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A Dialogue in Two Contexts: The Journey of Saudi Students in the United State of America and the Search for An I-Thou Relationship

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ABSTRACT This study aims to understand the essence of the participants' experiences as dialogues, and the researchers used phenomenology as a methodology to deepen the understanding of cultural differences, especially for adults, that affect class dialogue. Research has been done to explore different kinds of participation manifestations. The cultural factor was also examined by the researchers to understand the influence of how cultural backgrounds of international students influence their class participation. The participants expressed their meanings emotionally, intellectually, and socially. The findings of this study conclude that the participants experienced the lack of dialogue in the Saudi educational context, stating that participating in a dialogue as a sign of human agency and freedom, and the concept of respecting others' right to express themselves means respecting their human dignity. Also, the participants' experiences demonstrated that dialogue is deeply important not only for educational aims but as a human right.

INTRODUCTION

Education, culture, and dialogue are very important factors in any educational experience (Zaidi et al. 2016; Dauletbekova et al. 2020). In this study, the researchers ask Saudi graduate students in the United States of America the following questions. First, what are Saudi students' overall views of class dialogue? Second, in what ways do Saudi students perceive the academic context of a U.S. graduate classroom different from their Saudi academic context? Third, what role does language play in the Saudi graduate students' class dialogue? Previous studies showed that obstacles that render practicing dialogue are related to (1) the overall culture that prefers listening to the authority over critical thinking, (2) the educational system that does not create a safe place for dialogue, as teachers who encourage open discussion might get in trouble with the administration for opening controversial issues, (3) most teachers had no training in leading class discussion, and that skill was not part of their college training as teachers, and (4) schools are built and classes are organised in such a way that is not appropriate for practicing discussions. Most schools do not have stages for general meetings and classes are organised in a classic way that makes it difficult for them to face each other and show their engagement to each other (Almutairi 2008). Thus, the researchers in this study want to understand what effect being in another context might have on Saudi adult students and what role does language play in their class participation process.

The previous conclusion about the status of dialogue in the Saudi educational system is supported by other studies. For example, Hareb (2007) studied the Islamic and Arabic curriculum in Saudi Arabia to understand three essential concepts of the class dialogue. First, he examines how the other is seen in these curricula. Second, he examines the skills these materials provide to students to engage in dialogue. Finally, he also examines how these materials deal with current issues and to what extent they open them to free discussion. The study also aims to provide a list of essential concepts about class dialogue for educators so they can improve their theory and practice of educational dialogue. Hareb (2007) uses content analysis as his method to answer his questions. In order to do that, he creates a list of 16 main concepts for practicing dialogue. Then he analyses the curriculum based on their engagement with these concepts. He concludes that in terms of the quantity, these

curriculums do not offer enough information about how to understand the other and dialogue with the other. In terms of quality, Hareb (2007) argues, the materials he studies do not help students or teachers to open educational dialogues about local and global current issues. These issues are mainly ignored.

Literature Review

Research on classroom dialogue in Saudi Arabia focuses on how the educational environment influences students' abilities to fully engage in educative dialogues. Said Hareb (2007) studies the Islamic and Arabic curriculum in Saudi Arabia to understand three essential concepts of class dialogue. First, he examines how the other is seen in these curricula. Second, he examines the skills these materials provide to students to engage in dialogue. Finally, he also asks how these materials deal with current issues and to what extent they open them to free discussion. The study also aims to provide a list of essential concepts about class dialogue for educators so they can improve their theory and practice of educational dialogue. Hareb (2007) uses content analysis as his method to answer his questions. In order to do that he creates a list of 16 main concepts for practicing dialogue. Then he analyses the curriculum based on their engagement with these concepts. He concludes that in terms of the quantity these curriculums do not offer enough information about how to understand and dialogue with the other. In terms of quality, Hareb (2007) argues, the materials he studies do not help students or teachers to open educational dialogues about local and global current issues. These issues are mainly ignored. This study helps to understand where the participants are coming from and what kind of educational context they experience.

