because of the female-only environment, but also because of other female-related services the centre offers such as "sewing" classes and on-site childcare service for the children. When the researcher asked her "what else, other than the female-only environment" she liked in the classes, she stated:

They also have free sewing classes and a female carer to look after the kids while we study. This is very good ... I mean we can learn many other things and not only English. Our children are also being looked after while we study which makes it easy for

us to study and bring our kids with us, a service that we couldn't get at the TAFE classes. (Hamida, group discussion.)

According to this quote, these extra services the centre was offering (the free on-site childcare service and the sewing lessons) were very useful and encouraging to the IMIW because they were available only at female-only centres and not in the mixed-gender mainstream schools. Najat reported similar views to those of Hamida. Najat also left her English study at the TAFE and joined the women-only classes at the BWH. She reported:

One of my friends told me that the Broadmeadows Women's House offers free English classes for women. We checked with them (the BWH) and knew from them that they do offer free English classes for women only. They also told us that there are some Arab women in the classes (Iraqis and Lebanese). I was very happy to know about that and told my husband to register my name ASAP. (Najat, interview.)

The above quotes reveal that the women-only classes met Najat's needs in many ways. As discussed earlier, Najat is shy in nature and has very poor English skills, a female-only environment is ideal for her to study in as in such an environment she can practise her English with non-English speaking female peers without feeling embarrassed. She can also communicate and socialise in her first language (Arabic) with women who share with her the same culture and language. Najat also talked about another important motivator behind her decision to join the women only English classes. She stated:

Now [in the women-only classes] I can do anything I like without breaking my Islamic and cultural norms. For example, when I am at the school I can take off my HIJAB (hair scarf). I can also wear short or tight clothes because there are no stranger men at the school. You know, we cannot do these things

out in the public or when there are stranger men around us.
(Najat, interview.)

According to these words, Najat now (at the women-only classes) feels more freedom in her behaviours. She can study, move, and socialise inside the centre without wearing her full Islamic dress because she is within a female-only environment. It is noteworthy that in mainstream schools, Muslim women usually go wearing their full Islamic dress. But when it comes to the women-only classes, the story is different and they can wear anything they like because they are within a same-gender setting. This women-friendly environment at the BWH's classes does not only encourage Najat to wear anything she likes, but also gives her the courage to practise her English and participate in the class activities freely – a step that Najat was unable to take in the mainstream classes.

Janit's experience with the single-gender classes was remarkable to some extent, and similar. However she had no issue mixing with males. She agrees with Hamida and Najat that the women-only classes are more "comfortable" and "safe" when compared to the mainstream ones. In her interactions in the group discussion about the difference between the women-only classes and the mainstream classes, Janit said:

Yeah I do agree with you [all] that here [women-only classes] is better because you feel more satisfied studying with women like you and from you[r] community as well. Here you can do anything you like, wear anything you like and talk to anybody you like without being watched or bothered by others, especially males. (Janit, group discussion.)

As discussed earlier, Janit is a very social and active young female who is always surrounded by people including male strangers. Most of her female friends at the TAFE school are Muslims from her Iraqi community. This network of Muslim women did not favour mixing with men due to cultural and religious practices (as discussed earlier) and, as a result, influenced Janit's socialising with males at the school. When her friends at

the language school knew about the women-only classes at the BWH, many of them moved to these new classes.

This (as well as her husband's request to avoid mixing with male strangers) influenced Janit to leave the mainstream classes at the TAFE and join the single-gender classes at the BWH. According to her, Janit is now very "satisfied" studying at women-only classes because such an environment helps her avoid many social and family issues, especially with her husband and friends who prefer the female-only environment for study. Janit's comments also reveal that she is happy in this new environment because it enables her to stay with her friends at the same school, as well as to avoid the being "bothered" by the male students that happened in her mainstream school.

7.4 Discussion of the participants' views

It could be argued that the nature of classes in terms of gender participants played a key role in the IMIW's selection of English classes. While the research participants showed a clear reluctance to attend classes at the TAFE due to being mixed-gender, they also indicated significant happiness and comfort in the women-only classes at the Broadmeadows Women House. This "comfort" or "happiness" and sense of security the participants feel in single-gender classes are not related to Islamic restrictions only. Even though Islam prohibits free mixing of men and women privately outside the legal bounds of marriage, other sociocultural factors such as embarrassment and family reputation contributed to this reluctance.

