

## EXPLORING THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATE STUDENTS FROM WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES AT A SAUDI UNIVERSITY

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the academic experience of West African international graduate students in a Saudi university through conducting qualitative individual interviews with a total of 18 students. A qualitative method with individual interviews was employed to gather data according to the research questions. The results showed that overall, the academic experiences of these international graduate students were satisfactory. Participants reported satisfaction with the quality of their relationships with faculty members across all three dimensions of respect, fairness, and interpersonal supportiveness. Course offerings were rated as adequate in variety and content, relative to classroom quality and the digital infrastructure offered by the university, including electronic systems and the digital library. It shows that the academic timetable was well-structured and adequate for students' needs and that the majority of the discipline they were enrolled with related to their academic and labor market interests. Also, the students said that the university offered an attractive learning environment in relation to making the students feel belonging and integrated within the university. Even with these strengths, there were some challenges experienced particularly with the language barriers while academic reading and writing and scientific research. The study concluded with several recommendations.

**Keywords:** International students, educational challenges, graduate studies, higher education, student affairs management

### Introduction

Graduate studies are advanced levels of education in order to further delve into knowledge, improve research skills, and prepare academic and professional cadres to offer a contribution to socio-development. While such programs naturally extend undergraduate studies, graduate studies differ in nature, necessity, and level of difficulty. Universities therefore have more stringent and higher qualifications to allow entry into graduate studies compared to their undergraduate levels. Graduate studies focus not just on academic achievement but on the production of researchers with analysis, critique, and high scholarly productivity capacity. In most instances, studying for a master's or a doctor's degree involves a scientific dissertation or thesis.

Success in graduate programs requires skills above those commonly not in heavy supply at the undergraduate

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level, such as critical reading, critical thinking, research techniques, statistics, time management, academic writing, and psychological stress management linked to academic and professional pressures. Graduate students tend to have various challenges like adaptation into the graduate program requirements and coordination of academic life with personal or professional responsibilities simultaneously, particularly with rising levels of academic workloads and dual roles such as job or family responsibilities (Ahmad, 2023; Al-Tamimi, 2021; Al-Hadhli, 2024; Fareh, 2021; Saeedou, 2022; Said, 2022).

According to research, these issues are more significant for graduate students who are not native speakers of the language in which they are taught, including international students. These students experience other issues linked to linguistic and cultural disparities that could influence their interaction in class, academic work, and development of social and professional networks in the new university context (Al-Bishr, 2022; 2023; 2025; Al-Mutairi, 2014; Al-Omari, 2018; Al-Rumaidh, 2021).

### Problem Statement

The first higher education institution in Saudi Arabia was established in 1949, i.e., the College of Sharia in Mecca, whereas the first university was established in 1957, King Saud University, which was granted the first group of international students. The Saudi universities have since welcomed thousands of international students annually. The international students enrolled in Saudi Arabia were estimated at over 64,000 in 2022 (Al-Salman, 1999; Ministry of Education, 2025).

Even though this group has grown in large numbers with foreign and other students at graduate levels in Saudi universities – degree, master's, and doctorate, written literature especially targeting this learner category within the Saudi context is not that abundant (Al-Bishr, 2025). Overall, past studies on foreign students indicate various categories of issues within and outside the academic sphere (Akanwa, 2015; Albeshir, 2022; 2025; Gautam et al., 2016; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). This research enhances the body of knowledge at academic levels concerning what international graduate students from West Africa go through and face in a Saudi university.

### Research Question

What are the educational experiences of international graduate students from

West African countries at a Saudi university?

### Study Objectives

- Explore the nature of academic experiences international graduate students from West African countries have in a Saudi university.
- To identify the most prominent academic challenges faced by these international graduate students during their studies.
- To investigate the main administrative challenges encountered by these students throughout their graduate education.