Teachers play an essential role in education. Thus, their perceptions of dialogue were cardinal to understand the reality of practicing dialogue in education. Thus, Almutairi (2008) examines what high school teachers in the Saudi capital city of Riyadh think of their educational environment in terms of its support to class discussion and dialogue. The study aims to examine four factors the overall culture, implemented policies, teacher preparation, and school physical organisation. He uses a descriptive method by distributing a survey to gather teachers' responses. The sample contains 341 male high school teachers from different parts of the city. The study concludes that a significant number of teachers identified four obstacles in their educational environment. The overall culture does not support practicing dialogue in class. Most teachers argue if a dialogue is not practiced at home, in the media and in mosques, it will be difficult to practice it in schools. The materials they teach, the teachers' state, do not contain enough concepts that could encourage teachers and students to practice and appreciate dialogue as an educational tool. Moreover, the study concludes that most teachers did not have the academic preparation to start, lead, and encourage class dialogue. Furthermore, teachers state that current educational policies neither encourage dialogue nor protect teachers to open discussions that might be controversial. Finally, the teachers argue that the way classes are organised makes it hard to practice dialogue. Students do not face each other and schools have no stages for school dialogue. This study deepens one's understanding of the participants' experiences of class dialogue in their native context.

According to the Saudi Ministry of Education (2014), more than 175,000 Saudi students have been international students in different countries. These students participated in different educational contexts that most likely apply different values and educational philosophy. Researchers study the experiences of international students as participants in academic dialogues. Language and culture have been identified as the main factors that influence international students' experiences in-class discussion. Berman and Cheng (2010) conducted a study to compare the influence of language on students whose English is the first language with those whose English is a second language. They asked the following questions:

1. Which language skills are perceived to be difficult by non-native speaking (NNS) students at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and how do their perceptions compare with those of their native speaking (NS) counterparts?
2. Assuming both NS and NNS students have certain language difficulties in the

initial period of their academic study, do these language difficulties affect their academic achievements in terms of their GPAs in their first academic term?

In order to answer the questions, the researchers distributed a survey among both graduate and undergraduate students at Canadian universities. By a descriptive analysis of 186 responses, the researchers conclude that non-native English students face more difficulties in terms of communication through language than those whose English is the first language. Moreover, the researchers conclude that non-native English graduate students face more difficulties and challenges in academic communication than non-native graduate students due to the fact that oral class participation in graduate courses is more emphasised. This study is important for the study because it emphasises the role language plays in international students. However, it does not contain any Saudi student in its sample.

The cultural factor was also examined by the researchers. For example, studies were conducted to understand the influence of how cultural backgrounds of international students influence their class participation. Pinheiro (2001) conducts a study to assess nine international students' perceptions and preferences for educational communication in American universities. Participants came from three regions, namely, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and they were interviewed to reflect on their experience in PhD courses and describe their favorite conditions of learning. The researcher uses Knowles (1980) model of andragogy to devolve the framework and the interviews. The international students indentified difficulties with their experiences as graduate students. For example, they felt that their history is ignored in their studies. Also, the international students expressed difficulties with the role of the teacher as the one who only initiated a class discussion. Although, international students show some consistent perceptions and preferences, they reflect some differences in terms of what they prefer of the role of participation, the role of learner's prior experiences, and the role of the teacher. This study contributes deeply to the study since it emphasises the role of culture in international students' experiences. However, it does not contain participants from Saudi Arabia or from the Middle East, which makes the current study relevant.

Tatar (2005a) explores four Turkish students' perceptions of participation in graduate classes in the US. The researcher asks, "What are the silent factors influencing the classroom participation of Turkish students? How do Turkish graduate students perceive the participation behaviour of their peers and how do these perceptions influence their participation?" (Tatar 2005a: 339). The author collected the data through in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and documents analysis. The findings show that there are three main factors that influence the participants' class participations. The first factor is the role of educational culture by which the participants shared general rules for oral classroom participation that "valued silence over talk" (Tatar 2005a: 343). The Second factor is environmentally according to which participants prefer that a small percentage of the course grade to be devoted to participation. They felt that would take the pressure off the student and increase their comfort in the classroom. The third factor is the dynamics of the classroom. Participants show that their participation is influenced by what is going on in the class. For example, the domination of native speakers seems to discourage their participation. Moreover, the existence of students from their own country seems to increase their caution of making mistakes. This study provides an important perspective to the study since it makes the participants' voices heard to express their ways of dealing with different educational settings. However, the Turkish secular educational context is deeply different than the religious Saudi educational context.