On the other hand, the female-only nature of the women-only classes seems to be very encouraging to the IMIW at the personal, religious and cultural levels. In such classes, they can socialize and talk about their thoughts and experiences, as well as problems, with a group of peers of the same gender, and usually the same cultural and religious background. They can also dress, behave and act in any way they want without being watched or criticized by others. This kind of free behaviour and dress the learners at the women-only can experience is not available in the mainstream classes where Muslim women usually are in their full Islamic dress. This is because the behaviour of Muslim women, and particularly the married ones, in public or in mixed-gender settings, is highly restricted in the Islamic teachings and culture whilst, on the other hand, there are

no such restrictions in female-only settings. For instance, going out in public domains without wearing the *Hijab* is against the Islamic teachings and culture, but in women-only settings such as female schools or gatherings, the Hijab is not a requirement anymore.

Similarly, the social network of friends, relatives as well as the husbands of the learners, contributed to this low presence of Muslim women in mixed-gender classes. This can be seen clearly in Janit's case, when her Muslim friends and husband influenced her choice not to remain studying at mainstream mixed-gender classes at the TAFE and made her change to the women-only classes at the BWH. From the data obtained from this participant, her decision to change to female-only classes was to meet her cultural and religious requirements as well as her support network's advices. Such findings come in line with Rida and Milton's (2001) contention that Muslim women's networks influence their participation in the wider Australian society in general and in English learning in particular.

On the other hand, Janit's social networks of friends and relatives encouraged her participation in the women-only classes. It was her friend (Najat) who told her about the classes and encouraged her to join them and leave the mainstream classes at the TAFE. Her husband also contributed to this by encouraging her to do so. In light of this, it could be argued that the support networks and relatives of the IMIW have the potential to limit these immigrants' participation in mainstream programs and encourage their participation in women-only classes instead. This comes from the suggestion that women-only classes are culturally and religiously accepted by most Muslim women as they (Muslim women) view such classes as a good place to learn without any "embarrassment" or "restrictions" that might occur from the company of males.

The other female-friendly services the centre offers such as the free sewing classes and the on-site childcare are other important factors why the participants feel happy attending the women-only classes at this community centre. The researched women see such classes as an ideal environment for them to study the language, meet friends and

learn other skills, while their children are being looked after by a female carer at the same place. Such an environment also offers them the opportunity to practise their English language with non-English speaking peers who are, usually, at the same level of English proficiency: this abolishes the “embarrassment” these immigrants might have when practising their English at mainstream classes and amongst many male strangers. The findings this study presents support the current SLA research in terms of the difficulties Muslim women face in English learning in mainstream schools.

This researcher reported elsewhere (Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013) that mixed-gender classes is one of the important factors behind many Muslim women’s failure to attend their free English classes in Australia. Again, the data obtained from this research’s participants support this contention and show that single-gender classes is more attractive to Muslim women to the degree that many of them favoured it in preference to the mainstream mixed- gender ones. The findings also support Casimiro et al.’s (2007) argument that the needs and concerns of Muslim immigrant women are “more significant than others” and should be given special consideration in order to increase their social participation in the Australian society. These findings come in line with Casimiro et al.’s suggestions that “women-friendly” classes are a good tool for attracting immigrant women (and particularly Muslim women) to English classes and therefore for increasing their participation in Australian social life (Casimiro et al., 2007, p. 57).

In saying this, I do not argue that Islam prohibits its followers from participating in the wider Australian society, nor that it could be an obstacle, in some ways, for their learning English in Australia. It is true that Islam has some restrictions over its followers to the degree that they feel bounded in their social behaviours. However, on the other hand Islam is a very open religion and encourages social activities – the social relations amongst its followers, as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims. Islam restricts the total assimilation (that requires withdrawal from one’s own culture) of Muslims in other non-Muslim cultures, only because it encourages its followers to keep their Muslim identities as well as their Islamic norms and traditions.

It was reported early in this study that the researched IMIW have a strong desire to integrate well in their new country (refer to chapter 5). This is one of the main reasons why these immigrants are so willing to learn the English language. Gardner (2001) argues that when L2 learners (especially in the L2 community, as in the case of Australia) have a willingness to integrate with the L2 culture, they will learn and use the language of that group.

The current study supports this argument as the researched IMIW explicitly reported that learning and using English is necessary if they are to be able to engage more in the social Australian life. However, other researchers (e.g. Dornyei, 2006) argue that L2 learners' identification within the L2 target community may involve a complete withdrawal from the learners' own culture. This does not seem to be the case in the IMIW's learning of English in Australia. The study results show that their integration is caused by their desire to master the new language to assert themselves as "legitimate speakers" in the new community, as well as by their desire to position themselves well in the broader Australian English speaking society (Norton, 2013). This positioning, according to the results includes sustaining their cultural identities.

Indeed, the results show that the researched participants' reluctance to study at the mainstream mixed-gender Australian English schools is because it may cause them to abandon some of their cultural and religious norms as a part of their integration in the school community or the broader Australian society. It should be noted that not all the researched IMIW have the same views, but the discussion focused on in this chapter is about the three selected participants. This is because these participants clearly stated that they withdrew from the mainstream mixed-gender classes because they feared that their Islamic identities might be "damaged" by integrating in this way.