### Theoretical Framework

#### International Students in Saudi Higher Education Institutions:

In 2021, non-citizen (foreign) students enrolled in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's higher education institutions were approximately 64,874, with an estimated 46,723 in public universities and the remaining in private universities. By Ministry of Education statistics, most of the international students were in public universities, and they accounted for about 3.82% of the enrolled students, well over 1.2 million. In addition, international female students at public universities made up approximately 37% of international students, totalling 17,417 (Ministry of Education, 2022; UNESCO, 2024) (Table 1).

#### Prior Studies

Al-Bodi & Al-Zaki (2012): This study evaluated students' quality of services at King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia, and intended to evaluate the satisfaction of students and request differences in terms of gender, academic year, major, residence, and GPA. Through a descriptive design and questionnaire completed by 1,688 students, it was reported that overall services of the students were moderately satisfactory, with healthcare services being most satisfactory and activity-related services least satisfactory. There were large differences in favor of male students and students from other areas in Al-Ahsa but not by GPA or major.

Almotery (2014): This qualitative study of Saudi scholarship students' experience, expectation, and difficulties studying abroad in the United States was conducted via 20 interviews with students of varying levels and specialties.

**Table 1.** Top 10 Nationalities among International Students at Saudi Higher Education Institutions, 2021 (Ministry of Education, 2022).

| Rank | Country              | Number of International Students |
|------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1    | Republic of Yemen    | 14,600                           |
| 2    | Syrian Arab Republic | 6,558                            |
| 3    | Palestine            | 4,628                            |
| 4    | Egypt                | 3,369                            |
| 5    | Jordan               | 2,186                            |
| 6    | Indonesia            | 2,001                            |
| 7    | Pakistan             | 1,640                            |
| 8    | India                | 1,424                            |
| 9    | Afghanistan          | 1,301                            |
| 10   | Nigeria              | 1,231                            |
| 10   | Bangladesh           | 1,190                            |

Findings showed that prior international experience enhanced cultural and social readiness. They were complaining of language, university acceptance, and discrimination. They were having academic adjustment challenges in terms of language and co-education but had access to academic support facilities as well as the quality of learning. It was a success despite adversity, and institutional support was determined to be at the center of achievement.

Alfaheid (2017): Exploring issues Saudi PhD students in British universities face in preparing theses, qualitative research (n=61) discovered that the biggest challenge was English language fluency since it is not their first language. Academic community involvement of practice was helpful in addressing writing issues.

Al-Babteen (2018): This study surveyed the extent to which college faculty members demonstrated fundamental ethical skills (perceived by students) at King Saud University College of Education (n=391). The mean level of perceived ethical skill was high, and honesty ranked first, followed by truthfulness, fairness, cooperation, and humility.

Abdelkader (2023): The research estimated the extent of academic writing proficiency among master's students of curriculum and pedagogy methods of King Khalid University. Through a descriptive-analytic method and measurement tools for writing proficiency, 17 subjects of the research were found to have a generally low academic writing proficiency.

Al-Bishr (2023): This research was aimed at reaching King Saud University's College of Education international students and conducted a survey among 93 male students of various academic levels and specializations. The result was extremely high satisfaction with pre-arrival services, public facilities, international student services, academic services, and the learning environment.

Saeed & Al-Salami (2024): Investigating issues of scholarly writing among foreign students pursuing master's in Karabuk University in Turkey, the qualitative study (n=16) in this instance discovered egregious deficit in confidence in writing scholarly English, difficulty in organizing research papers, and necessitated specific measures and official assistance to facilitate such students in excelling.

Abdelghafar (2025): This study evaluated staff and student satisfaction with King Saud University Deanship of the Common First Year facilities in 2024 through surveys of 210 staff and 2,380 students. The study showed high overall satisfaction without statistically significant gender disparity among staff but some gender disparity in favor of female students among the student sample for facilities. Facilities did not play an important role in academic achievement, with few facilities available for female students.