To deepen one's understanding of cultural differences that affect class dialogue research has been done to explore different kinds of participation manifestations. If talking is widely taken to be the norm of communication, some scholars doubt that norm. Tatar (2005b) studies silence as a kind of participation. The aim of the study is to understand silence as a mean of communication through the perception of non-native-English-speaking graduate students in the US. The researcher uses a qualitative descriptive multicase study approach to answer the following questions, that is, what are Turkish grad-

uate students' beliefs about talk and silence in the classroom, and how do these beliefs influence their classroom participation? Data was gathered during an academic semester, consisting of in-depth weekly and bi-weekly interviews with the four study participants, extensive field notes of 48 class sessions, a focus group interview, and documents including course syllabi and handouts. The author concludes that the participants see silence in different ways among which is the following: (a) a face-saving strategy, (b) a means of participation, (c) a reaction to others' contributions, (d) a sign of respect for authority and concern for others, and (e) the product of a feeling of inarticulacy. One of the participants states, "I don't like to speak in that class. I like to listen. While I am learning something, I listen instead of speaking… Since I miss a lot while trying to organise the sentences, I prefer to listen to understand better" (Tatar 2005b: 289). Another participant expresses a cultural difference in terms of the appropriate way to contribute to class dialogue by arguing, "I think it should be worth it when you speak. When I think of the Turkish context, if many people are listening to you, you should say something valuable, something that is worth it. I don't want to say trivial things. I mean, participation should be meaningful" (Tatar 2005b: 291). The emphasis this study provides on the role of silence as a way of participation is important to the study since it shows a variety of ways the participants show their engagement in class dialogue. This makes the study more open to observe different ways that show the participants participation in their educational context. Also, it will help the researcher include silence as one of the questions in the interviews.

Ikuko Nakane (2006) finds similar patterns when studying silence and politeness among Japanese students. The researcher aims to answer the following questions: (1) How are the silences of Japanese students employed as politeness strategies? (2) Are there differences in terms of silence and talk as politeness strategies between Japanese and Australian students' behaviour? (3) How do Australian lecturers perceive Japanese students' silence in terms of politeness? (4) How are silence and talk negotiated with respect to politeness in intercultural classroom communication?

In order to answer these questions the author gathers data at two universities in Sydney, Australia by conducting (1) interviews with 19 Japanese students, (2) collecting questionnaire responses from 34 university lecturers, (3) collecting recorded audio and video seminar-style classrooms interaction and interviews with three Japanese students, 3 their Australian peers and lecturers who participated in the recorded session, and (4) collecting video-recording and field notes of classroom interaction from two Japanese high schools. The researcher concludes that silence is understood in different ways including (1) silence as a strategy to maintain a positive face, and (2) silence as a 'Don't do the FTA' strategy. One of the participants expresses this strategy as follows,

"*I don't really challenge lecturers […] There were times when I didn't understand what was wrong with the way I was working, but I didn't particularly challenge the lecturers. I didn't change the way I had been working. I continued the work the way I wanted to anyway.*"

The third way is silence as an 'off-record' strategy. The researcher also concludes that these meanings of silence are less common among Australian students. This study provides an essential perspective to the study since it shows the role of culture in shaping students' ways of managing their educational experiences. The Japanese context is different than the Saudi, which makes the study still relevant.

Although the literature on international students' participation in class dialogue is growing, various contexts are still not explored. The Saudi context is one of these contexts that has not been explored yet. The Open Doors Data (2019) ranks the fourth nationality after the Chinese, Indians, and South Koreans. They estimated about 44,000 and 37,000 Saudi students studying in the U.S during academic years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, respectively. These students participate in a different context that discourages free dialogue and now they are in different experiences that may encourage free dialogue. This study will deepen one's understanding of the Saudi students' experiences, which will be helpful not only for students but also for policymakers in Saudi Arabia and the US. Also, this study uses a theoretical framework that does not examine dialogue only as an educational tool but also as a way to relate to oneself and others.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, the researchers describe the theory that the researcher uses to define and understand what dialogue is. The researchers use Martin Buber's theory of dialogue as an existential relation. This framework sees dialogue as a deep relation between human beings. According to Buber (1958), there are two kinds of relations, I-Thou relation and I-It relation. The first exists between humans who see others as full human beings. The second exists between people who engage in instrumental relations. Dialogue, according to Buber (1958) must be an I-Thou relation. That is, dialogue, as Buber argues, requires the full presence of at least two people. The I-Thou relation guarantees this condition whereas in the I-It one loses that presence. The basic notion of Buber's dialogue philosophy is that human beings exist always in relations. Any search for understanding human beings outside the realm of their relations is, thus, misleading. This is not a transcendental or a priori assumption that Buber assumes but a mere observation of human beings' experiences. Dialogue for Buber happens in the space of "the between". People meet in this space. Thus, dialogue requires at least three factors, two people and space.

Johannesen (2000) argues that there are four major attitudinal dimensions of dialogue as Buber understands it. First, *authenticity* means that one communicates honestly and directly the information and feelings with others. However, authenticity requires another role. That is, it involves a kind of responsibility so one does not just say what comes to mind. One tries to avoid a façade, projecting a false image. By Buber's language, one tries not to be the image man. Buber distinguishes between "essence man" and "image man". The former "looks at the other as one to whom one gives oneself" and the latter, in contrast, is "primarily concerned with what the other thinks of him" (Friedman 2012: 99).

