How culturally situated notions of 'Politeness' forms influence the way Saudi postgraduate students write academic English?

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Statement of Authorship

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other

degree or diploma in any educational institution and, to the best of my knowledge and

belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person,

except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

The research for this thesis received the approval of the Monash University Standing

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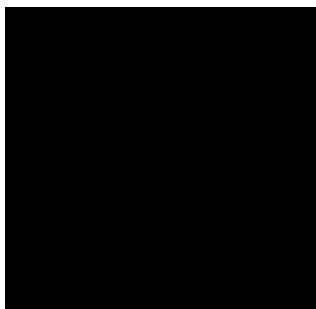
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Abstract

An increasing number of Saudi students are pursuing postgraduate degrees in Australian universities, which is partly a result of greater recognition of English as an important language for academic purposes. This has benefited Saudi students, allowing them to study their discipline in academic environments in multi-cultural universities in Australia. However, it has meant that they face certain cross-cultural challenges when communicating in English, especially in academic writing. This study aims to explore Saudi postgraduate students' experiences in writing academic Arabic and academic English in Australian universities, with a special focus on how the Saudi culturally situated notion of "politeness" influences their academic writing in English. Other influences include the impact of religious such "Islam", Arabic writing conventions and cultural stylistic differences in expressing ideas. To investigate this, a qualitative approach was employed, involving the collection of data from semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted individually with four Saudi postgraduate students from the Faculties of Arts and Education.

The research findings reveal that, all students have encountered intercultural miscommunication in writing academic English and that they identify religion and culture as factors that influence their academic writing in English. In light of politeness in academic English writing, this study establishes the principle of politeness from Saudi postgraduate students ' perspectives. Finally, recommendations are provided for academic lecturers so that they can better understand Saudi postgraduate students' experiences in writing academic English.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Overview

This chapter provides a brief outline of the study. It starts with the background of the study and the research problem. It provides a description of the researcher's interest in conducting this study. The aims of the research, the research questions and the design of the research are presented. At the end of the chapter, there is an outline that includes the organisation of the thesis.

1.2 Background of the study

In 2005, during the age of development in Saudi Arabia, the King Abdullah Scholarship program (KASP) was established. The King Abdullah Scholarship program is considered the largest scholarship program in the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013). It began with an agreement between King Abdullah and the president of the US, George Bush, in order to increase the number of Saudi students enrolled in universities in the United States. However, cultural exchange experiences with countries worldwide and acquiring knowledge and education were added as other goals for KASP, which extended the reach of the program into many countries, including Australia, Canada, and the UK. Consequently, the number of Saudi university students enrolled in Australia had increased to 10,300 in 2013(Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013). This is due to the higher recognition of the importance of learning English for academic

purposes or for international communication, along with integration with different cultures.

From my own experience as a Saudi postgraduate student who benefitted from the KASP, which assisted me to pursue my postgraduate degree in the Faculty of Arts in an Australian university, I found that using English to communicate with English speakers led me to face unexpected issues during my studies, especially in English academic writing. This could have been caused by the mismatch between my style of academic writing, which was influenced by Arabic cultural norms, and the requirements of writing academic English in Australia.

As I am a Saudi Arabic teacher who has an undergraduate degree in Arabic language and is currently pursuing aMaster's degree inApplied Linguistics in Australia, I understand and have experienced how challenging it is for Saudi postgraduate students in Australia to be understood by English lecturers, particularly with regard to the way they write in an academic context. Looking back at one of my Arabic essays and comparing it with one of my first English essays, I can see the differences between Arabic and English styles. For me, some of my Arabic writing styles are still reflected in my English academic writing which, therefore, affected my general language use. The differences in the two styles were present in the organisation of the writing, the use of specific forms of discourse, the politeness style, and the way I developed my essay's arguments. At that time, receiving feedback from my English lecturer at Australian university about the way I organizedmy assignments made me think about my way of writing. My lecturer's comments were: *'why did you choose this word?'; 'your review of the journal demonstrates that you have examined the material carefully. However, it would be more useful if you think critically and use theories to support your points';* and *'Be careful about discourse structure… or do not*

extend your introduction too broadly'. In fact, I fully understood the assignment requirements and I had the ability to express my points in an academic English context. However, I have realised that I was facing intercultural miscommunication, as academic English writing is different from my Arabic writing styles.

These issues in writing have been of interests to many scholars, and are the main focus of an area of inquiry called Contrastive Rhetoric (Kaplan, 1966, as cited in Connor, 2004). Contrastive Rhetoric is an area of inquiry that investigates writing across cultures and languages and explores the similarities and differences in L1 and L2 writing texts (Connor, 2008). Kaplan (1966) was the first to study the influence of first language on second language writing through analysing the organisation of paragraphs by Arabic-speaking students and English-speaking students. Kaplan's study characterised the style of Arab students as 'indirect' with more 'repetition', which led many Arab scholars to criticise his analysis. For instance, in 1997, Hatim stated that the studies of contrastive rhetoric in Arabic and English writing are 'characterised by a general vagueness of thought which stems from overemphasis on the symbol at the expense of the meaning' (p. 161). Hatim (1997) admits the differences between Arabic and English styles of writing and argumentation, which is in line with Hottel-Burkhart (2000 as cited in Connor, 2004, p. 501) who claims that 'what is considered an argument in a culture is shaped by the rhetoric of that culture'.

Given the factthat Saudi students bring their cultural convention of writing to their academic writing English; it is, therefore, important to study how this influence is revealed in their writing practice in English. This understanding has deepenedmy determination and interest in exploring various aspects of the intercultural issues that Saudi postgraduate students face. Specifically, it has strongly enhanced my desire to

examine their academic writing in English and to discover the different norms of politeness they apply in their academic English writing.

Many previous ContrastiveRhetoric studies (e.g. Kaplan, 1966; Al-Jarrah, 2001; Ismail, 2010) have focused on the texts written by students, with little attention to the cultural differences and the influence of linguistic background of the writer. Other studies have proposed that the writer's first language controlled the writer's thoughts when writing in a second language, defining culture based on geographical entities and considering it homogenous and unchanging (Hatim, 1997; Hottel-Burkhart, 2000; Kaplan, 1966). Thus, considering the limitations of these studies, my intention is to raise the level of awareness of both Saudi postgraduate students and Australian English lecturers about the culture clash the former encounter when studying in Australian universities. My research aims to investigate how Saudi postgraduate students in Australia write academic English, in an attempt to shed light on Arabic style and its influence when writing English in an academic context. It is well known that English is becoming everyone's language, as it is considered an international language of communication and the global language of business. Thus, Saudi students should have the right to use the English language without hesitation in ways that allow their Arabic culture to be expressed when they communicate in writing.

1.3 Research aims

The objectives of this research are to: 1) explore the way Saudi postgraduate students write academic English from the perspective of English as an international language (EIL); 2) introduce the different forms of politeness that Saudi postgraduate students use from their culture in their academic writing; 3) identify any other factors that may

cause Saudi students to write English as they do; 4) help English lecturers gain a greater understanding of the writing experience and knowledge of Saudi postgraduate students in both Arabic and English languages.

1.4 Research design

A qualitative method was used in this research to gain perceptions from some Saudi postgraduate students about their approaches to English academic writing during their studies in Melbourne universities. I carried out this research using an in-depth interview method, which I found suitable to meet the goals of this research. The qualitative method seeks to discover learners' experiences, in this case, their experiences with English academic writing. Using the qualitative method is well recommended for understanding learners' perceptions and gaining subjective interpretations, in order to convey different views of the researched problems (Guba& Lincoln, 1998). Thus, qualitative studies are appropriate for investigating social issues in natural settings because they offer researchers the opportunity to discover the meaning brought by participants (Dornyei, 2007; Creswell, 2003; Neuman, 2003).

1.5 Research questions

The research seeks to answer the following key questions:

(1) How do Saudi postgraduate students write academically in English and Arabic?

(2) How do Saudi postgraduate students present their norms of politeness in their academic writing in English?

(3) How do other factors influence their writing in academic English?

(4) Based on the findings, how can Australian universities support those students in their writing?

To answer the above questions, I used a semi-structured interview, since this provides the best potential understanding of the issue being researched. This interview format encourages the interviewees to express information about the researched issue in friendly settings. For this research, fourSaudi postgraduate students were recruited and interviewed for forty minutes. They were asked ten questions regarding their ways and styles of writing academic English. During the interview, the researcher discussed their essays in English to get in-depth perceptions about the reasonsbehind their writing in such styles. These interviews will be analysed and interpreted to reach conclusions.

1.6 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is the introduction, in which the background of the study and the research questions are presented. Chapter two reviews the literature on the different issues related to using English as an international language (EIL), discussing intercultural writing in general and explaining English and Arabic writing in particular, with indications of some Arabic writing standards. Chapter three describes the qualitative research methodology, with a focus on in-depth interviewing methods. Chapter four presents the findings of the interviews and reports these findings in the light of the research literature. Chapter five presents the conclusion of the thesis and provides recommendations to Australian universities and lecturers to assist Saudi postgraduate students in their writing in English. Following these chapters, appendices and references are attached as supplements to this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Overview

This chapter will review some research literature in the field of English as an international language (EIL). This is followed by a review of intercultural miscommunication in academic writing and a presentation of some studies in contrastive rhetoric (CR) and intercultural rhetoric. It also reviews a description of English and Arabic academic writing in terms of 'literacy', 'relevance' and 'politeness'. The review of these three notions will compare the views of different authors and the personal opinions from Saudi students regarding English and Arabic writing.

2.2 English as an international language (EIL)

British colonisation in the 19th century and the emergence of the United States as the leading economic and political force were the two main factors for the initial spread ofEnglish. Besides these factors, economic development and globalisation have made English the language that is mostly used and learnt by people from over the world who want to take advantage of the progress made in technology, science, and education. This has established "a diasporic base for the language, which is probably a key factor in the adoption of a language as a lingua franca" (Graddol, 1997, p.14). Thus, the spread of English in the 20th century has resulted in a shift from a view of English as belonging to Britons and Americans to the emergence of new and complex

notions regarding English (Liou, 2010). Specifically, during the process of globalisation, English has become a second or foreign language in most countries, and it is also used in workplaces and in the media. Also, many people move to countries in which English is used in their daily communication, which leads to the development of different varieties of English, as more communication in English today is between non-native English-speakers than between native English-speakers (Yano, 2003). It has been predicted that the number of non-native English-speakers will reach almost 462 million over the next five decades (Graddol, 1999). All of this has led to the emergence of the concept of 'English as an international language,' or EIL (e.g., Matsuda, 2012; McKay, 2002; Sharifian, 2009).

English has acquired the status of international language as an increasing number of countries use English as an official or the preferred foreign language that istaught in school and acquired as an additional language. As a result, "English is now the language most widely taught as a foreign language – in over 100 countries…and in most of these countries it is emerging as the chief foreign language to be encountered in schools" (Crystal, 2003, p. 5). Moreover, the changing status of English has resulted to the changing in its users' backgrounds. It is commonly agreed that most English users today are bilingual or multilingual (Yano, 2003). Linguists have estimated that approximately 80 percent of today's communication in English is between non-native speakers around the world, which leads to language exchange and the emergence of intercultural communication (Crystal, 1997; Sharifian, 2013).

The growing number of English-using countries and speakers has led to more diversity usage, which then brings about complex usage patterns and the emergence

of world Englishes (WEs) (Kachru, 1986, 1992). Kachru (1986) has classified English-using countries into three circles, based on "the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used in intercultural communications and languages" (Kachru, 1986, p.12, as cited in Radjadurai, 2005, p. 5): the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle, as Kachru defined it, uses English as a mother tongue. The Outer Circle consists of countries that benefit from the spread of English and use it in multilingual settings as an official second language. The Expanding Circle represents countries in which English is used as a foreign language (Kachru, 1992).

However, this concentric model was criticised by Jenkins (2009), as it is difficult to categorise English speakers as belonging to only one of the three circles. Similarity, McKay and Bokhorst-Heng asserted that, "due to the changes in the use of English around the globe, the lines separating these circles have become more permeable" (2008, p. 29). For instance, speakers from the Outer and Expanding Circles are living in Inner Circle countries, such as the US, Canada, and Australia, which has created many varieties of Englishes within one community (Canagarajah, 2006),while other varieties of English are spoken by people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds who have come to these countries as immigrants (Marlina, 2010). There has also been a shift in the status of English in the countries in each of the three circles. Namely, some countries in the Outer Circle, such as India and Singapore, have shifted from using English as an official second language to using it as a first language. Similarly, speakers from the Expanding Circle are giving English the status of an official second language instead of a foreign language (Jenkins, 2009).From this point of view, it is of paramount importance to indicate that English is used not only

in local settings, but also globally by speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (McKay, 2002).