### Critique of the Literature

Literature reviewed added depth to the theoretical framework of the present study, assisted in the development of a good conceptual model, and enabled wise comparison and explanation of results. Specifically, previous studies had predominantly employed quantitative method and raised questions such as students' satisfaction and scholarly writing ability, and qualitative approach of the present study on the basis of semi-structured interviews provided a richer and more detailed analysis. To the authors' knowledge, this research is the first qualitative investigation of the educational experiences of West African international graduate students solely in the context of a Saudi university, and hence fills an important gap in the literature and guides an approach towards a more inclusive and embracing learning environment for linguistically and culturally diverse student groups.

### Study Sample and Methodology

The study sample was purposively chosen and consisted of 18 graduate students, 6 of whom were females, all from West African countries where Arabic is not spoken as a native language. All the graduate students were studying humanities and social sciences at graduate level in a Saudi public university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. After obtaining informed consent from the female participants, the principal researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with them on the Zoom platform in 2022 and 2023. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and peer review was employed to attain credibility and reliability of the qualitative data, which is particularly paramount after existing controversies regarding qualitative studies' trustworthiness. The study utilized a qualitative research methodology suitable to the nature of the research, which enabled the deeper understanding of the problems being researched using techniques such as interviews. Phenomenological approach was also utilized, which sought to comprehend human experience as it is lived by the participants without attempting to generalize findings (Al-Rashidi, 2018).

Data analysis took the five interrelated steps elucidated by Bingham (2023):

1. Organization of interview data and development of early codes of emergent themes.
2. Sorting and collation of data.
3. Decoding and interpretation of underlying meaning.
4. Describing data and extracting common patterns and themes.
5. Describing outcomes in terms, describing therefore the experience under investigation.

### Results

The qualitative data for the current study were analyzed based on the steps of methodology proposed by Bingham (2023), which comprise five intertwined phases: organizing data, first-level coding, category development, interpretation, and finally thematic presentation of results. From content analysis of participant interviews, certain sub-themes were generated reflecting aspects of their impressions of university life in higher education institutions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

#### The results were classified under nine overall themes as listed below:

First: Experiences with Faculty Members

The results of the interviews revealed that the majority of international students revealed that they had good experiences with the faculty members during their graduate studies. The majority of participants reported that their experiences with professors were respectful and good and witnessed that they never suffered from any discriminatory or racist behaviour. They indicated that the academic evaluations were conducted objectively, with the professors using open, clear, and equitable grading criteria, which were set at the initial lecture of the courses. The students commended the professors' abilities, indicating that most of the teachers had superior competence, keen grasp of the subject matter, and utilized learning approaches that were graduate-friendly. They reported that explanations were either clear or well-structured, and professors clarified concepts in ways that were easy to comprehend and supported with critical thinking. Some students commended professors' modest and humane management and further added that some provided assistance beyond academic teaching, such as university procedure guidance or counselling. One student stated:

"Other professors teach more than they do; they inquire about how we are doing and help us if we are having difficulties with things outside of academics."

Despite these benefits, some of the participants complained about language challenges, particularly the usage of colloquial dialects when explaining things by some of the professors. Students described that they understood formal Arabic academic descriptions very well but had problems when local colloquial terms were used, which hindered their full understanding of the material. The limited time set for the exams also became a problem for foreign students; some complained of needing extra time to comprehend exam questions written in Arabic and then to ponder their answer. In the student's own words:

"I understood the material, but while I was writing the exam, I spent a long time trying to figure out the meaning of the question, and the time wasn't sufficient."

Overall, the results indicated that international students possess a good working relationship with members of academic staff, appreciate their scholarly expertise, lucidity, and fairness, but face some language and temporal challenges that could be mitigated through improved facilitation and understanding from teachers.