Second is *inclusion*, which means each dialoguer has to be open to see the other. Dialogue requires one's effort to go to meet the other. This move requires openness and a will to see the other not as an object among objects or a nature that can be experienced but "with no neighbor, and whole in himself, he is Thou and fills the heavens. This does not mean that nothing exists except himself. But all else lives in his light" (Friedman 2012: 66). Inclusion runs the risk of exclusion especially excluding one's self. Experiencing the other, hence, is always in the danger of losing oneself. Thus, meeting the other should be seen as "the extension of one's own concreteness" (Friedman 2012: 102). The elements of experiencing the other, Buber argues, therefore, are first, a relation between two persons, second, a shared experience, and third, the ability of living the event from the standpoint of the others without forfeiting one's own felt reality of his experience. The space between here requires each person to go outside herself without disappearing into the other-self. Here one understands Buber when he says that love without dialogue is evil since it does not occur in between. Rather, it is built on one's sacrificing his own concreteness.

Third is *confirmation*. To fully engage in dialogue each participant needs to be confirmed. That is, one's needs to feel that her presence is seen and known. It is hard to engage in dialogue with those who express their disinterest. It is not easy, Buber tells us, to be confirmed by the other in one's essence; so one appeals to appearance for help. The problem here is that the confirmation that is based on appearance is very fragile, temporary, and unsafe. The appearance person gets trapped by looking for confirmation to one's appearance and losses the ability to see the other and meet the other.

Fourth is *presentness*. The dialoguer is not an observer from without. Rather, the dialogue is a full engagement with the other. The other's existence is so important, which gives no space for being natural towards it. The dialogue here is a decision. In making decisions, Buber explains, man practices his freedom. Making decisions means confronting the void and making the new. Making a decision is also a practice that should be grasped in relation. Any decision is made by one and going to affect another. Many people avoid making decisions by disappearing in the crowd and others leave the space of action by alienating themselves from the crowd. Dialogue is again in the space of between. The dialoguer is in the crowd because he realises that he exists in relation and he is also being the single one who lives his singularity with others. Here, one

finds what Friedman calls Buber's man of the narrow ridge, the one who lives with others without giving up his personal responsibility and also without allowing "his commitment to the group to stand in the way of his direct relation to the Thou" (Friedman 2012:113).

Responsibility is an unavoidable fact for the dialoguer. The relational nature of her existence makes it impossible not to see the other while making decisions. It is also impossible to give up making decisions too because it would mean giving up the self and its possibilities. Trust also appears to be a fundamental base for dialogue. That is since dialogue always in relation, relations demand trust. Relations necessarily involve more than one party and cannot be postponed to be examined first. Trust is a necessary postulate for any relationship and it gets confirmed or denied only through relations.

In sum, dialogue or the I-Thou is a special kind of relation. It requires authenticity, inclusion, confirmation, and presentness. At the same time dialogue is surrounded by different kinds of risk. Dialoguers run the risk of projecting a false image, exclusion especially excluding one's self, searching for confirming one's appearance, and losing one's trust in the meaning of dialogue. Thus, the dialogue is always in between. Here one sees that dialogue is between the lack of communication and fake communication.

According to Buber (1958), since educational relationships are between human beings, they must be I-Thou. He says, "As experience, the world belongs to the primary word I-it. The primary word I-thou establishes the world of relation" (p. 2). It is also essential to point out that according to Buber (1958), the "I" in the two relationships is different since the "I" gets its meaning from its relations. This theory is supported by Paulo Freire (2000) and John Dewey (1966). Freire explains that oppression dehumanises people. In other words, oppression reduces the relationships from I-Thou to I-It. Moreover, Dewey (1966) explicitly states that education is communication, and democracy is its essential condition. Tyranny, on the other hand, by destroying democracy, limits communication between people as human beings to the communication between objects.

In this study, the researchers explore the participants' experiences of class dialogue using the broad meaning of dialogue Buber philosophised. This perspective allows the study to view class dialogue not only as an educational tool but also as a way of relating and seeing others. Moreover, this perspective allows the study to relate the participants' dialogue experiences to their overall personal and social experiences in the American context.

METHODOLOGY

Since this study aims to understand the essence of the participants' experiences as dialoguers, the researchers use phenomenology as a methodology. Phenomenology "is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view" (Smith 2013). In its philosophical roots, phenomenology moves one's attention to the core of the experience under investigation. That is, "the central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions" (Smith 2013).