Viewed in this light, the data that was obtained from this group supports Gardner's contention that individuals learn L2 because they have the motivation to integrate by learning and using the target language. On the other hand, it contrasts with Dornyei's (2006) suggestion that this integration may cause the learners to withdraw from their

own cultures. Furthermore, the IMIW's desires to hold on to their own cultural and religious norms could be explained by Norton's second language learning theory.

Norton (1995), in her discussion about the Hungarian immigrant women learning English in Canada, argues that learning a second language helps immigrant women reform their social identities as well as identify who they are and how they relate to the world around them. This might be the case with this unique group of IMIW, as they clearly reported that they wanted to learn the new language and, at the same time, sustain their Islamic and Arabic identity. In other words, they want to learn and use English in a way that enabled them to be active participants in the Australian society, but as Arab Muslim women. This, according to them, could only be achieved by studying at the women-only classes.

7.5 Chapter summary

This chapter concludes that the researched IMIW in Australia prefer to study in single-gender classes where they can practise their English and socialise with peers who share with them the same gender and, sometimes, the same level of education and a similar cultural background. The chapter also reports that the IMIW feel "uncomfortable" studying in mixed-gender classes due to social, cultural and religious commitments including their commitment to Islamic norms and traditions as well as to the influence of their social networks of friends and relatives. Having said that, this research does not argue that the Australian government should only offer women-only English classes to Muslim immigrant women. It rather maintains that female-friendly settings are more successful in bringing immigrant women in general, and Muslim women in particular, into English learning and practise in Australia.

The data obtained directly from the participants highlight that the women-only classes in Melbourne is a good initiative that many local Muslim women are very happy to utilize. One should not neglect to mention, however, that female-only settings are not only favoured by Muslim women. Scholars, for example Casimiro et al. (2007) and Mansouri (2010) state that women *in general* feel more comfortable in settings where

they can interact, share their thoughts and feelings, as well as discuss personal issues, within a group of peers who share the same gender.

Nevertheless, the question arises as to what degree the women-only classes are successful in bringing Muslim women to English learning? From the data that was collected directly from the participants, it can be argued that on the one hand these classes are very successful in attracting Muslim women to English learning. However, on the other hand there are still many challenges to be faced in increasing the IMIW's English learning to the levels they desire and need. For one, the number of Muslim women who utilise the free English classes is relatively low. This study has found that the number of women-only courses available in Melbourne is minimal and Iraqi Muslim women, usually, have to travel long distances to attend them. This might limit the number of Muslim women who access women-only classes, as well as other English learning services in general. To sum up, it could be argued that the women-only programs are a good initiative that needs much attention from the Australian government. Therefore, perhaps this is the time now that these programs should be increased and promoted to include more non-English speaking immigrant women.

Chapter Eight: General discussion, implications and conclusion

8. Overview

This chapter provides an insightful discussion (in light of the literature researched) on the topic of this research. The chapter discusses the interrelationships between the factors most relevant in regard to IMIW's English learning in Australia, as well as the interrelationship between the learners' mastering of English and their integration into the Australian social setting. The chapter also presents implications and recommendations to the stakeholders such as the Australian government, language policy makers, curriculum developers, non-governmental bodies, teaching institutions and the Iraqi community in Melbourne, about the importance of optimizing the provision of the women-only English classes to satisfy the unique needs and circumstances of this special group, the IMIW. In what follows, an extensive summary of the study is presented, within the scope and the limited size of the research.

8.1 The social dimension of the IMIW's English learning in Australia

From a sociocultural perspective, social interaction between the L2 learners and the host community is essential in mastering the target language (Atkinson, 2011; Davydov, 1995; Ellis, 1994; Lantolf, 2011; Ortega, 2011; Vygotsky, 1991). In fact, seen through Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, it could be argued that the IMIW's English learning in Australia cannot be achieved without successful social interaction between these immigrants and the English-speaking Australians. This kind of interaction, according to (Davydov, 1995), might happen through their teacher-learner interaction at the language schools, or when they practise their new language with individuals in the broader Australian society.

Rogoff (1995 & 1990), furthermore asserts the importance of learners' interactions with individuals in the social setting of their learning. She argues that this kind of social interaction happens over three stages – the communal, interpersonal, and personal stages. The study results illustrate this importance of learners' interactions with

individuals in the social setting of their learning, as this has been found in the IMIW's questionnaire, interview and group discussion data. In regard to the communal aspect, the researched IMIW showed significant desire to integrate within the Australian community and participate in the community's social activities – which is where they continue to improve their learning and practice of communicating in English. Following Watson's (2009) findings, these immigrants' interaction within Australian society first helps them to develop better capabilities in their use of English. Secondly, through the influenced by the social, cultural, and political norms of the Australian L2 situation and community they are now living in, they become fully integrated into the English language target community – the Australian multi-cultural society which is dominated by English as its main language (Rogoff, 1995).