## Second: Satisfaction with Academic Major

Interview findings revealed that most international student respondents were generally satisfied with the majors they pursued in their master's study, attributing that such majors are compatible with the demands of the job market and help them gain future skills. However, three of the respondents, of whom a female was included, revealed that they actually wanted to pursue other majors but had to accommodate Arabic language courses since these are compulsory for international students for admission purposes. They articulated feelings of limited selection of their majors despite having diverse interests and career aspirations. Some of the participants suggested allowing international students to pursue multiple academic majors, especially given that they are totally devoted to learning free from work or family obligations such as some local students. They testified that they had enough time to dedicate to another major, which would allow them to have a broader base of knowledge and a more favorable career path. With regard to courses, the students agreed that the courses were somewhat demanding but remained at a tolerable level. Most of the participants classified the courses as "moderately difficult" and claimed that they manage challenges by continuous studying and engagement with instructors. Generally, the results show satisfactory and good satisfaction with the courses and majors, though there are some comments regarding academic major flexibility for international students, which should be more developed to enhance their academic experience.

## Third: Academic Timetable

Most of the international students who participated in the survey believed that the academic timetable was well organized and generally good. Lectures were planned well before the beginning of the semester so that they could prepare and set out their day. They were happy that the timetable had no packed lectures and that study and resting time were well distributed. Students found lecture timings to be generally appropriate, although some liked starting classes early in the morning rather than later. One remarked:

"I would like to start learning in the early morning; I am more focused and can make better use of the rest of the day."

Students explained that because they are day-students and not working, they would rather have intensive morning lectures and gain more hours in the evening to study or take part in other activities of the university. Overall, the views of the students were a positive appreciation of the organization and timing of the schedule but with some desire for minimal modification in the lecture scheduling to fit their way of life and mental energy levels throughout the day better.

## Fourth: Courses

The international master students all concurred that their courses were challenging but at acceptable levels. They reported that the nature of courses requires ongoing effort and follow-up but is beneficial to them in terms of academic skill development and intellectual capacity. One of the students clarified:

"The materials are not easy, but they are reasonable and fit the graduate level."

In trying to cope with challenges, the students reported that they turned to electronic translation and support from peers in case of challenges in understanding some terms or concepts, especially where coping with theoretically challenging material or formal upper-level texts was concerned. The respondents would have liked to have the majority of the required books and references in the university library, hence making it more convenient for them to prepare their lessons in a more organized manner. Some of the other students, though, complained that some of the required books or reference materials were not in the library, and they were forced to buy them outside at very high prices. As one of them explains:

"Since some of the books that the professor demanded were not available in the library, I had to purchase them elsewhere, and they were costly."

Overall, these impressions give the feeling that international students perceive courses to be of sufficient coverage and quality and with minimal barriers which can be addressed by additional support in resource provision and simplification or translation of terminology concepts. Fourth: Courses

All the international graduate students described their courses as challenging but reasonable. They reported that course work requires continuous effort and follow-up but benefits them in their academic proficiency and analytical capabilities. One student described the material in the following manner:

"The material is not simple, but it is reasonable and appropriate for the graduate level."

In overcoming difficulties, the students reported utilizing electronic translations and peer assistance when they failed to understand specific words or concepts, especially while reading theoretically complex texts or formal upper Arabic

texts. The participants liked the fact that the majority of the texts and materials needed for their courses were found in the university library, which enabled them to prepare for their courses in an orderly manner. Yet some claimed there were some essential books or sources not found in the library and that they were forced to buy them externally at high prices. One of the students indicated:

"Professionally, there were some books that the professor asked for which were not in the library, so I had to buy them outside, and they were expensive."

Cumulatively, these perspectives demonstrate that the courses are seen to be at the appropriate level and content by international students, with some challenges which can be prevented by additional support in provision of resources and transliteration or simplification of linguistic rules.

## Fifth: Digital Infrastructure

The interviews with international students all showed satisfaction with the quality of the digital infrastructure of the university. The interviewees all indicated that the university has modern electronic services that make their academic and administrative processes seamless, including online registration, adding and dropping courses, checking timetables, and checking grades and academic plans via convenient and responsive electronic systems.