This methodology is appropriate to the study for two main reasons. The first reason is that phenomenology aims to conduct a study without presuppositions. Stewart and Mickunas (1990) argue that "phenomenology's approach is to suspend all judgments about what is real, that is, the 'natural attitude', until they are founded on a more certain basis" (as cited in Creswell 2007: 58). This is so important to the researcher since the researcher came to this study with strong feelings and ideas, which might affect the judgments on the participants' experiences. The method phenomenology implies to suspend all judgments, and is called "epoche". According to Edmund Husserl, one practices the phenomenology by "bracketing" the question of "the existence of the natural world around us" (as cited in Smith 2013) and focus attention to one's consciousness as directed to something. Dialogue in this approach cannot be studied out of the awareness of the participants and the awareness as an observer. It is important to notice the crucial difference between phenomenology and grounded theory in terms of suspend-

ing judgment. The phenomenological claim is weaker than the grounded theory's claim. That is, the phenomenologist is not claiming that she is coming to the study with no theory. What she is claiming is that she is going to suspend her judgment while observing, and then she is going to reflect on her theory based on the new observations. A grounded theorist, on the other hand, is making a stronger claim. That is starting with no theory in mind.

The second virtue of this approach is that it denies the subject-object dichotomy. That is, the meaning appears only in experiences when the subject and the object meet. Outside this experience, that is, outside this meeting meaning does not occur. Thus, the object-by-itself and the subject-by-itself are outside of one's experiences and thus outside of one's ability to comprehend. This approach supports the understanding of dialogue in the theoretical framework. For Martin Buber, the dialogue happens in the space in between. That is in the space where participants cease to appear as subjects and objects. Or, in Buber's phrases they cease to appear in an I-It relation. Dialogue here is the experience where meeting or meaning occurs. According to Creswell (2007), denying the subject-object distinction "flows naturally from the intentionality of the consciousness. The reality of the object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of the individual" (p. 59).

Methods

This study aims to understand the participants' experiences in practicing class dialogue. Thus, it is important to get as close as possible to these experiences. Therefore, the researchers in this study conducted in-depth interviews and fieldnotes observations. The sample of this study contains three Saudi international students. They are all male PhD students who had educational experiences both in Saudi Arabia and in the U.S. All of them have at least two years as a graduate student in an American university and all of them go to the same school in Florida. The data was collected through interviews and observations. The researchers met each student three times for an hour each. The researchers asked each participant 12 open-ended questions. Also, the researchers observed each one of them in their academic setting for a class period of time. The use of the interviews intends to show how the participants see and make sense of their experiences. Although an interview protocol was designed for this purpose, the interviews were conducted in an informal mood. The questions were used to instigate the discussion and then the participant will talk without being interrupted most of the time. In other words, the in-depth interviews were meant to be experiences of dialogue that aim to help the participants reflect on their experiences. Due to the small size of the sample, the researchers were able to talk to the participants outside of the formal interview setting. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Later, the researchers would return to them to check on their transcripts. After conducting the interviews the researchers conducted three fieldnote observations. The researchers visited each participant in their academic setting. The aim of these observations was to get closer to the class dialogue experience. It was important to observe the participants in their contexts interacting with others in the real environment. The researchers started their observations before the classes began to observe the interactions between students outside the formal setting and also to observe how the professors' reception looked like. Then, a researcher sat in each class to observe both oral and physical activities. Moreover, the researchers were interested in observing the role of the professor in class and were interested in what kind of role power played in that context. Furthermore, the observations aimed to understand the role of English in the participants' experiences.

The interviews and the fieldnotes were coded in two steps: open coding and focused coding. In open coding, the researcher "reads line-by-line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes, or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate" (Emerson et al 2011: 172). While using focused coding, the researcher "uses a smaller set of promising ideas and categories to provide the major topic and themes for the final ethnography" (Emerson et al 2011: 172). The coding process led to the following codes:

1. Seeing the other (SO) (dialogue was seen as a way to see and understand others)
2. Authority (AU) (dialogue was understood as a result of the power equation)

3. Safety (SA) (dialogue felt to be a sign of being safe)
4. Respect (RC) (dialogue meant respect for human dignity and freedom)
5. Confirmation (CF) (confirming the partner was seen as an essential mechanism in order to keep a dialogue going)
6. Shared Space or space in between (BW) (having a free space that is not dominated by others was seen as a necessary condition of dialogue)
7. Diversity (DV) (diversity was seen as the fact of the matter that makes dialogue unavoidable in a just world)

RESULTS

This study aimed to answer the following questions. First, what are Saudi students' overall views of class dialogue? Second, in what ways do Saudi students perceive the academic context of a U.S graduate classroom different from their Saudi academic context? Third, what role does language play in the Saudi graduate students' class dialogue?