Due to the pluralisation of English forms and the status of English as an international language, English must be considered a tool for users to express their own cultural and linguistic norms (Sharifian, 2009b, as cited in Marlina, 2014). To support this, Marlina (2014) explained that "when bi/multilingual speakers of English,… use English, they may not necessarily communicate the norms, thoughts, worldviews, and socio-cultural realities of the so-called 'Western' English-speaking countries" (p. 30). As McKay (2002) also asserted, the purpose of using English "is to enable speakers to share with others their ideas and culture"(p. 12). These practices have resulted in the emergence of intercultural phenomena in which speakers apply their own cultural rules and norms in different ways when they communicate. For instance, each culture has its own politeness norms in conversation in terms of apologies or compliments. Such clashes in values are also found in writing, which reflects cultural differences, such as in the structuring of discourse or the organisation of academic texts. These cultural forms are sometimes used in accordance with the standard norms expected by native English speakers, which may mean that others are forced to adopt cultural norms that clash with their own values.

In the case of Arab students, applying their own writing style, which may differ from that expected in English, is just a manifestation of their own conceptualisation of the cultures and values they generally express in their culture or language (Al-Qahtani, 2006). However, these norms may not be considered appropriate or "standard" among native English speakers, and so they may judge those who apply different norms as

unprofessional. This has been noted by many authors who have confirmed that there is discrimination against the writing of English users from non-native backgrounds who apply different norms (e.g.,Ammon, 2001; Calaresu, 2007). Nonetheless, if English serves as a medium for international communication, it would be appropriate to adapt it to accommodate multiple norms (Sharifian, 2009). In the same vein, there have been several scholarly discussions regarding the appropriation of language in relation to EIL (Phan, 2009; Holliday, 2005; McKay, 2002). For instance, Phan (2009) shed some light on the importance of giving international students the right to study in English-speaking countries by discussing the ownership of English as an international language. She stated that "users of EIL need to be seen as individuals and in relation to who they are, who they want to be and who they could become and in multiple domains in which their identities are produced and reproduced" (p. 204).

Based on the abovementioned literature, the perspective in which English is seen as an international language acknowledges the variability in English use and considers speakers from all circles as being of equal status. However, it still has limitations in terms of the examination of intercultural communication. Namely, Saudi students, who are from the Expanding Circle, have benefitted from this shift to English, but they have also faced problems in terms of finding acceptance from their lecturers in Australia. Because English has an international status, non-native English speakers like Saudis must find ways to acknowledge their own legitimacy as users of English. This will improve intercultural communication, as it will allow speakers from different cultural backgrounds to express their own norms (Phan, 2009). In this study, I shed light on how Saudi postgraduate students experience their cultural values and norms being prevented in writing an academic essay. The participants are well-

instructed Saudi students who have "successfully" acquired English and who have therefore found it relatively easy to express themselves in their academic writing. These students have been able to write well in English while paying attention to grammar, punctuation, and other conventions of English academic writing. This study provides Australian English lecturers with a picture of how Saudi students experience writing, particularly in terms of how such students present their own norms or cultural values in their academic writing in English.

2.3 Writing across cultures: Contrastive Rhetoric to Intercultural Rhetoric

Due to the spread of English and its status as an international language, the amount of communication between native and non-native English speakers has clearly increased. In this context, intercultural miscommunications arise when non-native speakers encounter norms that are culturally different from their own. In academic performance, intercultural communications in writing become particularly an important issue. This may be due to cultural, linguistic, and psychological factors (Felix & Lawson, 1994, p. 67). Several scholarshave investigated cultural differences in writing from the perspective of contrastive rhetoric (Connor, 2002; Phan, 2001, 2009; Kaplan, 1966). The methodology of contrastive rhetoric was developed to explain the choices multicultural students make in language, discourse, organisation, and presentation of texts when writing in English. Thus, contrastive rhetoric had pedagogical beginnings, and it continues to have a significant impact on the instruction of writing in English from the perspective of EIL (Kachru& Smith, 2008).

Kaplan (1966) was the first scholar to examine rhetoric in writing at the level of English as a second language (ESL). Kaplan's original study was a continuation of the contrastive grammar hypothesis, and his work was highly influenced by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which suggested "that different languages affect perception and thought in different ways" (Connor, 2002, p. 10). Proponents of this hypothesis maintain that the rhetorical predispositions of the first language will affect the process of learning a second language, particularly English. In essence, Kaplan's study looked into the organisation of paragraphs written by ESL speakers. Basing his analysis on Aristotelian rhetoric and logic, he concluded that the various paragraph development types reflected different rhetorical tendencies and that, therefore, each language had a unique paragraph order. Part of learning each language and its respective culture, then, entails the mastery of the logical system behind its paragraph development type.

However, Kaplan's (1966) study of contrastive rhetoric has received considerable criticism for its simplistic research methodology and its conceptualisation of contrastive rhetoric. As Liu (2011) noted, Kaplan's definition of contrastive rhetoric is restricted to the organisation of discourse in first-language and second-language writing.Kaplan's early study ignores other components of rhetoric, such as different styles, invention in writing, memory, and delivery(Connor, 2002; Liu, 2011). Indeed, it is clear that Kaplan ignored these components, concentrating instead on only one element, paragraph arrangement. Instead of this narrow focus, it would be beneficial to also examine the composition process. In fact, I consider Kaplan's focus contradictory. On the one hand, he argued that thought controlled language, and on the other, that writing reflected culture.Kaplan linked rhetoric choices and thought

patterns in a simple manner by ignoring the fact that rhetorical choices are socially and culturally constructed.

Despite the interest in culture, early contrastive rhetoric studies did not explore the cultural context that produced the written text. In other words, in analysing Arabic students' writing, early contrastive rhetoric studies did not investigate students' culture to understand their L2 writing, but instead considered writing to be isolated from its social context and any cultural influences (e.g., Al-Jarrah, 2001; Ismail, 2010; Stapa&Irtaimeh, 2012).These studies clearly did not explain how the writers wrote or how that writing came to be. What looks like disorganised text may be the result of something else, not just of the writer's L1. For instance, Al-Qahtani (2006) investigated how English and Arabic students took into account their readers when they wrote. Noted the unreliability of focusing on text alone when analysing students' writing, he found that native English-speaking students wrote more interesting and shorter introductions than Arabic students. He pointed out that these differences could be the result of contrasting rhetoric in English and Arabic, but that they could also be explained as evidence of different cultural expectations between readers and writers. Al-Qahtani(2006) further indicated that one problem with contrastive rhetoric is that it does not distinguish between the process and the product. Given this point, I would argue that early contrastive rhetoric researchers have their own narrow understanding of rhetoric, which may have led to a narrowing of their methodology as well.Another problem identified in early contrastive rhetoric studies is the gap that occurs "between prescriptive and descriptive forms of rhetoric", as the researchers take for granted the "prescriptive rhetorical convention in English" and ignore the fact that each language has its own preferred style for written text (Kubota, 2007, p. 276).

To address this problem, several researchers have broadened the view of rhetoric and the methodologies for studying contrastive rhetoric, which has shifted from textual analysis to the analysis of different writing styles as cultural and social phenomena (Connor, 1996; Liebman, 1992). Connor (as cited in Kubota, 2007, p. 278) argued that CR should move away from a focus on linguistic and cultural binaries towards describing the vast complexities of social, cultural and other factors that affect the writing process. This shift from investigating cross-cultural issues between two distinct cultures to investigating intercultural communication with a focus on the complexity of writing practices has not only led to analysing text, but also to the development of new methodologies, such as interviews (Kubota, 2007). This new methodological development is being used to understand culture and its effects on the writing process. As "language and writing are cultural phenomenon," different cultures use different rhetorical styles (Connor, 2002, p. 494). From this perspective, Connor drew attention to new directions in contrastive rhetoric and coined a new term that would better encompass the core of contrastive rhetoric: "intercultural rhetoric"(Connor, 2004). This approach has focused specifically on writing for particular purposes (Connor, 2008). In the shift from contrastive rhetoric to intercultural rhetoric, the impact of the L1 and cultural background on L2 writing has been evaluated in terms of organisation, relevance, and politeness (McCool, 2009).

Connor defined culture as "a set of patterns and rules shared by a particular community" (Connor, 1996, p. 101). Moreover, as Liddicoat (1997) noted, "language use in a group is a form of cultural behaviour" (p.13). In other words, language is a group practice that relies on cultural and social values. Certain types of text are

greatly valued according to social or cultural norms. Thus, "any study of a body of texts must see genre as culturally situated, culturally defined and culturally defining," and "texts, like other parts of language, are cultural activities and the act of writing is an act of encoding culture as much as it is a case of encoding information" (Liddicoat, 1997, p. 13). Thus, we must admit that culture and writing are interdependent (Connor, 1996; Purves, 1988, as cited in Connor, 2002). Purves (1998) argued that "the ways in which we express thought in writing are very strongly influenced by our experiences with discourse generally and written text specifically and the related conventions that govern each of these within our own social and cultural context" (p. 178, as cited in Connor, 2002, p. 496).Therefore, writing communicates more than its semantic content by also relating the writer's linguistic and cultural background.

The term "intercultural rhetoric" helps us understand the process of writing across cultures and languages. When examining rhetorical patterns reflected in a written essay, the examination is based on what we expect to find in the target language or writer own culture in terms of "well-constructed discourse" (Taft, 2011, p. 503). For example, in English, being "logical" and "linear" in developing an argument is expected by readers; specifically, writers are expected to use a deductive style in which they state their topic and then support it withfollowing points or evidence. However, this expectation is not necessarily universally applied because the standard for a well-structured written text varies from one language to another, as well as from one culture to another, and each culture expects a different structure of rhetoric (Connor, 2004; McCool, 2009). This can explain why the evaluation of a written text by a reader from a different cultural and linguistic background may be negative, as it

may be affected by the contrast of the writer's preferences regarding the structuring of rhetorical features with their own (McCool, 2009).

In this light, an analysis of the writing process of Arabic students and their cultural impact on writing English is highly needed, as almost all previous Arabic researchers have been influenced by Kaplan's work and thus have focused only on rhetorical patterns prevalent in the L1, generally Arabic (e.g., Al-Jarrah, 2001; Ismail, 2010; Stapa, 2012). Therefore, in this study, it is essential to shed light on the way Saudi postgraduate students write academic English, as it is also important to investigate how they selectively add rhetorical styles and linguistic patterns from their culture to emphasise their unique perspective and allow their personalities to shine through. In order to examine these phenomena, I will discuss three notions by Farrell (1997), who noted that there are several culturally situated notions that determine how an individual writes and uses language, which are "literacy,""relevance," and "politeness" (p. 68).

2.4 Culturally situated notions of 'literate' forms

In English-speaking countries such Australia, Canada, the UK, and the USA, literacy in school is "a highly specialised discourse "that "is objective, analytical and sequential" (Farrell, 1997, p. 142). From this standpoint, essays in English must be well organised and presented in a logical order, in a linear manner, and in a coordinated way. According to Farrell, for an essay to be considered well-structured in English, it must meet certain criteria, such as being easily read under considerable pressure of time. Allan (1996) also showed that examiners in English took for granted a particular discourse style that was related to their own style, and they did not agree

withthe use of other language styles. As a result, they recommend that writers become like them, "the examiners," and that they "use language, think, value, and talk in these ways, with these objects at these times and in these places" (Gee, 1992, p.123). Therefore, writers have to write in a way that suits the tastes of the examiners, andtheir writing should carry a message efficiently. This is similar to the English academic writing style in Australian universities. In an academic setting, the writing style tends to be more critical, and students must be able to discuss, question, and analyse any academic text. Indeed, San Miguel (1996) indicated that "the Western education system values critical evaluation and analysis of knowledge" (p. 39). As language and culture are connected, having the ability to learn a language, or being "literate," means not only acquiring the written code, which includes spelling, grammar, and lexicon, but also acquiring the values that are an integral part of the written code.

The characteristics of being "literate" differ in English and Arabic academic writing. Inani (1998) explained that Arab thought in writing is more likely to consider texts as a whole, to develop the argument in a circular way, and to connect more than one point not necessarily related to the central idea. In light of these differences, I will discuss some patterns used by Arab students or noted by various authors. It is necessary to recall, as Hamadouche (2013, p. 184) noted, that Arab culture has a huge influence on the writing and expression of Arabic discourses.

Due to their tendency to write an essay or develop an argument in a specific way, many Arabic students become lost when they encounter the different expectations in Australian English essay writing styles. Even if they are familiar with the overall organisational style of English academic writing, which includes an introduction, a

body, and a conclusion, they may be unsure about what should be included in each of these (Etherington, 2008). Thus, they may introduce their essays with unrelated material or they may arrive at conclusions that sound inappropriate or unrelated to what has been discussed which is not acceptable to English teachers. This was explained by Al-Zubaidi (2012), who argued that "most current English academic teachers generally ignore the fact that Arab students have a different background in academic literacy" (p. 48). In this study, I would like to compare "literate" English academic writing with "literate" Arabic writing. This is important, as it will shed light on the values of each culture. Liddicoat (1997) noted that, "within each culture, each of the rhetorical patterns will be considered to be 'linear' although the lines try to achieve different things" (p. 18). However, it is essential to note that some rhetorical patterns that are considered linear or connected in Arab writing may be considered "illogical" in English.

Regarding the organisation of an academic essay, both English and Arabic essays have the same three components: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. However, each component is shaped through a specific style, which is different in each language. For Arab students, writing an introduction and a conclusion in their Arabic style causes some confusion for English readers (Lahlali, 2009).