The students also liked the digital library as being affluent in books, scientific material, and research journals, all accessible easily with their university logins. Other students argued that the digital library was a fast and easy alternative to hard-copy literature, in light of the needs for rapid referencing of new material and international periodicals.

One of the most valued amenities was having free wireless internet (Wi-Fi) connection in all buildings on campus, including classrooms, library, administrative offices, and common areas. They described the internet as "fast and stable," and it was convenient for them to carry out their research and check on their academic activities without disruption.

Generally speaking, there were no complaints regarding the online infrastructure; all impressions affirmed that the online atmosphere of the university is an essential support pillar of the international students' experience and functioned to enhance their comfort and engagement with the new school environment.

## Sixth: Classrooms

The interview findings were simultaneous with favourable attitudes towards the physical learning environment in the Saudi university being researched. All the respondents agreed that the classrooms were rich in technology, having learning essentials such as smart display systems, interactive screens, and modern sound systems. Some of them noted that these technologies were in proper working order and were maximally exploited by tutors.

Physically, the students were contented with the quality of facilities, including comfortable chairs and well-arranged tables that promoted communication and academic discourse. They further cited the presence of facilitative learning resources, including whiteboards, demonstration models, and electronic libraries networked to classrooms.

Interestingly, all of the respondents testified that they had nothing to criticize the classrooms for; all of their comments were positive and provided an overall picture of satisfaction with the physical study environment. Some explained the classrooms as "reflecting a motivating learning environment," indicating that such facilities helped to enable academic integration and maximum benefit from study courses.

## Seventh: Registration and Enrolment Services

International student participants pointed out that registering for courses and registration services are all carried out electronically in an orderly and efficient way. They appreciated the ease of being able to conduct these processes remotely via the online portal of the university, without needing to physically appear or undergo paper-based procedures. Most considered this electronic facility an upgrade of the administrative infrastructure of the institution that adds value to the academic process, especially during the start of each semester.

In spite of this general positivity, there have been a few remarks from the participants that more than a single section of a particular course is not readily available, and most of the time there is only one. This restriction lessens students' liberty to choose teachers or suitable timings. There has been some response from the students that the university needs to provide more sections of popular courses, further incorporating that variations in teaching styles among the faculty members could have a significant effect on learning.

Overall, the evidence shows that registration and enrolment services are a high point in the university system, but more variety of course sections is an

important requirement to enhance international students' experience and enable them to make decisions in accordance with their learning interests as well as personal requirements.

### **Eighth: Relationship with Local Students**

Interview results confirmed that there was respect and cordial interaction between international and local students in the university community. Most interviewees testified that they were treated warmly and with respect by local students in classrooms without any aspect of discrimination or marginalization. Others took the courtesy as a sign of the overall culture of respect for one another and respect for university community values.

However, some international students characterized such contacts as superficial and limited to learning environments, to those in lecture halls or classroom interactions, and rarely extending beyond classrooms into friendship. Some interviewees pointed out that they found it difficult to develop close personal relationships with local students, and this hampered their integration into the general university community and the student body in general.

Students explained this social segregation as not being due to undesirable host student behaviour but to cultural difference, the existence of no common social interests, and the absence of interactive activities among host and international students.

### **Ninth: Challenges**

#### **Admission to Academic Challenges**

Interviews exposed critical challenges for international students on the admission and application level, the beginning point of studying in Saudi Arabia. The participants revealed that admissions were slow and cumbersome, at times taking as long as almost two years, leading to outright deferment of studying. This was a delay due to the admissions process, which has to pass through a series of government agencies before the approval process is complete, as all the students in this research are fully sponsored by Saudi government scholarships and do not fund themselves.