For the first question, the data shows that all the participants think dialogue is essential for human relationships in general and for education in particular. The theme the researchers noticed in this part is that the participants link dialogue to the reality of diversity. According to this theme, the dialogue is a peaceful mechanism by which diversity could flourish and be beneficial. For example, Fahad argues, "Today, we live in a diverse world where people from different backgrounds live together. This is the case not only in the West but also in my village in Saudi Arabia". In this diverse world dialogue is the way by which people can communicate peacefully. Moreover, Saad argues, "Dialogue is not about winning. It aims towards a shared understanding so it is good for everyone, strong or weak. Dialogue is a peaceful relationship". Dialogue also appears to be crucial for understanding others in one's social interactions. Fahad thinks that "without dialogue it is going to be really hard to understand others, and their actions will seem strange and unreasonable". Fahad also thinks that dialogue is the best way to know the 'other'. He argues, "We need some way or another to open chances and possibilities to people to explain themselves. Dialogue opens such opportunity for people to know each another". Dialogue for Fahad is the only peaceful way for people to live together. "It seems to me violence is the other alternative", he concludes.

Maybe ones needs to have these attitudes towards dialogue, partly at least, within the political context in the Middle East. Violence is the reality in many countries surrounding Saudi Arabia. Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq are countries that suffer a lot from violence. Saudi Arabia itself suffused from violence on several occasions. In this context, more people are coming to see dialogue as a solution to the violence problem.

In terms of education, all of the participants agree on the importance of dialogue. In addition to the theme of diversity, the researchers noticed the theme of authority as central. The participants see education as a social setting that operates in similar ways to the big society, which makes the role of authority crucial. Although the participants notice that all kinds of authorities are a threat to dialogue, most of them focused on the authority of teachers. Saad notices that the teacher-student relationship must be safe. He argues that this relationship "should present equality. Students should not be afraid that talking honestly in class might affect their grades negatively. They should feel they are partners and not subjects to the teachers' authority". Furthermore, Fahad reasons that from his experience there is a gap between students and teachers due to the lack of communication. The top-down relationship represents the lack and the gap between students and teachers. Dialogue for Fahad "can fill the gap between teachers and students'". When the researcher asked Fahad about the role of dialogue in education, he starts by pointing out that "indoctrination is not education". For him, there is a contradiction between respect and indoctrination. "Human beings need respect in all of their relations and the teacher-student relationship is not an exception", he argues. For Fahad, in practice, dialogue means "the teacher needs to be humble and able to work as a facilitator more than as a leader who knows everything".

To put all of these views in context the researchers asked the participants about their experiences with class dialogue as students and

as teachers in Saudi Arabia. In general, the participants had negative experiences. Saad tells, "I was called names by my teacher because I liked to participate in class. I was called 'long tongue' 'bothersome'". His college and graduate experiences were no different. He notices that "most professors lecture for the whole time. In college the authority of professors is scary. Students tell stories about professors who would fail you in the class if they feel you disagree with them or try to challenge their authority". Fahad recalls a story with his fifth-grade teacher who humiliated him because he asked an unexpected question. He says, "I felt I am stupid because I could not imagine that my teacher does not know the answer. It must be that my question was stupid". His graduate education was not better. "Professors were not able to accept our right to disagree with them because they care much about their authority", Fahad explains. He recalls, "I remember in my first year in my masters' program we asked the professor to change the class time if possible. He said, if you can't make it to class there are 1,000 students looking for your spots". Ahmad describes a similar experience. He recalls that in his elementary and middle school dialogue was not part of the educational environment. However, during his high school education, he had a good relationship with his teachers. He explains, "I was part of a religious movement called the awakening. We would care about social issues and we would encourage people to change many things. During that time I had good relationships with my teachers and they worked with me as partners". His college education was poorer in terms of practicing dialogue. He says, "Professors had strong authority in classes and they do not want discussion in their classes. I would say my high school years were much better".