An introduction in English is written like a pyramid, which means it is "very wide at the top, increasingly narrow in the middle, and very small at the neck or bottom" (Oshima& Hogue, 1991, p. 79). In the same context, Phan (2001) indicated that directness and immediacy are valued features, and Ballard and Clanchy (1991) determined that an introduction "will set out the key issues to be discussed, maybe

define a key term or set limits to the proposed discussion, and indicate the position the writer intends to take on the issues in question" (p. 30). On the contrary, an introduction in Arabicwriting can include more than one idea, and it is often long. Regarding this issue, Al-Qahtani (2006) investigated the differences between research introductions by Arab authors and American English writers. In his analysis of Arab writers' introductions, he found that there were some cultural and religious sentences that did not relate to the topic. Al-Qahtani (2006) categorised these sentences into three groups:

The first is the Islamic opening statements that are required in many
Contexts, particularly formal speeches, letters, acknowledgments, etc.
The second is the use of the Holy Qur'an and the prophet (peace be
upon him) sayings within the text. And the third is the inclusion of
acknowledgments and prayers for the helpers at the end of
the introduction. (pp.78–79).

In fact, the introduction in any other type of writing in Arabic still follows the same style, which tends to be long and indirect (Al-Khatib, 2001). It includes various ideas to make the reading more enjoyable for the reader by avoiding repeating the same idea over and over again. It is flowery, as the use of long sentences gives the readers fuller information and leads them to an understanding of each idea separately, without causing "boredom."

A conclusion in English academic writing often summarises the main points in the body and should not include any new ideas (Farrell, 1997). In contrast, a conclusion in Arabic writing is considered an important part of the whole essay because the

writer can add new ideas or discuss another valued point that has not been presented in the body (Al-Khatib, 2001). This may be perceived as unstructured by English readers (Abu-Rass, 2011). Due to differences in standard conclusions in Arabic and English, Saudi students may be confused about the appropriate way to write a conclusion, even though they are aware of the techniques for writing an introduction and a conclusion.

English academic writing requires the writer to be critical and to question any facts or points, as long as the writer has a strong opinion or an idea to support his/her argument (Al-Khatib, 2001). In Arabic writing, the influence of Islam and culture are highly dominant. This point is supported by Abu-Rass (1994), who argued that "Arab students have the tendency to use dichotomy: solutions to problems are black or white, right or wrong…there is no room for doubt or compromise" (p. 2). In addition, Arabic culture encourages "collectivism," rather than "individualism, "the former of which Feghali (1997) described as a practice in which "The loyalty to one's extended family and larger in-group takes precedence over individual needs or goals" (p. 352). Thus, most Arabic students' writing tends to use the pronouns *we* and *us* to express an opinion. This contrasts with English academic writing, in which the writer has the right to use the personal pronoun *I* or "in my opinion" without being misunderstood.

Another common and unique feature of the Arabic language is the use of repetition and exaggeration to persuade the reader. Arab students tend to repeat their own ideas and assert their own beliefs in order to be understood (Feghali, 1997). This can be explained by the fact that Arabic cultures and religionsoften use repetition to ensure that information is transferred and will not be forgotten. Feghali (1997) argued that

using repetition is an effective strategy, and emphasised that "repeated words, phrases and rhythms move others to belief, rather than the 'quasilogical' style of Western logic, where interlocutors use ideas to persuade" (p. 361). On the other hand, English readers consider it as "over the top" and "illogical"; in English, one idea stated once simplycan be understood successfully by the reader (Al-Khatib, 2001).

Notably, the writer in English is expected to be responsible for conveying a clear message to the reader without ambiguity. Mukattash (2001) indicated that, in English, the writer is responsible for delivering the message clearly and coherently, which is also considered away of being polite. In Arabic writing, in contrast, writers have no responsibility toward the reader, as writers may express their ideas, leaving the interpretation to the readers (Abu-Rass, 1994). As a result, ideas are expressed implicitly in Arabic writing, which English readers would consider "unclear."

It is obvious that literacy is a socially composed and a culturally constructed phenomenon, as students from Saudi Arabiahave their own discourse based on culturally accepted and socially determined ways of thinking and using the language. At the same time, this cultural discourse forms the basis for acquiring and learning other discourses in English. Thus, it is important to understand how their primary discourse strategy affects their writing in English.

2.5 Culturally Situated Notions of 'Relevance'

Many researchers have investigated academic writing through Grice's cooperative principles and its related maxims (i.e., quantity, quality, relevance, and manner)to help learners improve their writing (Santos, 1997).The Relevance maxim, which is the

focus of this study, refers to the decisions made concerning both "whether something is relevant and how it is relevant, "seen as central to the establishment of meaning" (Farrell, 1997, p. 68). However, this maxim is employed differently among different writers due to variability in cultures' communicative dimensions; in turn, each culture influences the expectations of writers and readers (White, 2001). This study thus investigates Saudi postgraduate students 'use of the relevance maxim in their academic writing in English and its relationship with their culture.

In English academic writing, to achieve relevance, the entire panorama of ideas, issues, and suggestions must be related to the central topic in one way or another (Farrell, 1994). If one idea is far-fetched and has no bearing or relation with the subject at the heart of the writing, then the other ideas also lose their power to communicate as effectively as one would wish. This is critical, as it also explains why paragraphs are introduced with topic sentences that are followed by supporting ideas. Such a structure, according to Phan(1999), might facilitate readers' ability to summarise the main ideas of the writing without necessarily reading the whole passage. It can also contribute to the "linearity" of the reading.

At this point, it is important to remember that different cultures have different performance in writing. As Phan (1999) noted, "each culture may expect different performances from a shared writing task requirement" (p. 13). Hence, considering a text to be well-written depends not only on having semantic knowledge, but also knowledge of socio-cultural patterns. Students from other languages will write a text "according to their explanation of the standard expected" (Phan, 1999, p. 13) in their

own language. This has nothing to do with the students' ability; rather, each culture expects specific forms of writing in such a text.

Relevance in Arabic does not seem to require a focus on the central idea throughout the discourse, as is required in all English writing (Al-Khatib, 2001). In fact, in Arabic, "relevance" is not required as it is in academic English, which means that Arabic writers can write a complicated essay but include "great" ideas, and they can move from one idea to another, even if it seems a bit "irrelevant." At the same time, readers want to read the complete text and enjoy creative structures (Al-Khatib, 2001). This does not mean that Arabic writing has no standard of "relevance" but, as Farrell (1994) argued, "whether specific discursive practices are read as subtle and skilful elucidation of the topic or as irrelevant and pointless ramblings" (p. 17) is determined by what the culture defines as relevant or irrelevant. Thus, Saudi notions of "relevance" can be understood in different ways, many of which may be marked as "does not make sense" by English readers. This is due to the fact that Arabic culture and religion strongly influence their writing, which then does not meet the expectations of English lecturers.

2.6 Culturally Situated Notions of 'Politeness'

The theory of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson used Goffman's model of face, which is defined as "something that is emotionally invested and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (Goffman, 1976, as cited in Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.66). They state that each individual has two types of face: positive and negative. Positive face is defined as "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' claimed by the interactants," and it includes the

need to be appreciated, such as sharing similar opinions and showing appreciation of the other. Negative face is defined as the individual's desire to feel free from imposition, and can be seen in speech acts such as apologies.

This theory of politeness can be used to analyse written discourse (Harris, 2007). However, linguistic politeness strategies may differ between cultures, as they are influenced by various cultural factors, such as power differences and the social distance between the writer and reader. Each culture applies these criteria differently, and this then shapes the language differently (Holtgraves& Yang, 1990). In writing, these factors determine the type and level of politeness strategies the writer uses (Scollon&Scollon, 1995).

Culturally situated notions of "politeness" in English "reflect a relatively high value placed on combativeness and individualism, and a relatively low value on community identity and traditional forms of knowledge" (Farrell, 1997, p. 69). Notions regarding how to be "polite" are highly influenced by factors such as the distance between the writer and reader and power (Tawalbeh& Al-Oqaily, 2012). Politeness is part of the relationship between students and teachers, which includes "whether it is considered insulting for a student to contradict a teacher or an examiner"; "the extent to which it may be appropriate for students to question or reformulate knowledge they have learnt"; and "the extent to which explicit, or direct, intellectual dispute is tolerated, even among equals" (Farell, 1997, p.46, as cited in Phan, 2001, p.2).

In Arab culture, the relationship between teachers and students is a respectful relationship in which students cannot contradict their teachers regarding any point during class (Al-Zubaidi, 2012). Students are expected to be silent during class, and

they have little chance to ask for clarification. Students in Saudi Arabia are satisfied with the "hierarchical relationship" between themselves and their teachers (Al-Zubaidi, 2012). This is clear when students are dealing with teachers; they are considered mature if they behave in this way, not only with their teachers, but also with any member of society who is older or who has more power. This is because they are following the Islamic moral norms of politeness, as can be seen in the following quote from the"Sunnah,"[1] which contains all the sayings of Prophet Mohammed:"Seek knowledge and train to be dignified and calm while seeking knowledge, and humble yourselves with those whom you learn from" (Tabaraani, as cited in Khan, 2014, p.92).

These norms[2] have influenced Saudi students when they shift from their own way of treating teachers to a more open, Western way of dealing with lecturers (Abu-Rass, 2011). This can affect their writing in English, as "some students are not sufficiently prepared for the tasks of analysing data and synthesising the information in research" (Al-Zubaidi, 2012, p. 50). This is due to the way of teaching in Saudi Arabia, in which students are just receivers, and the teachers are the ones who have the authority to formulate knowledge and ideas. In reality, Saudi students can be critical, but the way to be critical in Arabic writing relies mostly on religion. For example, Arab students tend to use quotations from the Qur'an to support their opinions, as they strongly believe in their hearts that the Qur'an is "infallible in content and literary style" (Abu-Rass, 2011, p.207). However, in current Saudi society, students still question and interpret knowledge with their friends or in social networks, which means they have the ability to be critical, but they need more opportunities to express

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[1]It is an Arabic name which means a method or path, contains all the religious practices and sayings that established by the Prophet Mohammed
[2]I conceptualized Islam as a norm because Islam in Saudi Arabia influences the teaching system, low and government.

themselves and their own knowledge. This is not a contradiction, but one must be aware of the impact of Islam in their society, realising that schools in Saudi Arabia are controlled by Islamic ideology, which influences students 'conceptualisation of politeness (Abu-Rass, 1994). This may influence the way Saudi students write academic English, which has been described as unquestioning, uncritical, and indirect.

Alhazmi (2010) discussed the differences between what is considered polite in English-speaking and Arab societies, arguing that "Arab students in Australia will give preference to Arabic cultural norms over Australian norms, which can sometimes lead to cultural miscommunication" (p. 4). The features of politeness here can be clearly observed in students' writing, in which they use indirect strategies to express their opinion or ideas. In line with this argument, Al-Qhtani (2006) investigated introductions written by Arabic and American students and found that Arabic students were clearly more indirect in stating their ideas when compared to American students. Another feature of politeness can be seen when students are asked to write a "critical review or literature." There are misunderstandings across cultures about what is meant by "critical": Arabic culture defines it as "criticising others," which maybe culturally discouraged (Al-Zubaidi, 2012, p.50). Thus, the influence of Arabic cultural norms is, therefore, finding its way into Saudi students' writing, despite the fact that their writing ought to adhere to the traditions of English writing. Saudi students will, then, try to apply the conventions that make sense to them. These are dutifully borrowed from their own culture and language, which they use to formulate the basis for politeness.

2.7 Filling the Gap

There have been a number of valuable studies that have investigate intercultural communications in writing among writers from different backgrounds, much of which is the result of using English as an international language for communication (Phan, 2009; McKay, 2002; Sharifian, 2009). In the case of Arabic students, early contrastive rhetoric studies viewed these issues in Arabic students' writing in English as a result of the influence of their first language (Al-Jarrah, 2001; Al-Qahtani, 2006; Ismail, 2010). However, none of these studies shed the light on the influence of Arabic culture in the organisation of students' writing in academic English. To the best of my knowledge, only Al-Qahtani's (2006) very important study addressed the cultural norms that influencedthe writing of an"introduction" by Arabic-speaking students compared tonative English-speaking students.

The purpose of the present study is first to fill the gap in the current Arabic literature, which is comprised of studies that emphasise the need to minimise the impact of culture on Saudi postgraduate students when writing academic English. To bridge this research gap, this study sheds light on the importance of culture and other factors that influences Saudi postgraduate students when writing academic English.Second, the study draws upon a wide range of insights from the field of contrastive rhetoric and intercultural communication in order to go beyond the text tounderstand the process of essay writing by Saudi students.Thiswill provide a clear understanding of Arabic cultural influence and its conceptualisationsof politeness, relevance, and literacynorms.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Overview

Quantitative, qualitative, and mixedmethods are three main approaches to research (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The method used in a study is highly dependent on the study's purpose. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the academic writing experiences of Saudi students; therefore, the nature of this study was interpretive exploration, for which the qualitative method is the most suitable approach. This study used semi-structured, in-depth interviews for the collection of qualitative data. Specifically, this chapter discusses and justifies my choice of a research design (i.e., qualitative research methodology); the approach used for the selection of participants; as well as the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data. This is then followed by a discussion on ways in which the reliability and validity of the research are ensured. The final section of this chapter presents the study limitations.