They explained that admission procedures don't end with the first university admission but also cover other stages such as ministry of education endorsement, visa granting, and meeting scholarship conditions, and therefore the process is complex and requires effort and patience on the part of students. Another complaint mentioned was that the final admission was kept in abeyance subject to university housing capacity, an arrangement which the scholarship students needed because they were so far away from home and did not have relatives living in Saudi Arabia. That condition delayed the admission for some or even barred timely admission. Overall, these results show that academic admission is a high-priority matter in the international student experience, rooted mostly in bureaucratic complexity and procedural matters related to scholarships, and reconsideration procedures must take place in a way that enhances the international students' experience and makes Saudi higher education centers more appealing in the area and globally.

#### **Language Challenges**

Results of the interviews indicate language problems as the core problems faced by foreign graduate students. They all suggested that their English or Arabic medium of instruction language competence was not sufficient enough to influence all these domains like classroom comprehension, reading for scholarship, and writing for research.

Students complained of finding it difficult to cope with lectures, particularly when lecturers used technical jargon or delivered information at fast paces, such that note taking and discussing issues within class became a challenge. The linguistic barrier also extended to informal out-of-class social interactions with other students, where others described themselves as being shy or reserved to communicate, fearing making language errors.

Students, who had been told that poor language was the cause of difficulties with academic writing and reading due to programmes demanding an understanding of highly technical scientific writing and the ability to produce good-standard academic writing—something difficult for students who are still learning a language. Some improved over a few years, but all reacted in the same manner with the need for systematic language support from the university, either through specialist supporting courses, language laboratories, or to provide for access to dictionaries and aids in class.

These findings highlight that language concerns outweigh communication concerns, overlap significantly with the spectrum of international students' academic and welfare, and call for regular and fruitful institutional approaches to the advantage of them linguistically.

#### **Issues Related to Research**

Interviews revealed that international graduate students had several research

issues, especially in light of diverse academic and cultural backgrounds and lack of adequate proper prior research experience for the majority. All the participants made recommendations that acclimatization to a new research environment necessitates complete understanding of the principles of scientific methodology, writing guidelines, and research ethics—issues not necessarily gained on time before program entry.

Some of the most basic issues encountered were the challenge of accessing suitable research topics that fulfill specialization requirements and agree with scholarship demand, and limited access to statistical packages, research tools, and data collection protocols which made it hard to design research projects or theses and required extra guidance.

Some of the participants explained difficulties in getting frequent supervision from supervisors with schedules working on excessive loads of work or irregular guidance styles. The students emphasized the vital importance of early-stage assistance in choosing subjects, formulating theoretical frameworks, and methodology selection, citing the risk of adverse impacts on research quality and confidence in inexperienced researchers where such are lacking.

They also foresaw little opportunity for participation in shared research activities or science teams via the faculty, and this restricted practice-based learning of research skills and less participation in the research culture of the institution.

#### **Challenges Pertaining to Academic Writing**

Graduate interviews with overseas students revealed scholarly writing to be one of the most significant challenges that students faced when enrolled in graduate school. The majority of interview participants indicated writing demands exceeding those of depth, precision, scholarship documentation, and critical and analytical writing, and as a result, causing significant amounts of academic stress, particularly for linguistic and cultural impacts on English or Arabic writing skills based on program language.

Students indicated that lecturers required greatly well-written research papers and reports as well as literature reviews with analysis and proper referencing by citation systems, none of which the students had when entering the program. Slowness in writing and inability to conduct professional academic writing were some of the self-reports by the participants, therefore work took extra time and effort relative to local counterparts.

Such students required professional academic writing facilities such as workshops, counselling courses, or university writing labs to enable them to attain increasingly and systematically abilities in line with graduate study necessities. These findings reveal that academic writing is not a technical problem but a more intricate problem that entwines language and critical and cultural competencies, showing the significance for universities to be cognizant of such an issue and provide facilitating programs particularly designed to serve international students' requirements and succeed academically.

#### **Academic Reading Challenges**

Academic-level reading was a pressing concern acknowledged by global postgraduates via interviews. The majority of participants said that they struggled with managing the quantity and intensity of reading needed, especially since they must comprehend higher-level science texts in academic writing that isn't their own.