This mutual relationship between the IMIW's English learning and their integration within the Australian community could also be explained by Gardner's et al (2004) argument. Gardner et al. stated that not only the desire to integrate within the target community will help L2 learners acquire the new language, but also their use of the L2 will increase their positive attitudes towards the L2 target community. Viewed through these lenses, the desire to integrate into Australian society and participate in its social life that these immigrants showed is clearly linked to their learning and use of English. That is, their continuous learning and use of this language enables them to be in direct contact with Australian society, which in turn makes them become more motivated to know more about this community and learn its language.

The interpersonal aspect of the IMIW's learning on English in Australia is also explained by Rogoff (1995), who states that L2 learners are influenced by the individuals or groups with whom they interact in society. The data obtained from the researched group revealed that their relationships with the individuals in the social world around them are also affected by their English learning experience. As discussed in Chapter Six, some of the researched IMIW “modified” their social relations with their family members, relatives and friends to adapt to the experience of a new way of living that enables them to continue to learn the English language with more and more ease. In other words, these immigrants fully understand that their English learning in

Australia is very challenging. Nevertheless, they are able to “re-construct” their family relations to cope with these challenges and continue their learning of English. An example of this is when they arranged with their husbands that their husbands stay home and take care of the children so they can go to their English classes (see 6.1)

Vygotsky (1991, p. 70) asserts that learning a second language is influenced by the social world around the learner, and that this process also restructures all the functions of behaviour of that learner. The IMIW’s restructuring of their family relations, according to this view, is a consequence of integrating into the new social world associated with their learning of the new language in this new country. This also supports Rogoff’s (1995) argument that learning a new language affects the learners’ interpersonal relationships with the people around them. Moreover, according to the data the L2’s behaviours in the broader Australian community are also seemed to be reconstructed due to their English learning and use. For example, these immigrants do not usually engage in relations with non-Muslim people or participate in public activities outside of their own communities.

However, the results showed that many IMIW’s are now having English-speaking friends and neighbours that they relate to and spend time with. They even accompany these others to social (mixed-gender) events. This active social participation would not happen without the English language learning. This is interesting because it helps these immigrants create new relationships with people from different backgrounds and keep in touch with them despite their poor (but developing) English skills. With this in mind, it could be argued that the IMIW’s English learning in Australia is a social process that is, on the one hand, highly influenced by the sociocultural settings around the learner and, on the other hand, influences their social behaviours.

At the personal level, in relation to Gardner’s (2001a, p. 10) contention that the integratively motivated learner of a second language “has a desire or willingness to identify with the other language community”, the researched IMIW showed a significant desire to identify within the Australian community, as well as a willingness to learn and use the English language (see 5.1). Indeed, the use of the English language

in their daily interactions helps them integrate into Australian society by enabling them to be active participants in Australian social life. As Scarino & Liddicoat (2009) noticed, the use of the language makes it possible for people to identify themselves in a new environment as well as make sense of the events and interactions in a new community, which seems to be the case in this cultural group's use of English in Australia.

Based on the above discussion, it could be argued that the learning and use of English language increases the IMIW's social participation in Australia and helps them "assimilate" into the Australian broader community (see 5.2), which is a primary goal of the Australian Social Inclusion Policy (ASIP) (Ingram, 2000, p. 4). This is also asserted by the Australian Social Inclusion Board (ASIB, 2012) which maintains that people with limited English skills are less likely to attend community events and participate in Australian social life. This increase in the IMIW's social participation in Australia is, in light of Vygotsky's theories, also adding to the development and growth of Australian society. According to this view, these immigrants' mastering of English will influence the Australian society on many social, economic, security and developmental levels (Casimiro et al., 2007; Ingram, 2000; McCue, 2008). That is, their social participation in the wider Australian community and workplace will, in turn, enhance the Australian economy and social harmony and security.

As discussed earlier (see 5.2), the IMIW's learning of English in Australia happens more easily during their interaction with the speakers of that language in real-life situations. This means that this process cannot be successful without support from the society of the target language. As mentioned above, Australia (through the Australian Social Inclusion Policy) seeks to assimilate immigrants into the wider Australian society through equipping them with the necessary English skills to increase their social participation (ASIP, 2008). This cannot happen without Australian society being supportive and encouraging. Gardner et al. (2004) provide a good explanation in their socio-educational model. They posit that when L2 learners have positive attitudes towards the L2 target community, their learning will be more successful. They further add that if the

target community is supportive and encouraging, the learning process will be successful. And if the L2 society is not supportive and not encouraging, the learning will not be successful.