3.2 Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research "locates the observer in the world to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them" (Denzin& Lincoln, 2000, p.3). A qualitative research approach is designed to "capture people, meaning, definitions, and descriptions of events" (Minichiello et al., 1990, p. 5); that is, it attempts to understand the participants' perceptions, thoughts, and feelings in particular social contexts. Because this study

investigated learners' approaches to and experiences of academic writing, the qualitative method was the most appropriate approach.

Another reason why this method was adopted for this study is becausethe inductive relationship between theory and research that explains the pre-existing hypothesis for a particular phenomenon is unnecessary for understanding the issues being studied within the qualitative frame (Mertens, 2005). This approach allowed theobservation and interpretation of actual situations from a subjective standpoint. Bryman (2004) indicated that researchers in social studies could understand human actions by obtaining "people's common sense thinking" from their own perceptions (p. 14). To do so, qualitative researchers must consider the social contexts wherein the participants have common experiences and share personal perceptions. Specifically, the present study investigated the participants' perspectives on academic writing in English and the influence of their own culture and language on writing.

English academic writing at the postgraduate level is the specific required style. However, Saudi postgraduate students have faced many issues that influence their writing in English. Issues related to their writing experiences, as explained in chapter two, derive from the influence of their language, culture, and religion. To that extent, analysing their writing practices and understanding their experiences are perfectly suited to the use of qualitative methodology, which aims "to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience" (Lichtman, 2006, p.8). Thus, using qualitative methods helps me see participant behaviour as something "social, contextual, and personal" (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p.31), and it assists me in investigating the perspectives of the participants while taking into account their

experiences. Using qualitative methods is suitable in examining a complex issue such as Saudi postgraduate student experiences in English academic writing. In this thesis, those experiences are investigated in terms of students' thoughts, perceptions, and feelings, which are determined by context (Gilham, 2000).

Unlike quantitative methods that allow objective facts to be observed using a well-designed instrument, a qualitative approach supports the belief that the interpretations and explanations provided on the basis of the data collected are just an attempt to represent "what is in fact a much more complex reality" (Holliday, 2002, p.6). This interpretive model means that there is no outright truth required, as both the researchers' and participants' subjectivity is something inescapable and acceptable. Researchers need to look into how this subjectivity influences the process of the researcher and the researcher as well(Lichtman, 2006).Likewise, Cresswell (1998) recommends that researchers use their prior hypotheses, experiences, knowledge, and cultural background to specify in what ways their prior understanding will be integrated into the research. In this way, researchers are pensive about the process of the research, and, hopefully, they will become more aware and open-minded as they examine and modify their preconceived personal understandings "through the encounter with what one is trying to understand" (Gadamer as cited in Usher, 1996, p. 21).

The issue of reflexivity and subjectivity discussed above is particularly pertinent to my study since I share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds with my participants because we are from the same country and speak the same language. I also study in an Australian university and face the same cultural issues in writing as

they do. As I have explained in my introductory chapter, this clearly affects the direction of my study in the first place, in which my cultural background becomes, as Gadamer (cited in Usher, 1996, p.21) states, "the essential starting point for acquiring knowledge" during the research process. Concerning the methodology of the research, the choice of the appropriate method has also partially resulted from my regard of the characteristics of the subjects. However, according to what Holliday (2002) recommends, I need to justify the decisions that I made in this research in order to maintain its quality. During the process of data collection, I tried to avoid leading the participants in the direction that I supposed they would go by taking into consideration the principles established by methodologists. I discovered particularities in each one of the participants, and I also found similar meanings among them. Some of these meanings or experiences are initially expected, while others are new to me, all of this enriching my understanding of the issue. I believe that my background assists me in being better connected with the participants and their experiences that they shared during the process of data collection. This, I feel, has also given me the desire to interpret the data more carefully, as I was concerned about not reaching justifiable conclusions due to the effect of my preconceived understandings, prior knowledge, and experiences.

3.3 Study Participants

3.3.1 Participant Selection

Purposive sampling strategies—which are defined as what the researcher intends to understand, discover, and gain insight into instead of generalizing the research findings—were used to recruit the participants (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998, p. 63) stated that "network sampling, convenience sampling, and unique

sampling…etc." are types of sampling the investigator can use to determine the selection criteria before establishing the sampling procedure. In this study, the participant selection criteria were chosen based on the research aims and questions. Each included participant met the following criteria:

- Saudi postgraduate student at the master's or PhD level at an Australian university
- Completed at least one semester or more in their field of study
- Studied for some time in Saudi Arabia

The participants were selected using convenience sampling (those who are available) and network sampling (referrals from existing study participants).The participants in this study were four female Saudi postgraduate students from Monash and Melbourne University in Australia. By having Saudi participants that come from the same country as I do, I believe that I would be able to easily communicate with them and have enough access to collect in-depth data to answer my research questions. In addition, I identified those students who experienced academic writing in an Australian university as I did, hopefully so that I would be able to understand the feelings, thoughts, and experiences they shared throughout the data collection. I approached the four female students to see if they desired to participate in this study voluntarily by posting an invitation on my personal Twitter account and distributed the message to groups in my social networks. After two days, I began receiving emails from Saudi students who were interested in participating. By email, I arranged a time and place that was convenient for them for the interview. In addition to the similarities that I have mentioned, the participants were diverse in a number of ways

such as having different degrees and being from different faculties. Therefore, I expected to obtain results containing similarities as well as differences, which I believe leads to a better understanding of the research topic.

3.3.2 Participant Description

The following is a description of the participants' background information. This information was obtained through an interview.

All of the participants are from Saudi Arabia, which in this study means that their first language is not English, but they learned English and use it for communication. In addition, all the participants finished their bachelor's degree in Saudi Arabia and are studying their master's or PhD in an English-speaking country, which is Australia. Most of the participants were recipients of awards from the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). Due to their scholarships, they came to Australia to learn English and to complete their postgraduate studies. In addition, the respondents were all from the Faculty of Arts and Education and had similar academic writingrequirements. One respondent was from the Faculty of Arts and was completing her Master of Applied Linguistics degree. Two were PhD students in applied linguistics in the Faculty of Arts, and one was completing her PhD in education. The age of the participants ranged from 25–33 years old. All had studied English for at least 4–10 years and had been studying in Australia for more than one year (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1Description of the participants

Name	Age	Qualification	Duration of Study in Australia
Huda	33	PhD in applied linguistics	6Years
Ahlam	29	PhD in applied linguistics	5Years
Norah	31	PhD in education (TESOL)	7Years
Lama	25	MA in applied linguistics	2Years

(Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' confidentiality.)

3.4 Methods for Data Collection

This study sought to answer the research questions by collecting comprehensive data from the participants. In this situation, that data is essentially qualitative in nature, as it has "words, images, and categories" (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p.31). Morse and Richards (2002, p. 70) suggest that in determining the techniques for data collection, researchers have to ask how "they can best access accounts of behavior and experience." Regarding Holliday's (2002) categorization of types of qualitative data, the data I sought might be classified as an "account" as it consists of what the students actually say in response to the researcher's questions. Bryman (2008)

mentioned that there are a wide variety of methods that can be applied in a qualitative study, including interviews; focus groups, observations, and ethnographies. For this study, the interview method was suitable because it allows open-ended questioning among a small group of participants and provided a clear picture of theparticipants' experiences and opinions. In addition, the method allows for further clarification of data obtained through phone conversations, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the results. Because the participants and I shared our country of origin and cultural background, the interviews were in the Arabic language and were translated into English during the analysis. The interviews were arranged around the participants' schedules and were conducted in a private room at the Monash University Library.

3.4.1 Interviews

There are different types of interviews such as structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews (Patton, 2002). Morse and Richards (2002) indicate that the types of interview used in the research and how they are conducted will highly depend on the research questions and the method. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this study attempted to gain the interviewees' points of view and experiences related to issues in academic writing. Therefore, I useda semi-structured, in-depth interview as the main instrument because of its effectiveness in allowing me, as a researcher, to investigate in more depth the participants' experiences in writing academic essays in English in Australia and to interpret the responses provided during the interviews. The interviews were comprised of 10questions that were changeable based on the interviewees' answers (see Appendix 2).The interviews were held in a private room to ensure the participants' privacy and to allow them to speak freely in a relaxed environment.

3.4.2 In-Depth Interview

The in-depth interview is a qualitative approach that is considered ideal for accessing and understanding the meaning of an individual's real-life experiences (Minichiello et al., 1990). Therefore, I used this method based on its power to discover learners' approaches to writing academic English. Oppenheim (1992) discussed some key advantages of using in-depth interviews, including that it affords the researcher greater control and provides the flexibility to ask varied questions. In addition, the relaxed and friendly interview environment allows the researcher to draw more information from participants. Because the interviewees and I are from the same country and culture, the interactions were natural, as we had all faced the same experiences during our studies in Australia. Therefore, the in-depth interview differs from the semi-structured interview in that it allows both the researcher and the participants to communicate their experiences and share their opinions regarding academic writing.

The interviews were conducted in Arabic with some shifting to English when necessary. At the beginning of each interview, I collected demographic information, including age and area of study, and asked friendly questions about the participant's life in Australia to build trust and generate a relaxed environment. Each interview consisted of questions regarding the participant's perceptions of the similarities and differences between the writing styles of Arabic and English, with a specific focus on the structure of academic essays, developing arguments, critical thinking, and the standards of each of the writing styles. The interviews were audio recorded by the

interviewer. The interviewer presented and discussed essay samples with the participants during the interviews.

In the in-depth interview, it can be tempting for the interviewer to focus strictly on pre-planned questions without giving interviewees the freedom to offer unique insights. To avoid this problem, I allowed the participants to respond freely while I took notes about specific points that needed further clarification. For example, I asked questions such as "What do you mean by saying this?" and "You mentioned that…. Can you give me an example? "In this way, I allowed the participants to explore ideas while maintaining consistency with the pre-planned set of questions. Since the semi-structured interview can seem intrusive and embarrassing to interviewees (Minichiello et al., 2008), I avoided this problem by establishing a comfortable atmosphere and treating the interviewees as colleagues rather than subjects. As a result, the participants were quite willing to share their experiences and insights.

3.5 Enhancing Trustworthiness

The goal of trustworthiness in a qualitative study is to support that the study's findings are worthwhile and important. This term *trustworthiness* was first used by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a replacement term for *validity* and *reliability*; they suggested its use in qualitative inquiry to enhance the quality or trustworthiness of the results.

Researchers have argued that in order to enhance the trustworthiness of a study, qualitative researchers should use procedures such as audit trails, rich descriptions, triangulation, reflexivity and member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 1998).Thus, in this study, I have incorporated member checking to enhance the trustworthiness of the data. This strategy can be described as "a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the quality and credibility of what has

been recorded during a research interview" (Harper & Cole, 2012, p. 510). This basically means that the researcher summarises or transcribes the data and then asks the participants to judge the quality of the information. If the participants agree that the transcriptions reflect their opinions and experiences and if trustworthiness is assured, then the research is considered to have credibility (Creswell, 2009).

As a part of member checking, I provided each of the participants with their own transcription so they could ensure the trustworthiness of the translation into English, as they were all postgraduate students. The participants thoroughly read the transcripts and clarified any questions, which allowed me to examine "[…] each information [source] and find evidence to support a theme" (Merriam, 2009, p.216).

3.6 Methods for Data Analysis and Interpretation

As the interviews were conducted in Arabic, the audiotapes were initially transcribed in the original language, followed by translation into English. During transcription, the participants 'grammatical mistakes and Arabic expressions were included without correction (see Appendix 3 for a sample transcript). Due to time constraints, only the most useful excerpts, including all features of verbal and non-verbal expression, such as pauses and laughter, were translated into English.

In the second stage of data analysis, the content analysis was organized as explained by Wiersma (1995,p. 216), who suggested that the analysis of qualitative data "[…] requires organization of information and data reduction. "This is because data collected from in-depth interviews can be disorganised and fragmented, requiring the

researcher to reorganize it into meaningful data sets in a process called 'coding' (Wiersma, 1995).

Thematic data analysis was employed, which allowed me, as a novice qualitative researcher, to combine important points from the narratives (Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis is a flexible tool that allows for the identification of themes from various angles. Its flexibility makes the method ideal for the constructionist model, particularly when examining "[…] the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences, and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society"(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81).

In the thematic analysis, I first read the transcriptions several times and highlighted significant points to familiarise myself with the data. I then generated identification codes in the margins of the transcriptions, particularly highlighting similar and divergent ideas expressed by the participants. After clarifying some points with the participants, I identified the themes. It is essential to note that coding must be approached from either a theory-driven or a data-driven perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the data were coded based on the research questions (theory-driven analysis), which allowed the connection of the data to the theories in the literature (see Chapter 2). The data revealed five themes: organization of essay ("Literate forms" in Arabic and English: General Shapes),"Politeness forms" in Arabic and English writing: Strategies in the Expression of Thinking, and Appropriating English writing style.