Students testified that language skill gaps directly affected them to be able to read and understand lengthy texts as required, resulting in long-term tension and stress, particularly before conducting class debates or research work.

Participants reported that lecturers have extremely high expectations of critical reading and deep referencing—manageable in graduate classes but a true challenge in students who are yet developing linguistic and scholarly ability. Some students said they made them do additional work to decipher and interpret texts and turn to translation or secondary sources in an attempt to gain the general ideas.

This is a sharp gap between student learning and linguistic skills and academic expectations at program entry, and institutional response must come through pre-academic orientation programs or rechanneling other resources to consistently reinforce analysis and critical reading skills.

### **Discussion of Results**

This qualitative study aimed to explore West African international graduate students' experience at a Saudi university in one interview with eighteen West African students. The sample consisted of six women and twelve men who were studying humanities and social sciences disciplines on fully government-funded scholarship programs. Comparing the interview answers showed that male and female students' university experiences overall were very similar and that there were no significant gender differences in the universality of their university experiences. All the male and female respondents valued the

standard of the study environment and cited strong factors on the experience of their teachers, levels of satisfaction in their fields of study, and good experience of the physical and virtual infrastructure of the university. This result concurs with what Al-Bishr (2023) outlined.

In the teachers-student's relationships area, respect for each other, good judgment, and humane sensitivity were the feelings majority of the students attested to. They vowed that the teachers are highly trained and committed to effective communication. The female teachers were reported by some of the female students to be more willing to motivate female students during class meetings and treat them as part of them. This finding concurs with Al-Babteen (2018).

In study programs, the students were generally satisfied with their course of study, which they deemed to be in accordance with the demands of the job market. Some of the female students indicated that they actually preferred different courses but resigned themselves to linguistic majors because of the admission requirements to scholarship courses. Others of the students also wanted to double major, especially since they only want to study without any work demands and family obligations. This accords with a study by Al-Bodi and Al-Zaki (2012).

Regarding making the schedule, students reaffirmed that it was good and suitable, with others hoping there could be more class sessions to begin earlier. They reported that coursework was moderately demanding but in line with graduate-level education, requiring focused effort and comprehension. The purity of the online system in the university positively impacted students' experience; they praised access to electronic services, hassle-free access to the digital library, and fast, free Wi-Fi throughout campus. Similarly, state-of-the-art and new classrooms were praised for supporting academic excellence. These align with Al-Bishr (2023) and Abdelghafour (2025).

Apart from these, some of the most common problems encountered were abundant. The most common was the complexity of scholarship admission procedures, differing governmental phases and a potential span of two years, followed by another element of university accommodation to ensure admission. The students were faced with stark language issues, i.e., understand the lectures or exam questions if local dialects are used, and scholarship reading and writing requiring high-level linguistic skills and analysis. The findings are in agreement with Albeshir (2022), Almotery (2014), and Akanwa (2015).

At the research level, the participants reported that they had difficulties in selecting a topic to be researched, understanding the research method, and adequate supervision and reduced exposure in conducting group research studies. They emphasized training and qualification courses to improve their research capacity (Alfaheid, 2017; Saeed & Alsalami, 2024; Abdelkader, 2023).

### Recommendations

1. Continue to maintain Arabic language centers for non-native speakers and widen their courses to include cultural and social dimensions to assist international female students to integrate into the university environment.
2. The university must have regular workshop training in place for its faculty members to continually enhance teaching skills for linguistically and culturally diverse background students with the goal of continuous excellence in teaching and assessment.
3. Further research on Saudi international students studying at the tertiary level is proposed, specifically with regards to social, economic, and academic elements.
4. Establish a writing center to assist international students in improving the quality of their academic writing and get their work read before submitting them to faculty.
5. Promote student cooperative activities and extracurricular activities that facilitate international and local students to be integrated, an environment that allows students to interact outside of class in order to support international students' academic and social lives.

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