The study found that the researched IMIW are provided with much support from English-speaking Australians with regard to their English learning and use (see 5.1, 5.2). And the help they get from their English-speaking teachers, neighbours or friends when they practise the language with them facilitates their learning. In recent years I was working as a volunteer tutor at the AMES language centre in Dandenong. My major duty was to give immigrants who have very little English experience extra English lessons to help them cope with their formal classes. From my own observation of these learners, they are provided with substantial language support from their teachers and friends. From my observations this can clearly smooth their English learning as well as their adjustment into their new community.

8.2 The IMIW social identity reconstruction through the use of L2

In light of the above discussion, the IMIW face many challenges in their English language learning in Australia. They have less chance to access mainstream English classes due to sociocultural constraints. They also have difficulty in utilizing the women-only classes due to their limited provision and limited information about these classes. Despite that, the researched IMIW showed a significant desire to learn and use English in Australia. Finding the explanation to this seeming contradiction in the literature has not been difficult. If we perceive these women's learning of English from Norton's (1995) viewpoint we find that these women are striving to feel accepted in the community they have newly joined. As some of these women stated, they learn English to, for example, talk to the family doctor, the shop keeper, the bus driver, or even to help their children with homework.

These results are consistent with Norton's (1995) contention that, when arriving in a new community, the immigrant women face specific discourses in which they may feel underequipped if they are unable to speak the target community language. This can be

seen clearly in the case of the IMIW in this study who spend remarkable effort learning English despite the restrictions they have. Their daily needs for English as well as their desire to be understood by the Australian community are strong motivators in their English learning in Australia.

The study has furthermore identified that these women's use of the English language is not only to find acceptance in the Australian community, but also to gain more social empowerment. This also corroborates Norton's (2013) contention that when immigrants learn a second language, they do so with an understanding that they will gain more social empowerment, which in turn will help them reform their social identity, as well as positioning themselves well in their new society. Indeed, the researched IMIW clearly stated that their use of English empowers them in the community. They feel more comfortable and secure going out by themselves because with English they have the ability to deal with difficult situations or with problems: they can look out for themselves when anything goes wrong, an action that they cannot do without knowing how to speak the language.

The study has also found that the IMIW's social identities are constantly reforming through learning and using English. That is, when they use their new language in the broader Australian community they do not only exchange information with people around them, but they are also constantly reconstructing themselves in the sense of defining "who am I", "who are they" (Norton, 2000, p. 19). In so doing, these immigrants are positioning themselves as "legitimate speakers" in this new community and also positioning the others as equal to them. This is because acquiring the new language enhances their "self-knowledge" as well as the way they perceive and position themselves in their new community. Such positioning is, again, due to the social empowerment these immigrants get from their ability to use the language of the new community that they now live in (Norton, 2015, p. 49).

Based on this interpretation, it could be argued that these immigrants' motivation to learn and use English in Australia is not only due to their highly positive attitudes and integrativeness towards this language and its cultural group. Viewed according to

Norton's (1995) Investment concept in second language learning, these immigrants are also "investing" in their second language learning in this country. Norton (2013) argues that L2 learners may be motivated towards learning the new language, but may have little investment in the language practices of the L2 target community. According to Norton this may be because, for example, the L2 learner may find their new society to be "racist ..., anti-immigrant or homophobic" (p. 421). As a result the L2 learner might choose not to participate in learning activities or social activities in that community. Indeed, the data that was obtained from the participating IMIW supported this contention and showed some "Investment", rather than a lack of investment, in this group's English learning. In addition to being highly motivated to learn and use the new language, the study found that these immigrants used their English learning to gain more social capital and empowerment in order to assert themselves in the Australian community.

8.3 Implications and recommendation for future research

Arriving at this point, the study has presented useful findings that the IMIW, language policy makers, teachers as well as ESL program coordinators can make good use of. To begin with, the study confirms that the IMIW have positive attitudes towards learning and using English. One major consequence of their positive attitudes is their desire to know much about the Australian culture in order to adjust successfully into the Australian community. Language policy makers, teachers and ESL program coordinators may need to pay more attention to this. Perhaps they could develop strategies such as using more authentic materials to teach these learners about Australian culture, values and habits (in which the participants showed interest) in order to motivate them towards more English learning. The findings also revealed that the oral help the learners get from their friends, family members, teachers and classmates (through talking in English) is very encouraging to them as it enables them to correct their errors and, in turn, learn more English. Thus, this practice needs to be sustained to increase these learners' English competency.