3.7 Limitations of the Study

There are several study limitations. First, as mentioned in this chapter, the study was constrained by time and space, which prevented further in-depth investigation; that is, the work considered only the researcher and participants, which renders the findings more suggestive than assertive. Second, the study participants were all female; therefore, the Saudi male point of view was not represented. Again, the time limit did not allow us to include both genders. Moreover, as discussed in the research design, qualitative study captures the subjectivities of the researchers and participants. Therefore, it is problematic to try to generalize the findings of the study to other contexts. To that extent, the results of this study should not be taken as providing a picture of what will occur in other situations at other times. Nevertheless, considering the breadth of the findings and the lack of research on this topic in regard to Saudi students, other Saudi postgraduate students should be able to learn from and reflect on this research, while English lecturers and examiners who work at Australian universities might also use the findings to help understand and support the writing of Saudi students.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

4.1. Overview

This chapter presents and analyse the data obtained through interviews. This chapter also discusses the findings in light of the research questions presented in Chapter One and the literature review presented in Chapter Two.

The research questions, research literature, and data analysis suggest the following Themes with subcategories given in parentheses: *Organization of an Essay (General Shape)* and *Strategies in the Expression of Thinking (Critical Analytical Thinking, Repetitious Style).*Within these themes, the data is presented and discussed in light of the literature presented in Chapter Two. Additionally, the participants provided other information during the interviews that is not categorized according to the preceding themes but which is related to the research questions. Namely, the data for the *appropriating English Writing Style* category is presented and discussed in the last part of this chapter. In the analysis and discussion, pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants in order to protect their privacy.

4.2 Organization of an Essay

4.2.1 "Literate forms" in Arabic and English: General Shapes and the reasons behind it

At the beginning of the interviews, all the participants mentioned that both Arabic and English essays have specific standards and follow the same organisation: introduction paragraph—body paragraph—conclusion paragraph. However, the participants indicated that this organisation is developed in different ways in Arabic and English writing styles, which will be explained and discussed below.

All participants indicated that Arabic writing has the 'indirect' style, and each participant gave her own explanation of this style. Huda explained her way of writing introduction section of an essay in Arabic:

> *Writing in Arabic is similar to a "circle". I mean, when I used to write an introduction, I had the habit of being indirect, and my introduction didn't tell the reader clearly what my essay was about. I believe that readers have to read each idea in my introduction to infer what I'm arguing about*

Also, Lama stated that Arabic writing 'does not have rules for being direct or clear'. She explained this by describing her writing in Arabic with an example:

> *My writing in Arabic is not straightforward; it is free from following any rules. For example, regarding an essay question, I didn't answer the question straight away. I have the habit of presenting many ideas concerning the topic at the beginning of my essay, which as a result took up one and half pages without answering the question. I ended up with a long introduction, which didn't answer the question.*

Ahlam and Norah have not experienced writing an Arabic essay at Saudi universities because their bachelor's degree was in English language. However, Ahlam asserted that Arabic writing has its own special style where readers find themselves lost at some point and then *'make the effort to connect all of the ideas together in order to understand the topic'*.

In further conversations with the researcher, Lama and Huda discussed how they write body paragraphs in Arabic, which Lama described as *'we can jump from one idea to another without introducing the readers to that transition'*. Lama and Huda explained how they develop their ideas, arguments and opinions through their academic essays in Arabic

> *In Arabic, we have a standard for writing essays, but we didn't learn probably at school how to write* (laughing)*…. I think we didn't get that much practice, so students often write in whatever form they like. When I personally write any Arabic essay, I don't show clear coherence.* (Lama)

> *When I write my essay in the Arabic language, I'm not usually aware of how my writing will be connected at the end. I write as I think; I can start a new paragraph even if I have not finished my argument in the previous paragraph.*(Huda)

As mentioned previously, Ahlam does not have experience in writing Arabic essays, but she stated that from her own observations as a teacher, Saudi students did not clearly indicate in their writing in Arabic that *'they know what a topic sentence is and what a supporting sentence is'*. Ahlam also asserted that Saudi students like to write a long sentence to present an idea. On further clarification with the researcher, Ahlam

described this as a common Arabic student writing habit. Norah supported Ahlam's point as she explained, *'I write long sentences in Arabic to refer back to any previous ideas....This habit is accepted by all my Arabic teachers.'*

To understand how participants write a conclusion in Arabic, Ahlam said that she worked as a teacher in a Saudi university where she assessed students 'writing. *'Arabic students have a unique approach in writing the conclusion paragraph'*, she said, although she did not explicitly describe how they shape their conclusion. However, Lama provided a clear description for how Saudi students write their conclusion: *'conclusions in Arabic essays can often introduce new ideas, suggestions, or recommendations'* She reported that Arabic writing seems to be like *'a maze where it is difficult to find any specific ideas connected together'.*

All participants explained the reasonsbehindthe style of writing introduction, body and conclusion sections of an essay in Arabic. Huda explained that indirectness in her writing is a result of the personality of Arabic people, whom she described as being very indirect and polite. *'They often say things implicitly by going around one topic without clearly mentioning the central idea of the topic.'* Also, Lama stated that Arabic writing 'does not have rules like being direct, clear or straightforward'. The reason Lama gave was that *'Arabic students don't get the chance to learn how to write an essay'.* Also, Lama mentioned that the way she writes an Arabic essay is highly influenced by her Arabic culture. She believes that *'Arabic culture and the way we learn in Arabic universities influence the way we write an essay'.* As an explanation of how these two factors influence writing, Lama said the following:

> *Our culture's standard is to be indirect when telling something. It has*
>
> *something to do with being polite. For example, when someone asks*

someone else, "how are you?" in Arabic society, especially Saudi

Arabia, it is unusual to say only "good" or "fine". It is unacceptable

to be that direct. This is because the hearer may think that the speaker

wants to end the conversation. It is popular in Arabic culture to

answer that question by mentioning many things to make the

conversation longer and friendlier. This part of our culture also finds

its way into our writing. We believe that if we answer the essay

questions or state the topic sentence directly, the readers may stop

reading the whole essay.

Lama believes that this style of writing gives the readers the desire to read the whole essay in order to, as she said, *'discover what the topic is about'.* Likewise, Huda thinks that 'it is not always a good thing to write the body paragraphs in one way or to focus on one whole idea because we have to lead the readers to enjoy reading it; we *cannot just simply state it'* [italics added]. Although the participants value their writing in this way, they also see that the function of the readers is to understand the writing.

During the interviews, All the participants perceived an English essay as having the style of being 'straightforward, direct and clear' (Lama, Huda, Norah and Ahlam). In Lama's opinion, this is because '*there is a clear standard for writing an English essay'.* However, each participant has her own experiences of writing an English essay. Huda gives a description of her writing in English:

The first time I wrote an introduction in English, I didn't write it in a

clear way as it was supposed to be. I thought the introduction was just

where we gave general ideas or a hint of what we are writing

about…not where we give an outline of what we are going to write

about.

Lama mentioned how this affected her grades in the first semester of her master's degree. She said, *'my lecturer perceived my writing as unclear and unstructured because I wasn't straightforward'*. Lama believes that writing an introduction in English is *'totally different from writing an introduction in Arabic'*, and this difference concerns the three features of 'clarity, directness and sequences'. All participants agreed on this point. As an explanation of clarity in English, Ahlam gave the following details:

'When writing an English introduction, writers have to know exactly what they are going to write about. It is very clear, it is not circular and the points are stated directly.'

All participants indicated that developing an argument through body paragraph of academic English essay must be straightforward and clear.

I learnt how to write an English essay...I know that a topic in an English essay is developed through many paragraphs, which are linked together in a relevant way to drive the message directly to the reader, but I find myself developing my argument with a sentence that is perceived by my lecturer as irrelevant. My argument is between the lines, not up-front in each paragraph. (Lama)

I generally find myself writing "and, and, and". During that process, I just stop... delete some "ands", and then write "so" or "but" or cut

the sentence short into different sentences by using a fullstop, then I

start a new sentence to support my argument. (Norah)

In my English essay, I always have an outline before I start writing my

first draft. An outline is needed to develop my opinions in a connected

way. (Ahalm)

I try to be clear in my English writing.... I know that there are clear

standards for writing essays at my Australian university. At the

beginning of my master's degree, I was writing my report, and my

lecturer was from an Arabic background. I remembered that I tried to

use English discourse markers like "first", "second", "then" to make

my writing clear. Even with those markers though, my lecturer's

feedback made me realise at some points that my ideas were not

connected. He mentioned Chomsky's statement that "Colorless green

ideas sleep furiously". (Huda)

In further conversations with the researcher, Huda added that her lecturer explained

that in English, unconnected ideas sound irrelevant to the reader. She mentioned that

what Saudi students consider relevant, Australian lecturers may feel is incoherent or

lacks relevance. However, all participants indicated that their conclusion in academic

English essay seem to be similar to their occlusion in academic Arabic essay with

more indirect style and unconnected ideas.

4.2.1.1 Discussion of the data

The findings discussed above indicate that both Arabic and English essays have the same basic elements: an introduction, body and conclusion. However, these elements are developed differently in Arabic compared with English.

All participants in this study supported Inani's (1998) statement that the organisation of English text differs from the organisation of Arabic text. This can be seen in the way the participants explained how they write in both languages. All study participants seemed to agree that Arabic writing should be indirect from the beginning of the introduction to the concluding paragraph (Huda described this as '*similar to a "circle", going around one topic without clearly mentioning the central idea*'), which is, to a great extent, in line with the features of Arabic writing described by Al-Khatib (2001). In addition, Arabic writing does not explicitly state the topic of the essay because writers enjoy having their ideas understood implicitly and in a way that will '*lead the readers to enjoy reading it*' (Huda). Huda and Lama both stated that this tendency results from the high value placed on being polite among Arabic people, which dictates that people should not be direct in their speech and should try to say things implicitly. This, however, does not correspond with English essay expectations in which participants said their writing must clearly explain the topic being addressed. However, to some extent, the participants said that they still use their own style when writing in English even though they realise that their English lecturers will not accept it. Al-Zubaidi (2012) has pointed out that most English academic lecturers neglect the fact that academic literacy in Arabic is different than in English.

From the data, it can be seen that the Arabic culture fosters a strong relationship between indirectness and politeness; that is, being indirect is considered being polite.

This was supported in this study by the way that the participants avoided answering the essay's questions or refrained from stating the points directly. According to Lama, this '*has something to do with being polite*'. From this point of view, one can see that Saudi students are applying a positive politeness strategy in their writing in which they have been taught and have acquired from their own culture and their own Arabic discourse, namely, indirectness. This strategy, as Brown and Levinson (1987) have explained, is used to "save face"; that is, retain respect and avoid humiliation. In a Saudi student's writing, it is considered polite to not make the reader feel threatened, so little direct information is provided. This type of politeness is determined by the social or power distance between the writer and the readers. Lama considered the distance when she said, '*If we answer the essay questions or state the topic sentence directly, the readers may stop reading the whole essay*'. This is in line with Holtgraves and Yang (1990), who pointed out that each culture, applies politeness strategies differently according to various factors and that these differences result in the same ideas being presented in unique ways.

It is obvious that Arabic academic writing has a style that is different from English academic writing, and this is a result of more than just the differences between the Arabic and English language styles. Namely, indirectness is perceived by Saudi postgraduate students as politeness and as an important cultural feature in their writing. This is in contrast with the view of Feghali (1997), who indicated that indirectness in Arabic writing is the same as unclear writing. Hamadouche (2013) pointed out that Arabic culture has a clear influence on writing experiences and expression of Arabic discourse. The findings of this study regard the influence of Arabic culture seem to support Hamadouche's point above.

It is clear in this study were well aware of the rules of English academic writing, but their experiences in writing English were still affected by their Arabic cultural norms. For example, Huda stated, *'I didn't write it in a clear way as it was supposed to be'*, and Lama commented,*I wasn't straightforward'.* This reflects Abu-Rass's (1994) point that an Arabian's primary cultural discourse forms the basis of their adoption of English discourse. Thus, it is important to understand how such discourse influences their English academic writing and how the notion of literacy is different in Arabic and English academic writing.

Furthermore, the validity of the claim that the ability of Arabic students to write logically and professionally in English is weak (Al-Khatib, 2001) needs to be questioned. The data for this study has revealed that Saudi postgraduate students at Australian universities have their own cultural and social methods of writing and that Australian lecturers need to understand the way that Saudi students develop their thoughts in their academic English writing to better assess their writing by taking into account not just literacy, which is socially shaped, but also the notion of relevance, which is an issue observed in both Arabic and English writing. This supports the literature that states that each culture has its own conceptualization of what is logical and relevant (Phan, 1999; Farrell, 1994). Such differences influence students' writing in another language and results in different applications of the relevance maxim among different writers (White, 2001). The conceptualization of relevance can be shown in the description given by the study participants that in their Arabic writing, they can write in whatever way they like to present their argument. This can be seen in statements such as the following: *'Students often write in whatever form they like'* (Lama) and*I write as I think'* (Huda). Moreover, Ahlam reported that in Arabic writing, there is no link between the topic sentence and the supporting ideas, which is

not acceptable in English writing. This style of writing is still reflected in Arabic students' academic writing in English at Australian universities.