For the second question, all of the participants emphasise on their awareness of the differences between their experiences practicing dialogue in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. These differences appear from different angles. They appear in class settings, students' behaviour, professors' behaviour, class interaction, freedom of speech, and the kind of materials they study. In terms of how classes are set, Saad notices that students eat, drink, and laugh in class. He also notices that there were communications among students unmonitored by professors. Saad also tells me that on the contrary to the Saudi context, professors in the U.S are more relaxed. They tell jokes and they are willing to announce that they do not know when they do not know. In terms of freedom of speech, Saad's experience shows him the difference. He says, "I am a Muslim and I focus my presentations on Islamic education here in the U.S. and internationally. I find people interested and open-minded when talking about these issues. Actually, I feel encouraged to talk more about these topics. If I did not feel safe, I would not have opened such topics".

Fahad argues that one of the main differences is that dialogue in the U.S reflects the wider culture. It is not just, he continues, a tool used only for educational purposes. This fact makes dialogue genuine and effective since it seems natural and people were raised to respect. Fahad also notices the differences in the professor's role in class. He observes that "In Saudi Arabia, the professor will sit and talk for the whole class. In America professors move, smile, tell jokes, and laugh". Students' behaviour seems different for Fahad. He recognises that "Students in the Saudi context must dress up formally. Here (in the U.S) they dress however they want". Moreover, the researchers find the theme of freedom in Fahad's description of his experience in the U.S. He tells, "I notice that here (the U.S) people are willing to discuss anything. I was surprised when they accept even international students to criticise the American government".

On the other hand, Ahmad was hesitant to compare the two contexts since his experience in the Saudi context is limited to his undergraduate education. He had his Master's degree from an American university. However, he notices his classes in the U.S were mostly dialogical. He also notes a difference in terms of the philosophy of education. He argues, "The American system is built on certain principles such as there is no one complete truth and critical thinking. These principles are not acceptable in the Saudi experience". In the Saudi context, he argues, factors such as deep respect to tradition reduces people's willingness to engage in open dialogues. In such a context, he continues "education is mostly about passing information, looking for believers, not critics, and some students

do not like a discussion, they just need you to tell them 1, 2, 3 and that is it".

The observations confirm the picture the researchers got from the interviews. All of the classes that were observed aimed to encourage dialogue. Professors used specific practices such as small groups and BlackBoard discussions to facilitate such dialogues. Classes were organised in a way such that students can see each other, which encourages discussions. Furthermore, it has been observed that students felt relaxed in classes. They dress differently and they talk informally sometimes. Jokes and anecdotes were a normal portion of most discussions. Professors appear as partners more than leaders. They raise doubts about their own knowledge and admit the shortcomings of some of the materials they assigned. In sum, the participants notice big differences between their experiences in class dialogue in the U.S and in Saudi Arabia. The differences seem to manifest themselves in the power relationships between students and the professor, between students, and between students and knowledge and tradition.

The third question in this study focuses on the role that English plays in my participants' experiences. Although the participants articulate that the language factor limited their participation to some degree, their participation in the U.S. context was far more in comparison with their participation in the Saudi context. The field notes showed that the participants had more chances to speak, they felt safe, and they enjoyed that experience. It is also important to notice that all of the participants emphasised their written communication and their communication via body language. Saad, although his English was very limited when he came to the U.S, was happy to say after describing his limited English, "However, I have spoken more than I have in Saudi Arabia". Saad also explained to me how he used social media and BlackBoard to communicate. In one of his classes, his professor started a Twitter hashtag so students could post anything they think germane to their class. This hashtag was a sign of a willingness to communicate not only with classmates but also with the general public. For Saad body language seemed crucial to show his participation, active listening, and his confirmations.

With Fahad, the researchers find similar experiences. When he first arrived in the U.S. his English was very limited. However, the class discussion was a main factor in improving his English. He says, "I found people were not judgmental about my English. They respect me even though I make mistakes". He also emphasised how he shows his respect to the speakers by using his body language. He remembers one of his professors seeing the lack of eye contact as a sign of disinterest. He agrees and thinks eye contact manifests respect and confirmation to the dialogue partners. Ahmad, on the other hand, came to the U.S with a good level of English since he majored in English and had taught English. However, he expressed his worries that he might fail to deliver his messages as he wants it to be. He also sees writing and body language as important ways to show one's participation and confirmation.