One might ask the question: How successful then is the IMIW's English learning in Australia? By examining the results of this study, it could be argued that this cultural group's English learning is not successful enough to enable them to learn the language easily and in a reasonable time. Their access to English language services, particularly the mainstream English classes, is also not easy. Despite the suggestion that to learn English these immigrants have sustainable motivation derived from their positive attitudes towards this language and its cultural group, the data showed that their access to mainstream classes is not successful enough. This is due to their religious/cultural and family commitments, including their reluctance to attend mixed-gender classes, the influential support networks of friends and relatives, and the IMIW's heavy home and family duties.

These findings are supported by other current literature on Muslim women's English learning in Australia which identifies that Muslim women have special cultural and religious needs that need to be satisfied in order to increase their access to English classes (Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013; AMES, 2008; Casimiro et al., 2007; DEEWR 2009; Macrae, 2002; McCue, 2008; Rida & Milton, 2001; Mansouri, 2010; Yasmeen, 2007). To enhance English learning in Australia, some of these researchers provided suggestions to ensure the maximum participation of immigrant women, particularly Muslims in English classes. For example, Casimiro et al. (2007) reported that the mixed-gender environment is reducing the access of Muslim women to their free English entitlement and suggested that providing women-only programs might increase their access to this free service.

In light of this discussion, the initiative of the women-only classes that some of the Australian language institutes started offering several decades ago has been very successful in attracting Muslim women to more learning of this language. However, the findings of this study showed that the limited provision of these classes acts as a big obstacle in the IMIW's access to this service. The study found that such programs are available only in larger suburbs and this limits the numbers of Muslim women accessing them. Travel difficulties prove to be too significant for those who live in smaller suburbs, especially for those who have numerous home and family responsibilities. The

little information available about such classes is also reported as a negative influence in the IMIW's access to this service. As discussed in previous chapters, only 17% of the researched IMIW had information about the availability of the women-only classes in Melbourne. This has contributed, to a large extent, to the low level of these immigrants' presence in the classes.

The present study has examined the IMIW's access to the women-only English classes in Australia and the sociocultural factors that may affect this access. Even though the findings from this study are confirmed to the context in which it was conducted (IMIW in Melbourne, Australia), they might also be applicable to other Muslim women in similar environments, although establishing this was not a concern of this project. This is because the basic principle of transferability in qualitative research is that the results always have the potential to be applicable in similar settings (Stake, 1995). Moreover, the study has only investigated the sociocultural factors in these immigrants English learning with little attention being paid to the educational ones. Once again, this is because of the scope and time/word constraints of the study. Viewed in this light, further research that can cover a larger population of Iraqi immigrants in Australia and, at the same time, investigate both the social and educational factors, would be interesting and valuable.

To sum up, Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women are a unique cultural group that have many special needs, especially when it comes to their access to English classes. Hence it may take a while for their needs to be fully recognised in Australia. Research such as this present project may help to raise awareness of these needs – and increase the push toward the availability of women-only classes, and the prominent advertising of these classes.

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Appendices

Appendix. 1 Explanatory Statement



Explanatory Statement

Explanatory Statement - Iraqi Muslim immigrant women

Title: Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women's access to women-only English classes in Australia

This information sheet is for you to keep

My name is Hassan Mahdi Abdilah and I am conducting a research project with Dr. Dat Bao, Lecturer in the Faculty of Education, towards a PhD in education at Monash University. This means that I will be writing a thesis which is the equivalent of 90,000 words.

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before making a decision.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You are Iraqi Muslim immigrant women who live in Melbourne. My study explores the access of Iraqi Muslim immigrant women to women-only English classes in Melbourne. I am looking for women participants who are members of the Iraqi community in Melbourne and have arrived in Australia during the last 10 years.

After you contact me via the phone number or E-Mail address listed in the advertising statement, I will meet you to explain the research and then give you a consent form. You will be asked to sign this form that will remain with Monash University for their records. An interview will be arranged to ask you questions in relation to the research questions.

The aim/purpose of the research

The aim of this study is to explore the access of Iraqi Muslim immigrant women to the women-only English classes in Melbourne. I am conducting this research to find out and answer the following:

- 1- What are the literacy needs of Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women in Australia and to what extent have these needs been met by the existing English language literacy programs?
- 2- What sociocultural factors influence IMIW's participation and success in the women-only English language literacy programs?
- 3- How can these women-only English classes be optimized for greater efficiency for IMIW in their learning of English

Possible benefits

I chose this research topic because it is a very important issue in terms of understanding and responding to some of the cultural and educational challenges Muslim immigrant women like yourself are facing when learning English in Australia.

What does the research involve?

The study involves administering a short questionnaire, audio recording semi- structured interviews and a focus group. These interviews will be performed at public library near your residence.

How much time will the research take?

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes.

Inconvenience/discomfort

No serious event or emergency is anticipated. To avoid any discomfort, however, a colleague female researcher from Monash University will meet you in a public library. This will provide you a safe environment during the conduct of the study.