Linking ideas repeatedly is another feature of Arabic writing that comes through in Arabic students' English writing as described here: *'I generally find myself writing "and, and, and"'* (Lama). This seems to be different from what is expected in the English essay. This finding is in line with what Al-Khatib's (2001) states, that Saudi students explain that they use long sentences to enrich each idea so that the idea can be understood without separating it into parts. This finding sheds light on the importance of cultural factors in influencing students' writing in English and supports Connor's (2002) point that language is shaped by cultural and social values. Despite the acknowledgment of English writing expectations and the standards of writing academic English by all the study participants, Saudi postgraduate students at Australian universities still apply value and present their own cultural structure in their academic English writing.Therefore, it is clear that this finding contradicts the findings of others studies (Kaplan, 1966; Al-Jarrah, 2001; Ismail, 2010) on contrastive rhetoric which claim that the Arabic language and its way of writing is the only factor that influences the way students write academic English without considering culture as a factor. As Liddicoat (1997, p. 13) argued, 'language use in a group is a form of cultural behaviour'. In a similar vein, the participants of this study asserted that language and culture are connected and that their English academic writing is influenced by this connection.

4.3 "Politeness forms" in Arabic and English writing: Strategies in the Expression of Thinking and the reasons behind it

The data regarding strategies in the expression of thinking focus on two features: expression of critical analytical thinking, and repetitious style. All participants indicated that critical analytical thinking is a valued and important feature in English writing, while it is the same in Arabic writing but in different ways. These differences were explained by all participants below.

> *My writing in Arabic is not very critical. It is less critical than in my English writing. In my Arabic essay, I develop my writing uncritically, and it's more descriptive. I learnt in my country that to criticise is discouraged in education. For example, in my university X* [in Saudi Arabia], *I know if I criticise famous authors or even my teacher, then it's like I am showing disrespect.* (Lama)

Lama attributed this to her Arabic culture. Saudi people in particular feel disinclined to criticise others. Ahlam, who has taught Saudi students in one Saudi university, also shared a view that was similar to Lama's view. She reported that teaching in Saudi Arabia is mainly ruled by an Islamic educational system. She mentioned that students have the belief that *'information written in a book is the fact, and teachers must be* [the only] *ones who are knowledgeable'* (Ahlam). Thus, they often trust the information already written without questioning. For Norah, this high respect between teachers and students influences the Saudi's way of writing in Arabic. She explained in detail that Saudi students are critical in their own ways:

> *Our culture and Islamic norms influence the way we learn and write. In Saudi, everyone has to share similar views and has to write what*

everybody values. If I suggest an idea, and my lecturer sees it is wrong in her opinion, then the idea is incorrect. This encouraged my classmate to not contradict what my lecturer said. Considering ideas as "right"[should] *be accepted by the majority. We have to write only what our society values and also what is accepted by Islam. If we write something from the* Quran, *then it is considered completely true and more important. For example, if I write "fasting is not good for patients" and successfully support my argument by quotes from the* Quran, *then my argument is correct and meets the standards.*

Huda described her first experience of writing an English essay at one Australian university as a 'turning point' because she was influenced by her way of writing an Arabic essay, had limited knowledge of English writing style and was afraid her writing style would not be understood by her Australian lecturers. When she was taking one unit of the Faculty of Education, Huda discovered that her writing style was not valued by her Australian lecturers:

I had one assignment in my first semester of my master's degree in which the requirements were not clear because my professor didn't explain it in detail. His ability to clarify the requirements to international students was really weak. I was required to write a report about the class in detail, and I was actually describing the class without analysing anything. I was expected to write a critical analysis and support my points, not just state them. But I didn't, which negatively affected my result. I got credit in this assignment,

> *which had an impact on my psychology as well as my performance. I*
>
> *think I wrote it correctly but in my own way of writing.*

Both Lama and Norah experienced similar situations in which they presented their critical thinking in a way that was more descriptive than analytical, which led them to be misunderstood by their Australian lecturers; however, this misunderstanding was not caused because they lack knowledge or are educationally incompetent. In further conversations with the researcher, they stated that belief stemmed from their 'different culture' as they had not experienced being assessed by Australian lecturers in Saudi Arabia. Ahlam explained that critical thinking is valued in English writing, and English writers can write whatever they like as long as they can support their arguments. Furthermore, she said that the 'power distance' is not emphasised. Individualism is much more acceptable in Australia, whereas collectivism is more important in Saudi Arabia.

According to these participants, repetition is another feature of the Arabic writing style that influences their English academic writing in the Faculties of Arts and Education. Most participants showed a strong preference towards using a repetitious style in both Arabic and English writing, which they claimed was a valued way to deliver the message to readers. They consider it a strategy for ensuring that their ideas are deeply understood.

> *One way to express my ideas in order to persuade others is by*
>
> *repeating the idea over and over.... I paraphrased it in another*
>
> *sentence again to make sure that the meaning is clear.*(Lama)

If you read my writing in Arabic, you will find that it is full of

repetition. I think this is not only in my writing, [but] *it is also a part of*

our communicative style. (Norah)

I really like when I repeat my phrase in my writing even in English. I

focus on that sometimes to emphasise my ideas throughout my essay.

(Huda)

Furthermore, Ahlam considered repetition as something that cannot be avoided in

Saudi students' writing because they adopt the style from the *Quran*, as following the

Quran to Saudi students is the way to reach God. Thus, Saudi students apply its

repetitious structure to all of their writing.

They believe that any other writing styles will not deliver their

message. They just focus on repetition over other styles. (Ahlam)

In further conversations with the researcher, however, the participants reported that

the use of this strategy to express one's thinking is not appreciated in Australian

universities, in which they could not use it comfortably because the lecturers:

... were not aware of how this strategy was important for me as it

assists me in expressing ideas... [but]*because it doesn't meet the*

nature of English writing, I [minimised] *the use of this*

strategy.(Huda)

> [Give] *the reaction that they aren't aware of cultural differences*
> *among students... sometimes they don't have knowledge of how this*
> *style is in Islam. So after I tend to use it regularly, I reduce using it*
> *little by little as I write more essays in English.* (Lama)

Despite this misunderstanding between lecturers and participants and unfair assessment by their lecturers, Norah uses therepetition strategy in her academic English writing in the Faculty of Arts.

> *Ok, it is true that I have a different culture than my lecturers, and*
> *English is not my first language, but I still repeat my ideas to show*
> *my own style as well. I am sure that I write grammatically correct,*
> *and it also makes sense.* (Norah)

All the participants indicated thatthe influence of Islam is the reason that they are not showing their criticism in their academic writing. Namely, Lama mentioned that if she says something about another person in his or her absence, it could be hurtful to that person, and that this behaviour is discouraged in Islam. Moreover, Ahlam asserted that Saudi postgraduate student are able to criticize others but that they show respect to the ethics of Islam. This can be seen in Huda's explanation:

> *I used to place myself down as a student and consider my reader as*
> *one of my lecturers. I almost avoid criticising others directly because I*
> *believe that criticism may hurt them.*

4.3.1 Discussion of the data:

In the data, it can be seen that the participants' contest Kaplan's (1966) point of view (presented in Chapter Two) that Arabic students' English writing is affected by their own first language without taking into consideration the strong influence of other factors. Firstly, Kaplan (1966) argues that writing is isolated from socio-cultural influences because the writing process is more affected by the writer's first language. However, the important point here is that the study participants also speak Arabic, which Kaplan (1966) assessed, but their writing in English is not necessarily influenced only by their Arabic language. Other factors also influence their writing process; in particular, their cultural background and Islamic beliefs have important impact.In fact, previous comparative rhetoric studies (Connor, 1996; Liddicoat; 1997) emphasised the importance of considering a text as culturally defined or socially shaped. However, as seen in this study, Saudi postgraduate students considered a text and a style as religiously defined, which sheds light on the importance of considering both religion and culture as factors when analysing students' academic writing.

Moreover, the participants reported that their critical thinking is different than what is expected in English due to cultural and religious factors. This is in line with the literature presented in Chapter Two, which highlights the influence of culture and religion on students' thinking as well as their learning processes (e.g., Abu-Rass, 1994, 2011; Al-Qhtani, 2006). Therefore, it can be argued that Saudi postgraduate students who appear to be less critical in their academic English writing may not necessarily feel that way, but their lecturers may need to understand and be aware of the influence of the students' culture and religion instead of attributing their writing style to just their language proficiency. Because English has an international status

and its speakers are from many different cultural backgrounds (Crystal, 2003), it is important to view Saudi postgraduate students as individuals in relation to their Arabic culture and Islamic religion, upon which they rely for knowledge and their identities.

Secondly, all participants supported Al-Zubaidi's (2012) definition of *being critical* as criticising others, which is looked upon negatively in Arabic culture. However, the participants pointed out that the influence of Islam causes them to be critical in their own ways.Namely, they use the *Quran*[3] to implicitly criticise others, which means that their culture and religion encourage them to be critical, to evaluate and to reflect. This encouragement of critical thinking can be found in the *Quran*, in which Allah[4] asks us to reflect on some matters and to be critical in our thinking: 'Do they not look at the birds, held poised in the midst of (the air and) the sky? Nothing holds them up but (the power of) Allah'. Verily in this are Signs for those who believe"(Qur'an 16: 79). The Qur'an further indicates: 'Have they not seen the earth, how much of every fruitful kind. We make to grow therein? Lo! Herein is indeed a portent; yet most of them are not believers' (Qur'an 26:7-8). Thus, it is clear that Islam encourages us to be critical and rational in our thinking. Moreover, the power of Islam influences the Arabic educational system as pointed out by the participants. Students learn that criticisms are discouraged in education '*because Arabic teachers see their criticisms as showing disrespect*' (Lama). However, their critical thinking can be appreciated and accepted when using the *Quran* as a source to support their own argument because in Saudi society, everything in the *Quran'is considered completely true and more important*' (Norah). This is in line with Abu-Rass's (2011) argument that the

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[3]Quran is the Holy book of Islam which as Muslims believed to be the word ofAllah (God) and it is the name that God has given to the book
[4]is the Arabic name that refer to God

Quran for Arabic students is considered the truest literary style and that educational system in Saudi Arabia is controlled by Islamic norms. In light of this, it is important to note that Saudi postgraduate students do not actually write uncritically; instead, their way of being critical differs due to their sociocultural knowledge and dominant Islamic norms. Therefore, their style of writing in academic English that may cause them to be perceived as less critical in Australian universities should not be attributed to the inability to write but to the lack of a cultural understanding of their lecturers. In fact, one study participant pointed out that this misunderstanding is a result of unfamiliarity with *'diverse cultures'* among them (Huda), which causes students to feel unsatisfied about their teachers' assessments.

Thirdly, it can be seen from the study findings that Saudi students' conceptualisation of politeness differs from what is expected in English culture. This supports Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily's (2012) point that in Saudi Arabia, the culturally situated notion of politeness is different from the English notion due to the strong influence of factors such as Islam and the Arabic culture. All the study participants showed a preference for using a positive politeness strategy to avoid threatening others and to try to show respect to teachers, authors and the information written in books. In line with the study by Al-Zubaidi (2012) that was discussed in Chapter Two, Ahlam stated that the distance power between teachers and students is controlled by Islamic norms of politeness in which the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed in *Sunnah* also contribute to maintaining this distance. One participant mentioned the *Sunnah*, referring to how the Prophet Mohammed teaches us this principle. Lama went on to explain that the Prophet Mohammed asks us to respect teachers. This is can be seen in *Sunnah* when the Prophet Mohammed described the high status of teachers: "Three types of people

[including teachers] should not be mocked except by a hypocrite, an old Muslim man, a knowledgeable person and a just leader" (Tabaraani, as cited in Khan, 2014, p. 93).

Moreover, Anas who was a companion of the prophet Mohammed, described how the Prophet Mohammed treatedothers: "I served the Messenger of Allah for nine years. I never heard him comment about anything I did, 'Why did you do this?!' He never criticized me for anything at all!"(Sahih Muslim, p. 2310). Saudi postgraduate students believe that they should see the Prophet as the role model and not hurt others through criticism. However, this does not mean that they have to be silent in their thinking; rather, they should present their criticism in indirect way with more kindness. The influence of Islam can be also observed in the way that the participants preferred to use the *Quran* to support their opinion, as they believe if they use *Quran,* their argument will be more justice and logical. In the *Quran*, Allah also says, "and when you speak, be just!" (Qur'an6:153). From this point of view, it is clear that Saudi postgraduate students try to follow the rules of Quran even in their academic writing, such as being polite to others. Therefore, recognizing Saudi students' norm of politeness is essential to better understanding the factors that influence their writing process and final product.