To sum, although the participants experienced that being non-native speakers of English limits their participation, it does not seem that the factor renders their participation in class dialogue. Actually, it seems that class dialogue was a factor in their English participation. Also, spoken English was only one tool in their hands. They used written English and body language to participate effectively in their classes' dialogical events.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study support what (Hareb 2007; Almutairi 2008; Alfayez and Alshammari 2017) conclude. That is, the participants in this study experienced the lack of dialogue in the Saudi educational context. The participants expressed what that means emotionally, intellectually, and socially. Emotionally, it seems that dialogue is a sign of safety. To wit, dialogue means that the power relationships in class and the role of authority must be organised in a way that protects each person's rights to be. Or, the dialogical relationship in Buber's language opens the space in between. The space where the I-Thou relationship occurs. The I-Thou relationship means that the power in the relationship is balanced so each partner has a safe space to be free and authentic. It is important to notice that it is essential that the other partner recognises the importance of the space in between and works to save it as well. In their Saudi experiences, the participants lacked that

space and they felt without any guarantees of their safety if they decided to be what they want to be. The examples they gave were proofs that trying to create a dialogical relationship threatens the authorities teachers have. That is why these teachers attacked them and pushed them back to the I-It relationship. The participants felt deeply that undialogical relationships are forms of oppression. They dehumanise at least one side of the relationship namely, the weaker one, the students. The researcher would argue that these relationships dehumanise both sides by engaging them in an inhumane relationship.

On the other hand, this study seems to disagree with Tatar (2005a) in the following aspects. This study did not find a tendency among the participants to prefer classes that put less emphasis on participation over others. Actually, this study finds the contrary. That is, the participants enjoy the classes that encourage dialogue. These classes remind them of being in a different environment than the Saudi educational one. One of the participants describes lecturing-based classes as boring and unattractive. Moreover, the participants in this study did not see those native speakers of English might negatively affect their participation by dominating the discussion. This issue does not appear in the interviews or in the observations. The participants in this study seem to focus more on the role of the professor than the role of their classmates. However, this study agrees with Tatar's (2005b) results that international students use ways to participate in their classes other than speaking. In this study, it was clear that the participants use writing and body language to communicate with others. Eye contact, nodding, and smiling appeared to be useful and important ways to show interest and provide confirmation to others. These ways show respect, which plays a huge role in the participants' experiences as an encouraging factor.

Although this study does not aim to compare the experience of the Saudi students with other adult international students or with American students, it seems to agree with Berman and Cheng (2010) that being non-native speakers of English makes it more difficult for the participants to communicate effectively. However, this effect does not seem major to the extent that makes communication unpleasant. In fact, this study shows that some participants see class dialogue as an opportunity to improve their spoken English.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the essence of the participants' experiences as dialoguers. Through utilitising phenomenology as a methodology in order to explore different kinds of participation manifestations. The cultural factor was to understand the influence of how cultural backgrounds of adult international students influence their class participation. The participants expressed what that means emotionally, intellectually, and socially. The findings of this study conclude that the participants experienced the lack of dialogue in the Saudi educational context. The participants' experiences show that dialogue is deeply important not only for educational aims but as human right. The participants saw participating in a dialogue as a sign of human agency and freedom. Respecting others' right to express themselves means respecting their human dignity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In terms of the implications of this study, the researchers believe both researchers in adult foundations of educations and policymakers in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. will find this study compelling and appealing. That is, it picks on one of the issues concerning modern educational theorists and implementers. In Saudi Arabia, it is widely believed that public education fails to prepare students for public communication and national and global dialogue. Hence, the importance of the link between education and the social and economic contexts is a key to community development. Many scholars have pointed out that public education in Saudi Arabia does not help in preparing students to believe in public dialogue. That is, public education implies a traditional philosophy of education that uses a top-down way of teaching where communication is limited to this picture: the teacher is the sender and the student is the receiver. As a result, both scholars and policymakers ask what should be done to reform the educational system in a way that makes it a better environment for communication and critical thinking. This

study provides a perspective that should be taken seriously. The participants' experiences show that dialogue is deeply important not only for educational aims but as a human right. The participants saw participating in a dialogue as a sign of human agency and freedom. Respecting others' right to express themselves means respecting their human dignity. A class that lacks dialogue lacks that kind of recognition of humanity in others. That is why the participants felt unsafe in the classes that lacked dialogue, and happy and flourishing in the other classes that employed dialogue. Also, that is why the participants felt oppressed by their teachers who prevented dialogue and felt respected by those who encouraged dialogue.

This study is also relative to educators and policymakers in the U.S since it throws light on the experiences of an important portion of their academic academy. Even though the participants show a general positive picture of their experiences in the American context, they also notice that in many occasions they felt like 'others'. That is, they felt their own questions and concerns seem absent in their class' attention. That is present clearly in the readings that focus mainly on the American context. Professors need to make their classes to reflect the diversity that already exists among their students. Moreover, this study shows the importance of ways other than speaking to participate in class discussion. Writing and body language are two important ways. Thus, including more active written activities will increase the level of international students' participation.

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