Payment

A \$20 Target gift card will be offered to each participant.

Can I withdraw from the research?

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. However, if you do consent to participate, you may only withdraw prior to the time when you would be asked to answer the questions in the interview.

Confidentiality

All participants will be asked to provide pseudonyms and all data will be reported using these pseudonyms in a way which protects your identity. You will also be given the opportunity to view the transcribed interview data being used and the right to say no to the data being reported.

Storage of data

Storage of data collected will adhere to the University regulations and kept on University premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years.

Use of data for other purposes

A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

Results

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact **Hassan Abdilah** [REDACTED]. The findings are accessible for 5 years.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research is being conducted, please contact:
<p>Dr Dat Bao</p> <p>Position Lecturer</p> <p>Org. unit Faculty of Education Faculty of Education, Clayton Education Clayton Campus</p> <p>██████████ ████████████████████</p> <p>██████████ ████████████████████</p>	<p>Executive Officer Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800</p> <p>██████████████████ ████████████████████</p> <p>██</p>

Thank you.

Hassan Abdilah

Appendix. 2 Consent Form



Consent Form

Title: Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women's access to women-only

English classes in Australia

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records.

I understand I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records.

I understand that:	YES	NO
- I will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- unless I otherwise inform the researcher before the interview I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- I will be asked to complete questionnaires asking me about Iraqi Muslim Immigrant Women's access to women-only English classes in Melbourne	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- I will be asked to take part in a focus group of up to six people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

And I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

and

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics without my signed consent below.

and/or

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

and/or

**I understand that I may ask at any time for my data to be withdrawn from the project
and/or**

**I understand that no information I have provided that could lead to the identification of any other
individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party**

and

**I understand that data from the <interview that includes audio recording > will be kept in secure
storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after
a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.**

**And I do give permission to be identified by a pseudonym at all times in publications from the
project.**

Participant's name: _____

Signature: _____

Date:

Appendix. 3 Flyer

To the Iraqi Muslim immigrant women

I am a student researcher and a member of the Iraqi community, currently doing my PhD research at Monash University, Clayton campus. The study examines the Iraqi Muslim immigrant women access to women-only English classes in Melbourne. I am looking for volunteers to take part in the study. As a participant, you will be interviewed to answer a short questionnaire as well as few open-ended questions regarding your access to the women-only English classes. You will, also, be required to attend a focus group about the same subject. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes, whilst the focus group will last for one hour. Your help is highly appreciated as you will help me provide important data about Iraqi Muslim immigrant women English learning in Australia.

If you are interested, please contact me on:

████████████████████

██

N/B: participant will get a \$20 Target gift card

Thank you

Hassan Abdilah

Appendix. 4 Questionnaire (English)



MONASH University
Education

Name:

genre:

age:

PLEASE TICK THE BOX WHICH BEST EXPRESS YOUR POINT OF VIEW:

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Attitudes toward English learning					
Learning English is really great.					
I really enjoy learning English.					
I Plan to learn English as much as I can.					
I wish I were fluent in English.					
Learning English is a waste of time.					
Studying English is very important.					
When I leave school, I will give up the learning of English because I am not interested in it.					
I hate English.					
Integrative Orientation					
Studying English is important because it will enable me to communicate with English speaking Australians					
Studying English is important because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.					

Studying English is important because it will enhance my participation in daily activities in Australia					
Studying English is important for me because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate Australian culture and literature.					
Studying English is important to me because it will allow me to keep in touch with English speaking friends and acquaintances.					
Women-Only English Programs					
I have heard about the women-only English programs in Melbourne					
These programs are important because they encourage more women to study English in Australia.					
I am currently enrolled in a women-only English class in Melbourne.					
I will enroll in these programs when they become available in my area.					

Based on: Gardner, R. C. Clement, R. Symthe, P. C. (1985-2004). The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery: Technical Report. *UWO press*, P.P 1-26

Appendix. 5 Questionnaire (Arabic)



MONASH University
Education

أستبيان حول دوافع تعلم اللغة الانجليزية

الاسم(اختياري): الجنس: العمر:

الرجاء وضع اشارة في المربع الذي تعتقد انه يناسب وجهة نظرك بشكل افضل.