Lastly, the findings from this study show that Islamic religion clearly influences students' writing. For example, the use of repetition is more of an Islamic feature than an Arabic language feature. As pointed out in Chapter Two, Islam is not just a set of beliefs for Saudi students; rather, it is considered a norm that has a strong influence in their lives. The study participants agreed with Feghali's (1997) argument that repetition is a successful strategy that Islam teaches them to use not only in their writing, but*also as a part of our communication style'* (Norah). They argue that the reason they use this strategy in their academic writing is *'to persuade others'* (Lama)

and *'to emphasise my ideas'* (Huda). This correlates with the claim of Feghali (1997) that repeated words in Arabic-Islamic culture means moving others to belief. However, two study participants stated that they had reduced their use of repetition in their academic English writing because they were afraid that their lecturers would consider this 'illogical' due to their lack of awareness of cultural differences. This is similar to Canagarajah's point (2002) that treating the different use of academic discourse as a lack of proficiency undervalues the culture and - I add - religion of the students. There is a need to prevent such judgment by encouraging lecturers to increase their understanding of the reasons that students use this type of discourse in their writing. This will help them to judge their students' writing more fairly. If this type of judgment continues, it can negatively affect their learning progress as these students are motivated by their religion and cultural or linguistic practices.

4.4 Appropriating English writing style

This theme arose from the data. The participants explained that they are appropriating the English writing style and taking the ownership of the writing. Namely, Huda mentioned the following:

> *As an Arabic person, I don't tend to criticise books or writers, but I realised that English values this. In English, it is considered part of knowledge and learning, so then I write as critically as possible.*

Lama described who she appropriates English writing style in her own way by taking the readers into consideration, and applying her own Arabic norms to present her identity.

I'm currently taking my readers into consideration as I write in

English, but I still write my introduction the same way as before. I

think this way is comfortable for me. It expresses my ideas more than

being more specific and directs (Lama).

Norah tried to appropriate English in her own way in which she

believes it is more polite, but her lecturers' assessment was an

obstacle for her:

After I got credit in my first assignment, I got upset and realised that

no one in this environment would ever appreciate my writing style. I

tried my best to criticise thinking and people, but sometimes I failed to

do so...not because I can't, but because I think it is impolite. (Norah)

Ahlam mentioned that she is appropriating English writing style as she has spent eight

years in Australia. She could not think first in Arabic and then translate into English

because there are many linguistic theories that she did not learn in Saudi Arabia.

Thus, she follows the rules for English academic essays but with presenting her

Arabic identity. For instance, she still presented her introduction in her own way

'being indirect in just to get the readers discover what is my essay about'. This was

also the case with Lama, Huda and Norah, who arestill presenting their own Arabic

norms in their English academic writing in Australian universities.

In further conversation with the researcher, Lama mentioned that English is everyone's language and 'is not the private property of native English speakers'. She added that during her master's degree, she learnt that all speakers from non-English backgrounds should be *'appropriating English as their own language'*. Huda, in line with this point, she believed that lecturers must consider that their students are from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; instead of forcing students to abandon their own cultural style, it is more important 'to *accept multicultural thinking'*. Additionally, Ahlam and Norah referred to this idea as they mentioned that English is a part of their lives, and it is their rights to present their own identity in a multicultural context.

English is for everyone....as a teacher, I try to master it. I have been an English teacher for more than six years. I have learnt English since my secondary school as my major in my bachelor's and master's degrees is English as well. I consider English as a vehicle to present my culture and to communicate with people from various backgrounds. (Ahlam)

I use English currently to communicate, but my Arabic culture, my religion and my own style of communication still make me feel good about being Saudi. (Norah)

These participants recognize the importance of speaking English and the knowledge they received from communicating in English, which has helped them become more

aware of their culture and Arabic identity. The participants' appropriation of English does not mean that they ignore English academic writing style; rather, they take ownership of English for their own benefits and advantages. They indicated that they presented themselves comfortably in English, which helped them to show their identities as Arabic Muslims in general and as Saudis in particular.

4.4.1 Discussion of the data

As can be seen in the findings from this study, all of the participants considered English as everyone's language and they enjoyed writing in English in relation to their advantages. Indeed, they are showing their own cultural norms and clearly presenting themselves in their writing without hesitation. This supports Marlina's (2012) argument that it is not necessary for English speakers from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds to communicate the norms of Inner Circle countries. The study participants clearly agreed with this point of view, as they stated that they present their Saudi identities in their English writing without apology. This can be found in Lama's and Huda explanations regarding how they take their readers into consideration but still retain their previous way of writing an introduction by mixing Arabic and English writing styles. They incorporated English identity with Arabic identity to present third identity for them which is writing in English with the voice of Arabic. The participants 'comments support Canagarajah's (2006) argument that English has been appropriated by users from different cultural backgrounds, to the extent, that makes sense to them. Being able to write in English with a Saudi identity was seen as an essential factor contributing to their positive experiences as international students in Australia. Sharifian (2009) argued that English must be

considered a medium for users to express their own cultural norms. In this study, some participants are still indirect and avoid criticism in their English academic writing (e.g. Lama and Norah). Therefore, lecturers may need to be aware of the students and learn to understand the different cultural rules or norms of international students because these students, including those from Saudi Arabia, seem to have determined that their ownership of English can be used to facilitate their own identities. Both the literature presented in Chapter Two, which discussed the importance of taking ownership of English as an international language (e.g. Phan, 2009; Holliday, 2005; McKay, 2002), and the participants' own words in this study present a similar determination.

The participants in this study indicated that they still present their own cultural and Islamic norms in their English writing. It is clear that the participants do adopt English norms somewhat, such as writing in direct or clear ways, but they admitted that they are Saudi, not English. This can be seen in their call for their norms *'to be appreciated'* (Norah) and their need to avoid discrimination. The participants' needs are similar to Sharifian's (2009) argument that since English has acquired an international status, it is appropriate to accept multiple norms by its users. As Phan (2009) argued, this helps improve intercultural communication in which speakers from the Outer and Expanding Circles can express their own cultural norms. In the same context, Saudi students in this study are from the Expanding Circle, and they considered English as a tool to express their own cultural norms to Australian lecturers in order to achieve intercultural communication.

In this study, all the participants stated that they do accept and use the English writing style. It is important to note that while they do not reject their own norms, they do write in English. However, they also apply their own Arabic and cultural norms

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because they make sense to them and they help them present their identities in a comfortable way. Therefore, it is of paramount importance for Australian lecturers to understand how Saudi postgraduate students experience writing in respect to their culture, norms and styles and from the perspective of EIL.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1. Contributions of the study

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this study aims to explore Saudi postgraduate students' experiences in writing in academic English at Australian universities. It also aims to discover whether Saudi postgraduate students perceive differences between writing in Arabic and in English during their academic studies. This study has found that Saudi postgraduate students, whether they had written an Arabic academic essay in their first degree or not, identified the differences between Arabic and English writing. These differences were classified as related to the organisation of the general shape of an essay, the organisation of discourse and strategies for expression of thinking. It has largely confirmed that Saudi postgraduate students are in fact not ignorant about how to write academic English essays, but they choose to write in their own style because of the influence of their Arabic culture and Islamic norms. Their lecturers may inadvertently consider their writing as illogical, unstructured or not proficient. Therefore, this research has extended the argument presented in Chapter Two by Abu-Rass (2010, 2011). Moreover, this study has also explored a theme that has not been presented in the literature reviewed, namely, appropriating English writing style.

This study suggests that it is necessary to understand how Saudi postgraduate students have different conceptualisations of politeness in writing. Another proposition is that

Australian lecturers should not initially assume that Saudi postgraduate students have problems in their writing and consider these problems as a lack of proficiency. Interestingly, instead of ignoring English style, these participants acknowledge the English writing style in writing. For these participants, language has a strong relationship with their culture and identity; however, as soon as they became aware of what is expected in academic English writing, they naturally appropriate themselves. The findings suggest that when students write more in English in which their writing is valued by cultural standards shaped by English, they tend to appropriated English language and its values without rejecting their own cultural norms. This research has identified this to be found in intercultural communication as well.

5.2 Politeness in academic English writing by Saudi writers

It is clear that English has acquired an international status and that its speakers are from a variety cultural backgrounds. English has become a language in which its speakers have the right to present their own cultural identities. As Marlina (2014, p.30) argues, speakers of English do not necessarily speak English to communicate the cultural and pragmatic values of 'the so-called "Western" English-speaking countries'; rather, they apply their own cultural norms, sociocultural practices and discourse conventions when using English. Regarding politeness in the context of academic writing, some scholars, such as Cmejrková (1997) and Golebiowski (1998), have focused on the issue of different politeness norms accepted by people from different cultural backgrounds. With respect to academic English writing, some scholars, such as Kaplan (1966), Farrell (1997) and Phan (2001), have proposed that in order to be polite in English academic writing, students has to follow some criteria when they write an academic English essay such as taking the readers into consideration, being clear when presenting ideas, showing a sequence in their

paragraphs and writing critically. However, according to the Saudi postgraduate students in this study, these conventions are not necessarily seen as 'polite'. Saudi students as proposed by Saudi scholars (Al-Qhtani, 2006; Abu-Rass, 1994), have their own principles of politeness when writing academic English essays. First, including the Islamic statement 'In the name of God', in their writing is considered to be polite. This is because such phrase is used at the beginning of each chapter of the *Quran* and involving the style of Quran in the text consider more polite. Saudi students prefer to present their Islamic identities wherever possible; therefore, they use this phrase in their writing to show respect to God. Second, from Saudi students' points of view, presenting criticism in indirect way in academic writing is considered to be more polite to avoid threatening the other's face.

Third, using the Quran and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed to support arguments in academic writing is considered to be polite. As mentioned in the literature by Abu-Rass (2011, p. 207), Saudi students believe that the Quran is "infallible in content and literary style". Therefore, from Saudi students' perspectives as Muslims, it is more logical and polite to use the Quran within their texts. Finally, driven by the style of Quran, repetitious style is considered as a form of politeness and being literate. Supported by Feghali (1997), this type of discourse is used to persuade others and to make sure they are being understood. This style is also seen Chapter 55 of the *Quran*, when Allah repeats one verse almost 30 times to emphasise the importance of understanding a particular belief, action, thought. Therefore, As Muslims, Saudi students take their religious practices into consideration when they communicate with others. It is of paramount importance to note that they use English as a medium to present their Islamic identities, and their way of presenting it is connected with their

own politeness strategies, which Australian lecturers should take into account when reading and assessing Saudi students' academic writing.

5.3. Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research

In addition to the limitations mentioned in Chapter Three, there are other limitations in light of the study findings. Because of the restricted time and limited words of the study, this research has not been able to explore other Saudi postgraduate students in different facilities or in different degrees of study. Nor has this study been able to investigate Australian lecturers' experiences or perceptions towards Saudi postgraduate students writing in English. Moreover, this study also suggests that Australian lecturers 'seemingly negative practices and their simplistic judgments can prohibit Saudi postgraduate students from presenting their knowledge comfortably in writing. However, due to time constraints and the words limit of this study, it has not been possible to obtain data from Australian lecturers. Thus, cultivating the perspective of Australian lecturers would be recommended for further research. Additionally, due to time restriction, this study focuses on interview methods to collect data, further research in analysing Arabic writing text would be valuable as well as would enrich the data.

5.4. Expansion knowledge of culturally valued practices

Principles are valued in every culture, but there are some values that are more appreciated or less appreciated in one culture than in another culture. However, from my own experience as a postgraduate student in the Faculty of Arts, academic lecturers usually just explained the guidelines of the course, submission requirements

for assignments, required reading material and plagiarism, without taking into consideration the importance of understanding students' culture and familiarising the students with the English culture. Almost none of the lecturers encouraged students to present their own cultural pattern in writing and then explained to the students to what extent this method is acceptable in English academic writing. As a result, some Australian lecturers at the Faculties of Arts and Education often think that it is not necessary to understand what is valued in students' culture and writing style, as they simply require students to write in the way that is accepted by the lecturers. When encountering Saudi students who clearly present other styles in writing, they tend to underestimate their style and clearly blame the students' perceived lack of language proficiency rather than trying to understand the students' culture and experiences. Therefore, it is important for Australian lecturers who insist that Saudi postgraduate students must follow the English academic way of writing to take into the consideration that it is impossible to prevent cultural factors from appearing in students' writing styles. Australian lecturers also need to note that if the participants in this study do acknowledge the standards for academic English writing, they are clearly still maintaining some valued norms of their language and culture as well as some Islamic practices because they must meet some religious restrictions. It should be note that the students' writing reflects their voices, methods and ownership of their writing. Thus, instead of ignoring their culture and voices, Australian lecturers should assess their writing with an open mindedness to the existence of cross-cultural variation.

5.5 Challenge previous contrastive rhetoric studies' assumptions about Arabic students' writing

Firstly, it is extremely important to challenge previous assumptions and beliefs put forth by many intercultural rhetoric studies, lecturers and researchers that have been negatively used to explain the reasons for how Arabic students write English. Language proficiency and language structure are not necessarily the only factors that influence Arabic students' writing, as presenting different styles in writing does not necessarily reflect unprofessionalism in using the language. As this study confirms, other factors can affect Arabic students' writing, particularly Saudi students, such as highly valued Islamic norms and principles that should not be ignored when analysing students 'writing. Therefore, it may be necessary for researchers and lecturers to re-examine their assumptions and raise their awareness by taking into account the Arabic-Muslim culture and its impact on Arabic writing. Certainly, a person's first language is considered an important factor that influences writing in English, but analysing the influence of students' cultures, ethnicity and religion can lead to greater understanding and consideration of students' ways of writing academic English. This intercultural rhetoric study confirms that religion as a factor have an influence in students academic writing which must be taken into account when analysing any text by students from different religious background. In addition to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and discussion of the data in Chapter Four, the following final section concludes this study by exploring some strategies that Australian lecturers may need to take into account to better understand Saudi postgraduate students' writing in English.