لا وافق بشدة	لا وافق	محايد	وافق	وافق بشدة	الفقرة
الشعور تجاه اللغة الانجليزية:					
					تعلم الانكليزية شيء رائع.
					انا فعلا استمتع بتعلم الانكليزية.
					انا اخطط لتعلم اكبر قدر من الانكليزية.
					اتمنى لو اني كنت ناطقا فصيحاً في اللغة الانكليزية.
					تعلم الانكليزية هو مضيق للوقت.
					تعلم الانكليزية شيء ممل
					لا انوي تعلم المزيد من اللغة الانكليزية لانني غير مهتما بها.
					انا اكره الانكليزية.
الاندماج مع اللغة الانكليزية :					
					دراسة الانكليزية مهمة لانها تجعلني مرتاحا اكثر بالتحدث مع الاستراليين الناطقين بالانكليزية.
					دراسة الانكليزية مهمة لانها تجعلني التقى واتحدث مع اناس كثيره ومختلفة.
					دراسة الانكليزية مهمة لانها تجعلني قادرا على المشاركة بحرية اكبر في النشاطات التي تعقد باللغة الانكليزية في استراليا
					دراسة الانكليزية مهمة بالنسبة لي لانها ستمكنني من فهم وتقدير الثقافه والادب الاستراليين بشكل افضل.
					دراسة الانكليزية مهمة بالنسبة لي لانها تبقيني على اتصال دائم مع اصدقائي ومعارفي من الناطقين بالانكليزية.

					برامج تعلم اللغة الانكليزية للنساء فقط
					لقد سمعت عن هذه البرامج وتوافرها في مدينة مليبورن
					هذه البرامج مهمة لانها تحفز النساء للمشاركة في دروس تعلم اللغة الانكليزية في استراليا.
					انا الان ادرس في برنامج تعلم الانكليزية للنساء فقط (يرجى اعطاء سبب الموافقة او عدم الموافقة على هذه الفقرة في المربع ادناه)
					انوي الدراسة في هذه البرامج اذا اتاحت لي الفرصة. (يرجى اعطاء سبب الموافقة او عدم الموافقة على هذه الفقرة في المربع ادناه)

Appendix. 6 Interview Questions (English)

Interview Questions

Background (for all participants)

1. When did you arrive in Australia? Give year.
2. What made you decide to come to Australia?
3. How do you rate your English? (very good - good - poor - non-existent)
4. Have you taken any English courses in Australia? If yes, please say more about it/them and the school you are studying in?
5. If you haven't taken any English courses in Australia, can you tell us why?
6. Have you heard about the women-only English courses in Melbourne?
7. If yes, have you joined them and what motivated you to do so?
8. If no, will you join them if they are available in your city?
9. Are there any things in your life that prevent you from studying English in Australia?
10. Are there any things in your English course that encourage you to study English more?
11. Please tell me more about them and how they motivate/de motivate your English learning?

Follow-up Questions

Depending on participants' answers to the questionnaire items, I will select three or four answers and ask them "Can you please tell me more about why you chose this answer?"

For example, for participants who make their answer (agree) to the item (6):

- Learning English is very important, I will ask the following:

-Why do you think that learning English is important in Australia?

-Do you think that English facilitates your life in Australia? How?

-What else you want to say about the role of English in your settlement in Australia?

Appendix. 7 Interview Questions (Arabic)

Interview Questions

اسئلة المقابلة

اسئلة عامة لجميع المشاركين:

1. متى وصلت الى استراليا؟ اعطي السنة.
2. ما الذي جعلك تقرر المجيء الى استراليا؟
3. كيف تقيم لغتك الانجليزية؟ (جيدة جدا - جيدة - ضعيفة - معدومة)
4. هل دخلت في اي برنامج دراسي لتعليم الانجليزية في استراليا؟ اذا كان الجواب نعم، الرجاء اعطاء تفاصيل اكثر عن هذا البرنامج
5. اين تدرس الان؟ الرجاء اخباري اكثر عن المدرسة التي تدرس فيها حاليا.
6. منذ متى وانت تدرس اللغة الانجليزية؟ اخبرني اكثر عن برنامج تعليم الانجليزية الذي انت به الان.
7. هل تشعر بان لديك الحافز لتعلم واستعمال الانجليزية؟ لماذا؟ لم لا؟
8. هل هناك اشياء في برنامج تعلم الانجليزية الذي انت به الان تشجعك اكثر على دراسة الانجليزية؟ الرجاء اخباري اكثر عن هذه الاشياء وكيف انها تحفز تعليمك للانجليزية.

اسئلة متابعة لاجوبة الاستبيان:

اعتمادا على اجوبة المشاركين لاسئلة الاستبيان، سأقوم باختيار ثلاثة او اربعة اجوبة ومن ثم سؤال المشاركين: هل تستطيع اخباري اكثر عن السبب وراء اختيارك لهذا الجواب؟

كمثال على ذلك: بالنسبة للمشاركين الذين كان جوابهم (موافق) للفقرة رقم(8): انا اكره اللغة الانجليزية.

سأسئلهم التالي:

- 1- ماذا تكره في الانجليزية؟
- 2- كيف يرتبط هذا الشعور بطريقه فهمك لمعلمك وزملائك في الصف؟
- 3- هل هناك اسباب اخرى وراء قولك انك تكره الانجليزية؟