5.6 Understanding the writing experience of individual students

It is important to understand the writing experience of individual students not only in the student's second language but also in his or her first language. This means that if a student has a writing experience in his or her first language, this helps the student in writing in a second language with respect to organizing the essay and developing logical arguments. However, this experience can lead to overlap if a student's first language style is greatly different from the target language. On the other hand, if a student has no prior writing experience in his or her first language, it is sometimes easier to explore a more professional style in writing in the target language because there is no previous experience to contradict with current experience. Therefore, Australian lecturers should have a general knowledge and understanding of the prior experiences of each individual student's writing in both the student's first language and the English language, as well as whether other factors have influenced the student's rules of writing in both languages. This understanding will help the lecturers better assist the students and give them more equitable assessments of their writing. To do this, Australian universities can ask overseas students to fill out questionnaires to gather information regarding their writing experiences. The collected answers may help academic lecturers and faculty members arrange the proper support for students and develop their own awareness. It is also a good strategy for Australian lecturers to have a discussion with the students at the beginning of the course to familiarise the students with the differences between the Arabic language and the norms that are accepted in standards English academic writing. Namely, academic lecturers may ask students to describe what makes their first language writing well, as well as discuss with students what makes English writing well. Finally, all Australian lecturers must be aware of intercultural miscommunications in writing in order to avoid

misunderstanding their students. At this point, I would like to conclude this research with a poem that explains my experiences as a Saudi postgraduate student and the experiences of the participants. I hope it can help Australian lecturers understand our experiences of writing as Saudi students.

To my academic lecturers, to my Arts faculty

And to my Australian university:

Greetings from a student of an Arabian nationality

From a different land of a cultural diversity

I hope to take the following into consideration

As I came from a different nation"

As Saudi students, we aware of the academic writing criteria

But still follow our religion and its sound belief

That is, "never criticize explicitly or declare your idea"

But imply your precious opinion, to maintain the relations, safe

I hope to take that into consideration

As we all came from a different nation.

As Muslims, we highly respect elders and teachers

We are not allowed to say "you are wrong" directly

As it is impolite, embarrassing and may harm others

Honestly, it is not Islamic morality to criticize overtly

I hope to take that into consideration

As we all came from a different nation.

When we write in English, we repeat phrases again and again

This is actually derived from Quran verses

It is a useful manner for concentration and to evoke the brain

But some of you feedback as it is wasting time and useless

I hope to take that into consideration

As we all came from a different nation.

Beside Arabic, we consider English is our language, too

For that, my dears, we've chosen your country and respect your culture

Yes, we aware of the saying; when in Rome do as Roman do

But we more aware of the value of reflecting our Islamic nature

Would you please take these matters into consideration?

As we all came from a different nation.

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Appendix 1 – Interview Questions

1-what are you studying? (Master- PhD)?

2-What is your field of study?

3-How long have you been studying in Australia?

4-How often do use English Language currently?

5-What language issues you faced at the time of writing your assignment or research?

6-Did you write an essay in your Arabic university?

7-What is the similarities and differences between writing in English and Arabic? (I mean in the way of organization, developing your argument)?

8-Do you follow the same style of writing in Arabic when writing in English?

9-As there are some similarities and differences between Arabic and English, do you find difficulty when write in English in Australia? Can you think of any examples? Let'sdiscuss your essay.

10-Do you think that your supervisor or teacher' feedback regarding your essay is caused by misunderstanding of your culture? When and how?

Appendix 2 – Sample of Interview Transcript

R: Researcher   **I**: Interviewee

R: what are you studying?

I: Umm…I've already finished my master's degree.

R: What is your field of study?

I: I'm a master' students in Applied Linguistics in Australia.

R: How long have you been studying in Australia?

I: Almost two years.

R: How often do you use English language currently?

I: Umm…well…I use it every day basically because I have my kids going to school and coming back and speaking in English all the time. So I have to speak with them.

R: What language issues did you face at the time of writing your assignments or carrying out research in Australia?

I Basically…my problem is always with my introductions...The first time I wrote an introduction in English, I didn't write it in a clear way as it was supposed to be…umm I thought the introduction was just where we gave general ideas or a hint of what we

are writing about…not where we give an outline of what we are going to write about...this is my main issue…not being direct in my writing.

R: Are there other issues that you have faced?

I: Umm…usually when I write in English…I…face this problem…I mean…that… they want me to be specific and direct and to tell everything to do with the whole essay at the beginning. Umm…I don't follow this because I think if…I tell everything in the introduction, what can Isayin the paragraphs? So it is hard for me to…to…follow this instruction in English, so sometimes…I usually go back to my introduction and try to edit it when I have finished writing my essay. I…don't like to be specific, so sometimes I don't give the points that I will discuss in the paragraphs because I think if I tell the readers at the start…what is the point of telling them again? Umm…but…I remember one of my professors in the master's degree…actually…when he first…received my essay…he told me it was great and that everything was okay…but when I submitted it…I discovered that…like…I received low marks…umm…not what I expected…. So when I asked him why…he told me that…you need to work on your introduction…I think he should have told me that at the very beginning, not at the end…like…when I had just submitted it. So I found this hard.

R: Did you write essays in your Arabic university?

I: Yes I did... My Arabic writing was different from my writing in English…I… mean…when I write my essay in the Arabic language, I'm not usually aware of how my writing will be connected at the end. I write as I think; I can start a new paragraph even if I have not finished my argument in the previous paragraph...also…my writing in Arabic is similar to a "circle". I mean, when I used to write an introduction, I had

the habit of being indirect…and my introduction didn't tell the reader clearly what my essay was about. I believe that readers have to read each idea in my introduction to infer what I'm arguing about.

R: You mentioned "being indirect" in your Arabic writing. Could you please tell me the reason for this?

I: Umm…I think it is our way of writing...you know everyone has their own special style…I…believe...this style is used by all Arabic people…it is their personality of being indirect…they often say things implicitly by going around one topic without clearly mentioning the central idea of the topic.

R: Do you think there are any similarities or differences between writing in English and Arabic (I mean in terms of organization or developing your argument)?

I: Yes…yes…there are many differences between writing in Arabic and English…but I think both have the same sections…I mean… introduction, body…and conclusion… There are many differences… English academic writing has to be clear and direct…you know...this is not like Arabic writing at all... For me I think that it is not good to write my introduction or body…or conclusion in a direct way…or to be concentrated on one idea… I think that in Arabic writing we have to guide the readers to enjoy reading it…we cannot just simply state it. When I write my English essays…I sometime use my Arabic style…I like to make the readers enjoy reading my essay.

R: Can you tell me about your first academic essay in English?

I:Yes…yes... actually my first essay in English…was like…a turning point…this is because I am influenced by Arabic style…it is my way of writing…. I was just so worried that my lecturer wouldn't accept it…and I didn't know what mark he would give me...actually...I try to be clear in my English writing...I know that there are clear standards for writing essays at my Australian university. At the beginning of my master's degree, I was writing my report, and my lecturer was from an Arabic background. I remembered that I tried to use English discourse markers like "first", "second", "then" to make my writing clear. Even with those markers though, my lecturer's feedback made me realize at some points that my ideas were not connected…He mentioned Chomsky's statement that "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously"… after that I knew that my style was not appreciated by my lecturers.

R: So you still follow the same style of writing in Arabic when writing in English?

I: Oh…yes…yes I have… I had one assignment in my first semester of my master's degree in which the requirements were not clear because my professor didn't explain it in detail. His ability to clarify the requirements to international students was really weak. I was required to write a report about the class in detail, and I was actually describing the class without analyzing anything. I was expected to write a critical analysis and support my points, not just state them. But I didn't, which negatively affected my result. I got credit in this assignment, which had an impact on my psychology as well as my performance. I think I wrote it correctly but in my own way of writing.

R: It seems as like you find difficulty when writing in English in Australia?

I: Yes…sometimes not only because I'm being indirect but also because I repeat my statements over and over again through the essay…I…realized that this is not accepted in English writing…but I love this strategy…I just love using it in my English writing too**…**

R: Why do you consider this strategy important to you even in English writing?

I: Umm…yes...first this strategy is used in the Quran which repeats verses and also my teachers in …X (Saudi university)…always repeat phrases…I adopt this strategy in my communication and my writing in English…I really like when I repeat my phrase in my writing even in English. I focus on that sometimes to emphasize my ideas throughout my essay…but unfortunately…my Australian lecturers were not aware of how this strategy was important for me as it assists me in expressing ideas... but because it doesn't meet the nature of English writing, I …minimized the use of this strategy.

R: Can you think of other differences between your writing in English and your writing in Arabic?

I: Yes…umm...I think in English…I am supposed to criticize scholars if there is something that I don't agree with…but in my Arabic writing I can't think how to criticize others…it is something to do with being polite. As I…don't like to be criticized…I don't like to hurt others…you know this is what we learn from Islam… this was hard for me…I mean how could I criticize English writers or Arabic writers and…indicate their name…I was afraid that this would be impolite…I don't know but when I write… I used to place myself down as a student and consider my reader as one of my lecturers. I almost avoid criticizing others directly because I believe that criticism may hurt them.

R: Do you think that your supervisor's or teacher's feedback regarding your essay was caused by misunderstanding your culture? In what ways?

I: Yes…I believe that they don't know about Saudi society and how we communicate…I…know that they also don't know about my style or…my…religion… this makes me change my writing in English a little.

R: What do you mean by change? Do you mean that you are no longer applying your Arabic style?

I: NO…no… but…you know as an Arabic person, I don't tend to criticize books or writers, but I realized that English values this…In English, it is considered part of knowledge and learning, so then I tried to be as critical as possible…I don't mean that I am following all the rules of English academic writing…but I still use my repetition strategy when possible…I know my lecturers don't like this but I feel comfortable using it in my English writing and this is how I am...I think it is my right to use English in my way as long as I am writing in correct grammar…I hope that my lecturers try to accept multicultural thinking…as we are all from different backgrounds.

Appendix 3 – Explanatory Statements

MONASH University

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Project: (How Culturally Situated Notions of politeness forms Influence the Way Saudi

Postgraduate Students Write Academic English?**)**

Chief Investigator's name Dr. Roby Marlina Department of Art	(Hanan Almalki)**Student's name**

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researcher via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

My name is Hanan Almalki and I am a master student in Applied linguistics at Monash university. I am conducting a research project under supervision of Dr Roby Marline, an assistant lecturer in the school of languages, literature, cultures and linguistics. My research project will be submitted as a master thesis and will be written from the data I collect in this research.

The goal of my research project is to explore the way Saudi postgraduate students write academic English, and to introduce the different norms of politeness that Saudi Postgraduate students use in academic writing. This is important because it will help English teachers to have a greater understanding of the writing experience and knowledge of Saudi postgraduate students in both Arabic and English languages.

In order to meet the goal of this project, you are invited as a Saudi postgraduate student to participate in an interview which will take approximately forty minutes, in which you will be asked to answer ten questions regarding the way you write in academic English during the period of your study in Australia. If you are interested, you can contact me via email or phone number given above to arrange time and place for the interview at your convenience. You will be given a consent form to complete. Signing this form indicates that you have consented to take part in this research. During the interview, you will be asked to bring an essay of your writing in order to discuss the way you organize your writing and how you reflect your Arabic cultural values in your academic writing. In advance, I would like to thank you for your time to participate in this project.

Participation in this project will not cause you any harm or inconvenience, beyond losing a small amount of your time for the interview. There are no risks results of participation in this project. Please note that you are welcome to ask for clarification during the interview, and you must understand that your participation is voluntary. You can withdraw or refuse to participate at any time with no penalty and without offering explanation.

I would like to inform you that the audio recorded will be deleted after completing the transcription and the data will be reported anonymously, no names or personal information will be included and the data will be reported using codes. The data will be accessed only by the researcher and supervisor.

To protect you, the data will be stored in a computer in a locked office for five years and after that will be destroyed. This study may be published as an article in a journal; however, participants will not be identified in the final report.

If you have any queries or would like to receive a summary of the research findings, please do not hesitate to contact Hanan Almalki on ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or email
 The findings will be released between (October- November, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
2014).

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee

(MUHREC)

Room 111, Building 3e

Research Office

Monash University VIC 3800

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Thank you,

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Chief investigator's name

Dr Roby Marlina

Appendix 4 – CONSENT FORM

MONASH University

Project: 'How Culturally Situated Notions of politeness Forms Influence The Way Saudi Postgraduate Students Write Academic English?'

Chief Investigator: Dr. Roby Marlina

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
Audio recording during the interview	☐	☐

Name of Participant:

Date:

Participant Signature: