

**The Perception of Interpersonal Relations between Instructors and Students as  
Experienced within Classroom and Online Communication:  
A Mixed Method Case Study of Undergraduate Women in a Saudi Institution**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis contributes to the understanding of the instructor-student relationship construct, and social media adoption in higher education systems that are generally characterised by a formal quality, and that of Saudi Arabia in particular. The potential impact of social media, as it leaks into higher education practice globally, is of great concern and cannot be overlooked by research. A formal education system, such as that of Saudi, is a convenient case study for examining two overarching aims of this thesis. The first is to explore the resilience of established instructor-student interaction practices and the character of the relationships within a Saudi university classroom context. The second aim is to explore the ways in which evolving social media reconfigures the formal quality of instructors' interaction practices within the Saudi culture in a social media context. These two aims are explored in a mixed methods case study consisting of two inter-related studies: Study 1 and Study 2.

The mixed method Study 1 surveyed students about their perceptions of the classroom environment, and through questionnaires collected both instructors' and students' perceptions of the quality of their interpersonal relationships. Instructors were interviewed and students participated in focus groups to illuminate the quantitative findings. The findings paint a general picture of traditional, formal teaching traditions and instructor-student relationships that are a result of several contextual factors mainly related to the Saudi educational system. Participants' views of optimum interpersonal positive behaviours are hindered in becoming apparent, not only by the physical place where teaching and learning within this traditional cultural educational system is played out, but also the stable, traditional, pedagogical paradigm that has been exercised and maintained over the years. The study suggests that many 'unrevealed' informal behaviours from instructors constrained by the system could be released within other enabling environments, such as social media.

Study 2, exploring interaction practices of students and instructors through social media, was achieved by examining instructors' conversations with students, via social networking applications, for any existing, informal, interpersonal texts and the ways in which they emerge over time. A mixed methods approach through statistical

trend and content analysis was conducted to explore this investigation. The findings reveal a discrepancy between instructors' formal practices in a classroom context and their discursive practices within social media. All interpersonal behaviours that appeared to be restricted in a face-to-face context, such as humour, self-disclosure, reassurance and many more, are seen to be gradually released within a social media context. Although instructor variations exist, the tendency towards increased informality over time was evident in the text of most participants. Thus, interaction through social media may set the conditions for revitalized relationships within such an educational ecology in both social media exchanges and face-to-face classrooms.

## **Dedication**

*To my beloved late father,  
Mohammed Ayed Alamri,  
whose prayers, support and love had been instrumental in achieving my goals,  
yet never had the opportunity to see his dream comes true.  
May his soul rest in peace.*



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## Glossary

There are a number of terms used in this thesis that need defining. These are explained to facilitate the reader's understanding of the research.

**Classroom Environment:** The social climate, psychosocial dimension and the emotional aspects of the classroom. It is the concept whereby instructors influence student behaviour. Classroom climate, classroom environment, or learning environment have been used interchangeably in this thesis.

**Instructor-Student Relationship (ISR):** the academic relationship between instructors and their students, which is based on instructor-student interaction practices inside and outside the classroom settings.

**Interpersonal Communication:** refers, in this thesis, to verbal and nonverbal communication between one-to-one or one-to-many that consists of social, informal or intimate texts.

**Information and Communications Technology (ICT):** is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning.

**Online Learning:** Also known as e-learning, this refers to the use of electronic or digital technologies and the internet to deliver educational content such as using Learning Management Systems (LMS) or any other web-based instruction.

**Social Media:** websites and applications that cultivate socialization, enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. This thesis agrees with the formal definition: *‘web-based and mobile applications that allow individuals and organizations to create, engage, and share new user-generated or*



*existing content, in digital environments through multi-way communication'* (Davis III, Dell-Amen, Rios-Aguilar & Canache, 2012, p. 1).

**Web 2.0:** is term that was introduced in 2004 and refers to the second generation of the World Wide Web that is focused on the ability for people to collaborate and share information online. Web 2.0 basically refers to the transition from static HTML Web pages to a more dynamic Web that is more organized and is based on serving Web applications to users. Some examples of features considered to be part of Web 2.0 are blogs, wikis and social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace.

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 The interpersonal fabric of educational contexts**

The learning environment within educational systems is the space where the acts of teaching, interaction, and building of social relations often spark. Within a higher education context, lecture halls, seminar rooms, or the dominant form of a learning space, the ‘classroom’ can be viewed as a social system. These social systems are populated and continuously shaped by humans through their behaviours and interactive practices within that environment. In addition, this thesis is concerned about the important psychosocial dimension of the classroom environment, mainly represented by instructors’<sup>1</sup> interpersonal behaviours, as it has a tremendous influence on students’ affective, social and cognitive outcomes (Myers & Rocca, 2001; Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012). Hence, both instructors and students' interpersonal behaviours practised within classrooms form the character of their interactive practices, and in turn, their relationships. More specifically, the literature recognises the significance of instructor-student relationships and several studies have long shown that it is a strong motivator and indicator of students’ learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Christensen & Menzel, 1998). A healthy instructor-student interpersonal relationship has been found to improve students’ attitudes towards the learning environment (Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987) and the university (Tinto, 1975).

A number of research studies have turned their attention to interpersonal relationships from a teaching perspective and have provided useful insights into what constitutes a positive relationship and its important dimensions and aspects (Crombie, Pike, Silverthorn, Jones & Piccinin, 2003; Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). This will be discussed further in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2 and 4.2.3. In addition, Wubbels and his colleagues established that the interpersonal relationship between instructors and students can be conceptualized and measured by

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<sup>1</sup> Instructor in this thesis is the equivalent of the UK lecturer.

both instructors and students, and based on instructors' behavioural patterns using the Interpersonal Theory (Wubbels, Créton & Hooymayers, 1985). Despite the critical role of the relationship, unlike school context research, research on this topic in the context of higher education is not well developed. A review of literature within higher education suggests that instructor-student relationships have rarely been the main focus of research (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Also, the research on relationships does invoke highly abstract psychological concepts and does not show clearly how these relationship qualities are operationalised. In addition, the majority of studies on this context-dependent construct are mostly qualitative, with only a few quantitative studies, which presents challenges in achieving a holistic understanding of the topic. Thus, in terms of research methodology, a mixed-method research approach is required (Smith, 2006) to address and understand the quality and aspects of this complex, context-dependent phenomenon within a higher education context.

Within any certain pedagogy, it is not reasonable to divorce teaching practices from the social relationship that pedagogy often helps to construct between the instructor and their students. Teaching is not a series of arbitrary contacts, rather instructors and students exercise a classroom 'ritual' or 'routine' constituting procedures and practices for managing the dynamic of instructor-student relationships. These rituals are equivalent to the custom, values and traditions of the wider culture and society (Alexander, 2009). Thus, the foundation ideas of pedagogy about teaching, learning, policy, instructors and learners that pervade social relations are acted out in various ways by different educational systems operating under other cultures. For instance, most instructors' practices from British and American educational systems reflect individualised learning approaches and a confident path towards small group collaboration. However, more cultural educational systems such as that in Middle East countries regard undifferentiated learning and the traditional pedagogical formula with respect and protection, as it has fundamental roots in a society's history and culture (Elyas & Picard, 2010). In a Middle Eastern country such as Saudi Arabia, these roots in traditions and values originate from religion and culture that largely influences every aspect of life, including educational communication practices, and social relations (Oyaid, 2009; Alebaikan, 2010).

Within the Saudi educational system, university teaching practices generally consist of lecture-based and large group teaching. Values such as obedience and showing respect, a sense of loyalty, and an unquestioning attitude towards people with power are implanted in the mindset of Saudi society. The instructor is considered to be a person with power and one who is seen as an authority figure who should be obeyed and respected. As a result of the instilled teacher-centred philosophy of teaching, discouragement of critical thinking, students' passivity, dependence, and respect for authority have long become the norm within this educational ecology (Al-Essa, 2009; Al-Ghamdi, Hamdan, & Philline 2013, Allamnakhrah, 2013). Thus, it could be expected that interaction between instructors and students is not frequent compared to a western classroom environment where discussion and debate is an integral part of the learning activities. This notion is confirmed in the literature, which suggests that the instructor's teaching style shapes the nature and occurrences of interaction in and outside-the-classroom (Cotton & Wilson, 2006), and in turn, the instructor-student relationship. This cultural context will further be discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

While Saudi Arabia's traditional educational system shows stability in terms of educational practices and its associated norms of instructor-student relationships, new communication technologies and particularly social media are now deeply embedded in Saudis' everyday lives. Such artefacts have penetrated into people's norms of social interaction and have been linked to altering how people think, perceive and interpret their social activities (Olson, 1994; Friedberg, 2006). This shift towards embracing digital forms of activities forges people's engagement with both the material artefacts and their social experiences. Mediational perspectives of digital technology, including the socio-cultural theory of learning, provide useful insights into understanding the ways in which the medium reconfigures human cultural practices within mediated experiences (Vygotsky, 1984; Engestrom, 1987). Despite the various different platforms of social media, such as Facebook<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> A popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com).

YouTube<sup>3</sup>, WhatsApp<sup>4</sup> and Twitter<sup>5</sup> among others, they all share social and emotional consequences for their users.

These media have influenced the ways in which people associate with each other and form social relationships. These digital spaces that incorporate many features from conventional forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) foster socialization (Walther, 1992, 1996), establish a convivial spirit and encourage informal conversations. They also redefine how people communicate with each other, where communication using sentences, facial expressions and gestures has been replaced with tweets, emoticons, likes or dislikes. Several studies have investigated social media implications and how they transform social interaction. These effects include impression formation and management, and constructing shared understanding (Bryant, Marmo, & Ramirez, 2011; Walther & Jang, 2012). Also, social media blurs the boundaries between online communities and real world society and it is inevitably crawling into education. University students are vastly immersed in using these tools to argue, discuss, exchange feelings and emotions, and form relationships with their list of '*followers*' or friends. Detailed discussion of social media is tackled in Chapter 5 Section 5.2.5. For this generation of students, social media have become the means of communication and a significant part of their identity (Lin, 2008), and university students belonging to the Saudi firmly formed educational system are no different (Al-Sharqi, Hashim & Kutbi, 2015).

Against this background of a stable, cultural, educational system, where the learning environment reflects teaching traditions and instructor-student interaction practices that are guided by cherished, formal values fundamental to the society's history and culture, social media is one interesting avenue through which to witness how human behaviours are being mediated and reconfigured. Saudis' high immersion in using social media for socialization purposes in entertainment contexts has caught the world's attention, as reported in newspapers and magazines (The Economist, 2014).

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<sup>3</sup> A free video-hosting website that allows members to store and serve video content.  
[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

<sup>4</sup> An instant messaging service for smartphones. It uses the Internet to send text messages, images, video, and audio messages to other users using standard cellular mobile numbers.  
<https://www.whatsapp.com>

<sup>5</sup> A free social networking microblogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets. [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter are the most widely used social media channels in the country (the Arab Social Media Report, 2015; The Statistics Portal, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, the higher educational system has become, over the last decade, a growing digital communication environment that encourages instructors to use digital tools in their teaching (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010; Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). While a considerable literature has developed in using social media in higher education institutions around the world (Breeding 2010; Dickson & Holley, 2010; Selwyn, 2012), very limited research exists on social media applications among institutions, such as those exemplified by Saudi education (Alsereihy & Al Youbi, 2014; Alqahtani, 2015).

Therefore, the potential disorienting significance of social media as it leaks into higher education practice globally is of great concern and cannot be overlooked by research. Thus, the Saudi higher education system is an exemplar and a convenient case study for exploring one of the aims of this thesis, which is to understand how social media might reconfigure the formal quality of Saudi female educational practices, and the impact of allowing these social spaces to migrate into an educational context. In other words, it is of interest to this thesis to explore Saudi female instructor and student communication practices within these media. However, this is not going to be the first step or research study to be tackled in this thesis. Hence, the social media study will be called ‘Study 2’.

In order to examine the aim of Study 2 confidently, it is essential to first understand the nature of the Saudi female classroom environment and open a window into current educational and interaction practices between instructors and students that shape their interpersonal relationships in face-to-face contexts. In addition, this cultural context is an interesting space to explore how resilient such firmly established norms of interaction and forms of relationship are within the Saudi educational ecology. Although the existing literature depicts the Saudi educational system as maintaining cultural stability in terms of employing lecture-based and large class teaching (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013), there is a lack of holistic understanding and up-to-date studies investigating the nature of instructor-student relationships within a cultural traditional educational system, such as that of Saudi in particular. In addition, the literature on instructor-student relationships views the

term as a context-dependent construct, where culture is an influencing factor. Thus, Study 1 of this thesis aims to explore instructor-student interaction practices within a classroom environment by taking into consideration the role that culture plays in constructing these relationships. The implications of this first study will help in informing the second study. The following section states the aims, research questions and provides a brief clarification of the theoretical framing of Study 1 and Study 2 of this thesis.

## **1.2 Research aims and questions**

The overarching aim of Study 1 is to explore the resilience of established instructor-student interaction practices, focussing on the nature of their relationships within a Saudi university classroom context, as well as furnishing an examination of the psychosocial aspects of this university learning environment. The psychosocial dimension of the classroom environment in this study focuses on human behaviour as represented by instructor-student interaction and relationship. This study proposes four sub-research challenges:

1. What are Saudi students' perceptions of the university-learning environment at a Saudi university?
2. What are Saudi students' perceptions of the current nature of interpersonal relationships with their instructors at the university?
3. What are Saudi instructors' perceptions of the current nature of instructor-student interpersonal relationships at the university?
4. To what extent, if any, is there a difference in the perception of instructor-student relationships between instructors and students?

In addition, the overarching aim of Study 2 is to explore the ways in which evolving social media reconfigures or destabilises the formal quality of Saudi instructors' communication practices in a social media context. In particular, this study enquires into the 'interpersonal', 'informal' or 'intimate' behaviours that female instructors text to their students in an educational mediated space. This study proposes the following research challenges:

1. What are the informality and intimacy markers that exist in Saudi instructors' communication practices with their students in social media contexts?
2. To what extent is there a growth in instructors' emerging informality markers over time via the medium?

As explained above, this thesis consists of two interconnected studies grounded in multiple theoretical perspectives appropriate to the specific aspects of the research problem they are addressing. First, Study 1 uses the Interpersonal Theory developed by Wubbles and his colleagues (Wubbels et al., 1985) which is useful in giving a 'language' to describe the interpersonal relationship based upon instructors' and students' perception measures. Study 2 uses the important concept of mediation as developed from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which is important in understanding the dynamics of digital technologies and their influence on people and their activities. This perspective supports viewing social media roles as part of a set of dialectical relations which include people (in this case instructors and students), language, contexts and artefacts. The underlying theoretical framing of Study 1 and Study 2 are further discussed in Chapter 4 and 5.

### **1.3 Organisation of the thesis**

This chapter has introduced the thesis and its main concerns. The first is to explore the influence of using social media in reshaping interaction practices within the cultural educational system in a Saudi female only campus. As a first step, the current status of those interaction practices and the resultant relationship in a Saudi classroom context will be examined. Chapter 2, attempts to acquaint the reader with the cultural context, where this study is conducted, by highlighting aspects such as higher education, and ICT and technology. Chapter 3 will clarify the methodology of this thesis by bringing together the holistic picture of the research questions and methods used in this thesis. Chapter 4 introduces Study 1 by first reviewing the relevant literature and theoretical perspective used to explore the study's questions. It also reviews the Study 1 methodology, presenting the results and discussion. Chapter 5 turns to Study 2 by first reviewing the relevant literature about the role The chapter also reviews the Study 2 methodology and presents the findings of the social media study. Chapter 6 ends the thesis with concluding remarks and a general discussion.



## **2. Study Context**

### **2.1 Overview**

This chapter introduces the area that this research is interested in exploring and places this research into context. It presents a general profile of the country in which the research takes place in Section 2.2 to Section 2.4, which includes a closer look at its people, religion and culture. Section 2.5 describes the evolution of the internet and technology and the Saudi people's reactions to the new media. Section 2.6 discusses the rapid growth of higher education and the role of ICT and higher education policy in the adoption of online learning. The specific research setting, where the researcher is a member of staff is introduced in Section 2.6.4. A summary overview concludes this chapter in Section 2.7.

### **2.2 Saudi Arabia**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the 15 biggest countries worldwide and is the largest country in the Middle East. It is located in the southwest of Asia and covers an area of 2.15m sq. km, which occupies approximately 80% of the Arabian Peninsula. The country holds a distinctive position in the world due to its massive oil reserves, the rapidly growing social and economic developments, and being the birthplace of Islam, the fastest-growing religion worldwide (Wynbrandt, 2010). The country's official language is Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, but there are also Arabic dialects, which are mostly used in spoken contexts. However, English is widely spoken, especially by the large expatriate population and for business, as well as it being widely understood and used in the country's road signs alongside the Arabic. This expansive area was not populated until the 1960s, since then the number of inhabitants has been increasing. The following section describes the population of Saudi.

### **2.3 Population and Demographic**

As of March 2016, Saudi Arabia has a total population of 28.16 million, up 1.5% from year 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The population is forecast to rise to

almost 34 million by 2019 (British Council, 2015). The rapid increase in Saudi population started in the 1960s, when the process of urbanisation commenced as a result of a rapid development in the economy. As of 2016, 82.8% of the population is urban. Figure 2-1 shows the Saudi population increase over more than 30 years, and Table 2-1 reflects a comparison of the latest estimates for 2016 compared with 2005, and 2015.

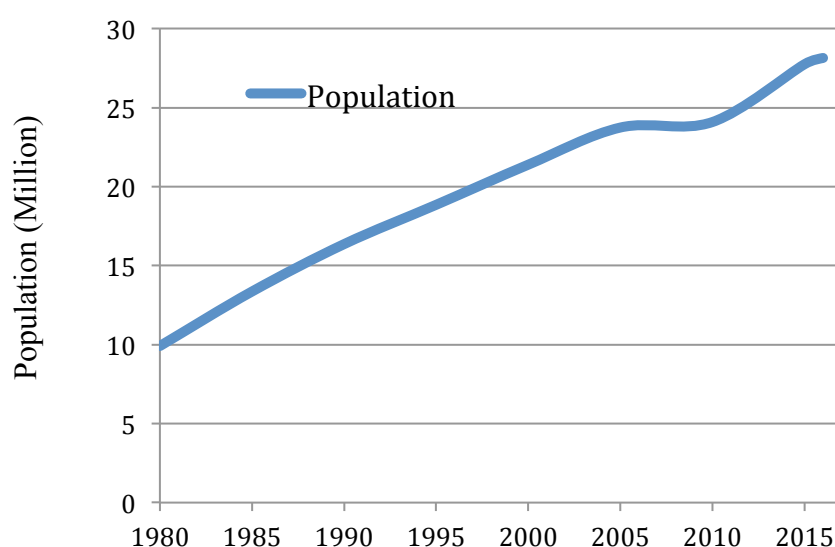


Figure 2-1 Saudi Arabian Population (1980-2016).

Demographic Indicators		2005	Year 2015	2016
Population	Midyear population (in thousands)	23.642	27.752	28.160
	Growth rate %	1.8	1.5	1.5
Fertility	Total fertility rate (births per woman)	2.9	2.1	2.1
	Births (in thousands)	514	514	519
Mortality	Life expectancy at birth (years)	73	75	75

Table 2-1 Saudi Arabia Demographic overview.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, 2016.

Saudi Arabia's population is 'young' and increasing rapidly. Over 60% of the Saudi population is under the age of 25 (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2010), and according to the recent United Nations estimates, 76% of the Saudi population is under the age of 39, with approximately 9 million males and 7 million females (United Nations, 2016). The median age of the population is 27.2 (United Nations, 2016). This growth has established several social and economic challenges for the Saudi leadership, which need to be addressed through various initiatives as discussed in the following sections. Figure 2-2 shows the Saudi population by age group in 2016.

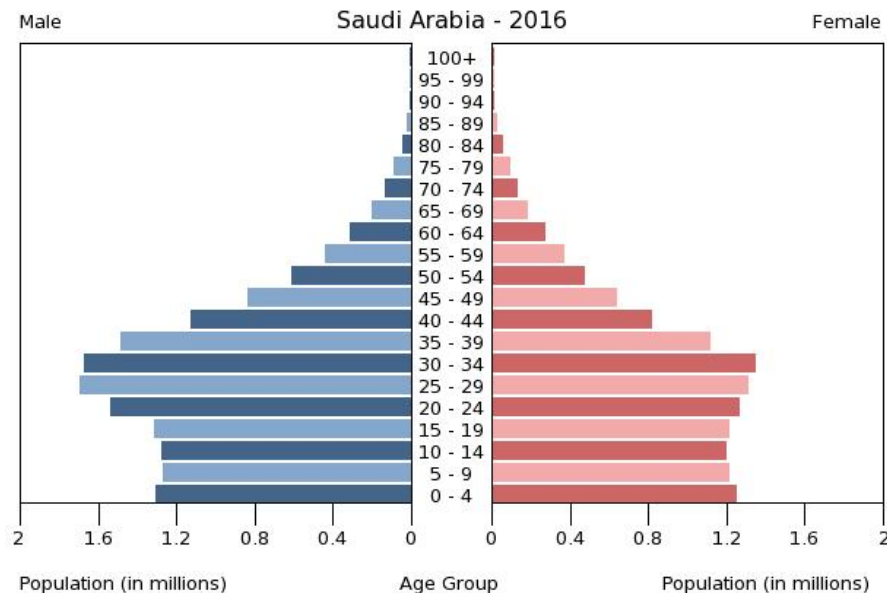


Figure 2-2 Saudi population pyramid by age group.

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, 2016.*

Major urban areas in Saudi Arabia are represented by the country's largest cities: Riyadh, the capital, which is home to around 6.195 million people; Jeddah, with 4.076 million inhabitants; Makkah, the Holy City with 1.771 million; and Medina, with 1.28 million people (The World Fact book, 2015). This study is conducted in Jeddah, the second largest city in the Kingdom. In the following section, a brief account of the Islamic law which is the dominating force of the culture operating in this country is discussed.

## 2.4 Religion and Culture

Research suggests that culture originates from three basic components that define cultural standards: climate, language, and religion (Lewis, 2003). Saudi Arabia is the place from where Islam sprung and where the two holy cities are situated. Thus, the impact of religion on the culture of Saudi society's social, political, and code of conduct is significant. Saudis as Muslim citizens consider this religion as an overarching system that provides full prescription of personal, social, and business matters among several others (Alebaikan, 2010). In fact, the Qur'an sets out a complete list of rules that covers every aspect of individual behaviour. Al-Saggaf (2004) clarifies that '*Islam plays a central role in defining the culture, and acts as a major force in determining the social norms, patterns, traditions, obligations, privileges and practices of society*' (p. 1). Therefore, religion impacts the ways in which Saudis think, behave and perceive things. While religious practices are linked to cultural practices, people vary in the degree of adherence to the religious system (Garcia, 2011, p. 27-28).

Religious meanings are conveyed in ethics and cherished traditions and values, which are practised by Saudis every day. The influence of religion on Saudis' nurtured values include, but are not limited to: the extended family, conservatism, gender differentiation, respect for the elderly and people with higher status, desire for justice, sincerity, morality, and integrity. As the religion places great value on the family, in the Muslim world, the family is the basic social unit, while in the western world it is the individual (Lewis, 2003). Having a family is valuable to Saudi people, and the interests of the family as a whole are above those of the individual members of the family. Gender differentiation is another maintained religious value that demands that communications between males and females, who are unrelated or unmarried, are restricted. Women wear the hijab (covering the head and body) when they are outside their houses, and they usually avoid unnecessary conversations with unrelated men (Alebaikan, 2010). As a result, every aspect of life in Saudi Arabia is affected by the segregation of the genders, including education. Consequently, Saudi males and females are educated in separate locations at all levels of education (Oyaid, 2009; Alebaikan, 2010).

Obeying people with power such as rulers, parents and teachers is a duty of Muslims and this is emphasized in the Qura'an: "*Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad peace be upon him), and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority.*" (Al-Qur'an 7:158). This conformity is practised on several levels: the citizen should obey the rulers and the teacher, as well as the parents or the head of the family. To Muslims, there are various benefits of such obedience, such as a united society, security and peace, and reward from Allah (God). Also, there are various traditional cultural assumptions that strongly influence Saudis' communication styles. For instance, factors such as age, status, family, and gender play a significant role in determining the communication relationship and how people interact in a given situation. Thus, face-saving and being aware of hierarchy are essential in order to have positive communication with one another. When Saudis interact within a group, the loss of face factor becomes more critical and maintaining a harmonious group is a priority. Arab people, including Saudis, are distinguished from western cultures in relation to their preference for indirect communication styles (Zaharna, 1995). In contrast to the direct style, which stresses openness, the ambiguous style of Saudis suggests concealing the message and more of a desire to create emotional 'vibes' rather than express a precise message. Being emotionally engaged, expressive and showing a polite interest in the individual is common in social conversations. Thus, Saudis consider politeness, indirectness and saving face as the first steps toward forming a relationship.

These firmly fixed norms discussed in this sub-section are now facing the emergence of new communication and information technologies. Thus, the question arises as to how Saudis react to technology. The next section gives a brief illustration of the emergence and use of the internet and technology in the country.

## **2.5 The Internet, ICT and Technology**

In 1997, public access to the Internet was allowed in the country (Ali, Sait, & Al-Tawil, 2003), so Saudi Arabia has a short history of Internet use. The use of the internet by citizens increased rapidly in the following years. For example, there were nearly 200,000 active users in 2000, and the growth rate became 1170% in 2005 (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, 2007). After four years

of the availability of public internet access, the influence of internet use in the country was investigated. According to the research study, which gave insights into the behavioural usage of the Internet, younger age groups were using the internet increasingly, with an emphasis on e-mail, information, and chatting functionalities. According to Ali et al. (2003), the study examined the use of the internet in three main areas: social uses and effects of the internet in society, implications of internet technology for education, and business uses of the internet. The number of Saudi Internet users continues to grow rapidly. By the end of 2015, it reached 21.6 million Internet users, with a 68.5% population penetration as shown in Figure 2-3.

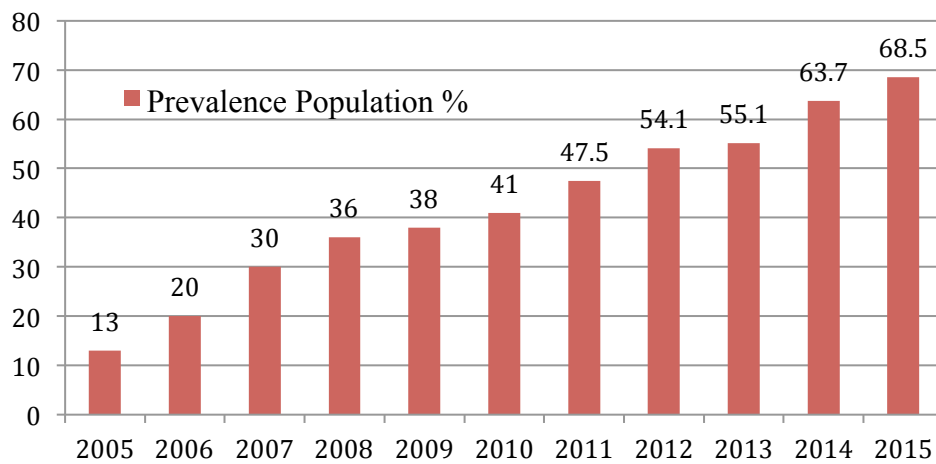


Figure 2-3 Saudi Internet users from 2005 to 2015.

According to the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (2016), there is a growing demand for internet services and broadband, which is resulting from the accelerating use of social networking applications and video downloading. The Ministry also asserts that it is expected that the demand for more internet services will significantly increase over the next few years due to the persisting spread of smart devices and applications (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, 2016). In fact, a recent report by the Communication and Information Technology Commission (2015) highlights a strong growth trend for Saudi ICT that is driven by a number of factors, including continued investment in ICT and infrastructure, increased spending on tablets and smartphones, the implementation of e-government projects, and a growing interest in ICT services.

The report also suggests that Saudi has one of the world's highest percentages of total internet traffic consumed on mobile devices. Because mobility is one of the most dynamic aspects of ICT in Saudi, the commission predicts that smart devices will become the primary device type in the country over the next few years (Communication and Information Technology Commission, 2015). Figure 2-4 shows the main indicators of ICT and the percentage of users in relation to the population in 2015.

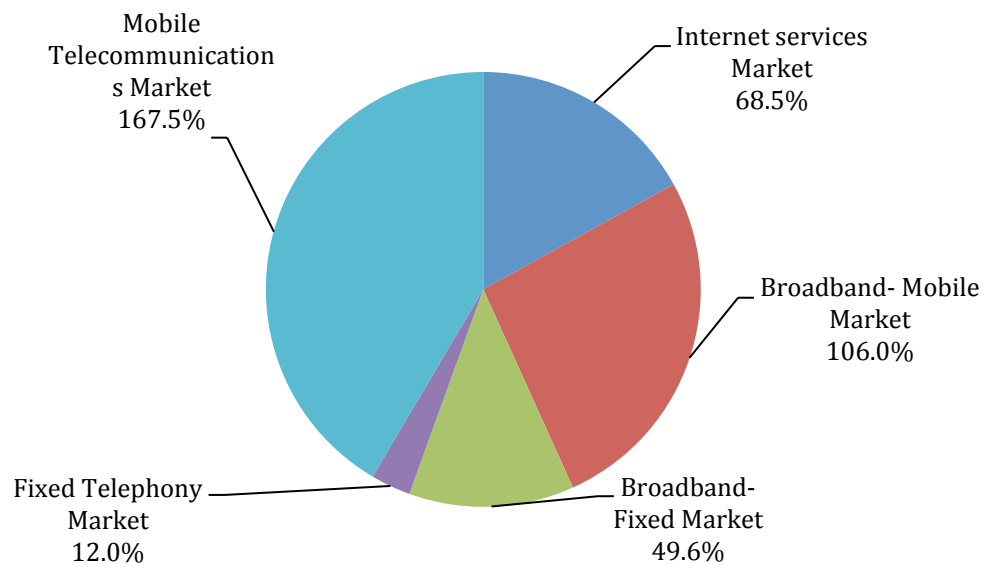


Figure 2-4 ICT Indicators in Saudi Arabia in 2015.

*Source. The Communication and Information Technology Commission, 2016.*

At the present time, newspapers and magazines are writing about how Saudis are becoming among the most “online” individuals in the world and are wondering about the reasons. Titles such as ‘*Twitter Usage is booming in Saudi Arabia*’ (Global Web Index, 2013), or ‘*Social Media in Saudi Arabia: A virtual revolution*’ (The Economist, 2014) have increased in the web. In 2013, Saudi Arabia ranked first on Twitter penetration worldwide (The Social Clinic, 2014). According to the Arab Social Media Report (2015), Saudi was ranked the first in Twitter usage among 18 Arab countries and the third across 32 countries worldwide. The current 5.4 million Twitter users in Saudi Arabia tweet more than a staggering 210 million tweets per month (The Social Clinic, 2015).

Beside the Saudis' interest in using Twitter, research suggests that WhatsApp (91%) and Facebook (80%) are the most used social media channels in Saudi, with a penetration rate of 27% and 25% respectively for WhatsApp and Facebook (the Arab Social Media Report, 2015; The Statistics Portal, 2015). Figure 2-5 shows the penetration of leading social media in Saudi in 2015. The qualitative findings of the Arab Social Media Report (2015) suggest that WhatsApp is the top preferred mobile application across Arab countries and that the main reason for using social media is to chat and socialise. Not surprisingly, chatting via mobiles is the most common activity and a popular mode of communication in Saudi. Taking into consideration that WhatsApp is a mobile application, this growth is likely to be driven by the high levels of mobile internet usage, as 60% to 83% of Saudis access the various internet applications using their mobiles (Global Web Index, 2013; the Arab Social Media Report, 2015). In addition, a recent report shows that the average daily use of the internet via a mobile phone is 4 hours and 13 minutes, while the average daily use of social media via any device is 3 hours and 02 minutes (We Are Social Report, 2015). Therefore, the high use of the internet, mobiles and social media has already shaken the silence of the culturally reserved Saudis and the above figures point towards a significant adoption of social media by today's generation.

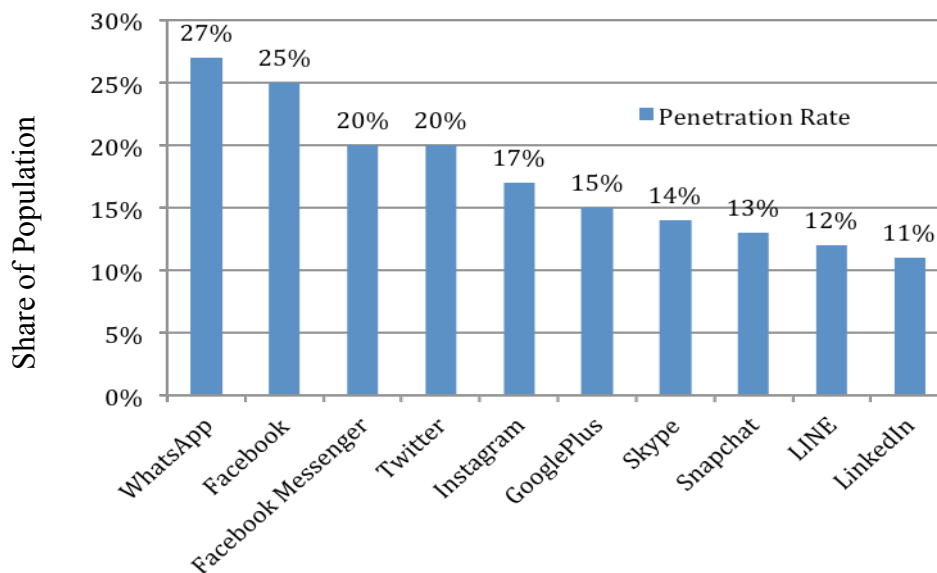


Figure 2-5 The penetration rate of leading social media in Saudi in 2015.

*Source: The Statistics Portal, 2015*

In the following sections, Saudi higher education is discussed, as well as its status of



being a high priority sector for the country, based on the heavy investment directed towards developing its standards. A brief background history of education, and teaching and learning strategies, and a description of the educational developmental plans within the country, are developed in the subsequent sections.

## **2.6 Higher Education**

Education in Saudi has seen significant development in the last five decades. It is widely known how Saudi Arabia, one of the largest oil exporters worldwide has endeavoured to invest heavily in modernising its education system, particularly higher education, for decades. Generally, the school system shifted dramatically from a mosque-centered basic education for boys, to government education offered for all citizens starting from elementary school level and continuing to university level. In particular, the Ministry of Higher Education is the umbrella for the free education offered in elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools, and university education. The Saudi government allocates substantial resources to education, amounting to \$57.9 billion, equivalent to 25% of the Saudi annual national budget, since 2010 through to 2015 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010, Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2014). As for higher education, the total expenditure is around \$3.28 billion for the purposes of establishing three new universities and the maintenance and refurbishment of college campuses in many universities.

The government allocation of a substantial budget for education is partially due to several challenges that have been facing higher education. One of these challenges is the increasing demand for enrolment in the past 10 years. The high birth rate and the young population in Saudi have pressured available Saudi universities to accommodate a growing number of students. University enrolment for undergraduate, masters and PhD programmes has increased from 432,000 in 2001 to 1.5 million in 2014 (University World News, 2015). It is expected that enrolment will increase by an average of 9% per year during 2015-2017. Another challenge is the gender separation system in Saudi education, which doubles the universities' administration and resources, as Saudi universities require separate facilities for their male and female students (Albalawi, 2007; Almalki, 2011). Thus, with congested classrooms in the existing universities, the quality of teaching and learning and the

vision of the country to reconcile globalization are jeopardized (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). As a result, the Ministry of Higher Education has had consecutive development plans, with each plan lasting five years since 2005. Besides finding solutions for the above challenges, the Ministry's overarching aim through these plans is to enhance the quality and performance of its universities to be among the best institutions worldwide (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). A discussion of Higher Education policy, its plans and how the use of ICT is to be established is illustrated in Section 2.8.2.

The rapid development in higher education can be seen in the increasing number of universities in the country. In 2005, there were only 7 public universities. Ten years later, there are 28 public and more than 9 private universities and colleges.

According to the Ministry of Higher Education, there has been an 86% growth in the number of established universities over the last decade, accommodating more than 1.5 million students in the country, where female students represent 55% of this number (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014). According to the Ministry of Higher Education (2014), there are approximately 73,817 faculty members, 40% of whom are female instructors, teaching more than 1.5 million students in 25 public universities, and 28 private colleges and institutions (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014).

This sub-section clearly shows the country's efforts in developing education in general and higher education in particular. The challenges that are facing higher education are being dealt with by tremendous developments over a relatively short period of time. New universities and institutions are established, and increasing the quality of teaching and learning is one of the Ministry of Higher Education's priorities. Thus, it is now appropriate to understand teaching and learning practices and the influencing factors of instructional strategies within higher education. The next section first lays down a brief history of teaching and learning and then describes the current situation in the light of the available literature.

### 2.6.1 Teaching and Learning Practices

Education in Saudi Arabia originated from two main roots: the traditional learning in Qur'anic schools (oriented to understanding religion), and formal education, the *kuttab* and *madrassa* or the primary school (oriented to religion and a few basic subjects) (Tibi, 1998; Elyas & Picard, 2010). First, the traditional learning in the Qur'anic school was oriented to religion where the teaching curriculum was only based on understanding Qur'an verses and Hadith (Prophet Sayings) interpretations. This pre-school stage took place at home or in mosques. The only learning method used in this school was reciting and memorizing the Qur'anic verses. This key method formed the basis of learning, where oral transmission of the Qur'an across generations was an ultimate aim. In addition, what makes this method particularly significant is that Muslims do recite Qur'anic verses five times a day during *Salah*, or prayer, which is the most important act of worshipping Allah in Islam. Thus, in 1932, memorization and oral transmission was the only form of education in the kingdom (Elyas & Picard, 2010). The second form of education was organized into the *kuttab* and the modern elementary (*madrassa*) schoolings (Tibi, 1998). Before the twentieth century, the only type of education existed was the *kuttab* where religion, the Arabic language and an introduction to arithmetic were the subjects instructed. The elementary school used a more extensive curriculum; however, the method of teaching and the status of the instructor remained the same (Elyas & Picard, 2010).

Support of rote learning and the acquisition of facts existed beyond elementary school level. Szyliowicz (1973) described how early Saudi teaching methods were constantly used in Saudi public schools as well as in university education. He states:

*'Formal delivery of lectures with the lecturer squatting on a platform against a pillar and one or two circles of students seated before him was the prevailing method in higher levels of instruction. The teacher read from a prepared manuscript or from a text, explaining the material, and allowed questions and discussion to follow the lecture' (p. 51).*

This seating arrangement, with the instructor in the front represents the '*Halagah*' which is a religious assembly in a mosque, where the imam preaches and the audience listens (Elyas & Picard, 2010). As mentioned in Section 2.4, the teacher's role as someone with a higher status and knowledge is a crucial one, especially in the dynamic of teaching and communicating with students. Teachers are considered as rulers within this society. There is one proverb that states that the role of a king, a teacher, and a father is the same as a ruler of society. Teachers are respected by students as authority figures and sources of knowledge. Students are used to rote memorization of information and they are expected to provide correct, textbook style answers in written tests. Unlike western learning methods, independent problem solving strategies and creativity in-group work are rarely encouraged (Prokop, 2003; Allamnakhram, 2013). In most cases, students' work depends on the instructor's guidelines and learning is mainly guided by the instructor.

As a result of the traditional high respect for instructors, the relationship between students and instructors is usually formal in all contexts. Most students feel hesitant to ask questions in and outside-the-classroom (Al-Essa, 2009; Allamnakhrah, 2013). In addition, Saudis put more value on student's grades than on his/her cognitive development. Saudi society believes that those grades practically assess the person's academic progress. As a result of this ongoing traditional teaching style, passivity, dependence, respect for authority, and an unquestioning attitude are instilled in the philosophy of teaching in Saudi (Al-Essa, 2009; Allamnakhrah, 2013). Moreover, communication and interaction between instructors and students is poor, as are discussion and debate, which almost do not exist.

Therefore, it is natural that current teaching styles in both school and university educational systems still reflect the early cultural pedagogical strategies. Saudi universities maintain a rigid curriculum and a didactic pedagogy. Saudi universities have been receiving criticism over the content of curriculum and the nature of the preferred pedagogy that does not support high quality teaching and learning standards (Elyas & Picard, 2010). In addition, Alnassar and Dow (2013) have investigated current educational practices by Saudi academics and indicate key challenges that constrain effective teaching and learning, such as the domination of the traditional teacher-centred approaches to teaching and assessment, and the

strictly followed curriculum that does not adequately nurture critical thinking and problem solving skills, which are essential to learning.

Furthermore, large group teaching, or one-way communication is the traditional centre of university teaching within Saudi universities mainly because of rapid increases in enrolment. This form of teaching is focused on imparting knowledge to students. This teaching mode has been employed from generation to generation of students and has survived the test of time. This might be because instructors are making efforts to magnify the benefits of this method by breaking up the lecture, introducing a film or a video and providing perspectives and summaries (Alnassar & Dow, 2013). Small group teaching and powerful teaching methods, which are used by most developed educational systems are vital, but not widely achieved within Saudi universities. The two-way-communication activity is not evidently supported by the teaching and learning plans and university authorities. Working in an appropriate physical area, coupled with a task that enables listening to students, asking students questions and ensuring that students' voices are heard and acknowledged, does not happen or exist at large. Students in the first three years of university often learn with a large number of students in lecture halls. Some advanced and more specialized courses, with smaller enrolment have more opportunity for instructors to promote less formal approaches to teaching that could be tailored to students' needs. However, the current skills and capabilities of teaching staff may make adopting small group teaching methods a difficult task. Currently, some enthusiastic instructors who have acquired new ideas and experiences overseas are trying non-traditional methods. However, such few individual informal initiatives are not sufficient in altering entrenched methods of teaching, and changing instructors who have been only exposed to early teaching approaches, which are widely supported by Saudi universities and retain the system's certainties. There is a clear absence of studies that investigate the status quo of the educational practices of Saudi staff in university classrooms and consequently the nature of instructor-student interaction in the classroom.

In summary, this sub-section provides an overview of the well-established teaching and learning practices that are largely influenced by culture and religion. The available literature recognises the fact that these instructional strategies are naturally

passed on from the school system to university classrooms. As a result, the cultural role of the teacher alongside traditional didactic teaching is exerting an influence on classroom structure and instructor-student interactions. Although individual efforts at innovative teaching are spotted, the general reported practice gleaned from the limited literature suggests a domination of one-way communication, lecture-based teaching and an absence of student-centred teaching approaches. The evolving technologies have inevitably leaked to higher education worldwide. Thus, the following section illustrates the ways and levels of support that the Ministry of Higher Education has devoted to embrace ICT and technology in teaching and learning.

### **2.6.2 ICT and Higher Education Policy**

Over the last decade, the Saudi government has become more aware of the significant role of ICT; therefore, in 2001 the government founded the Communications and Information Technology Commission, which focused on the use of technology and increased awareness of it (Communications and Information Technology Commission, 2011). In 2007, it established a National Communications and Information Technology Plan for the country, which was included as part of the government's long term economic development agenda. The main goals were to obtain ICT availability and computer literacy equivalent to the top developed countries and to enhance the country's economy. One of the substantial investments in the country's five-year socio-economic plans was directed towards educational ICT. ICT in education was observed as an objective of great importance because of the high number of young citizens in the country. The number of laptops in higher education institutions increased from 50% in 2007 to 79% in 2009 (Communications and Information Technology Commission, 2010). Internet connections also increased from 2007 to 2009, and 93% of universities and colleges already have broadband connection. In 2007, the government reported to the United Nations:

*'The Government is also continuing its policies to promote the development and use of information and communication technology (ICT) in transforming Saudi Arabia into an information and knowledge society' (Saudi Government, 2007, p. 1).*

A review of the Ministry of Higher Education's plans suggests a shift in aims over the years. For instance, the aims changed from providing adequate resources and infrastructure in the 7<sup>th</sup> plan (2000/2004) to meet demand, to the enhancement of the quality and functioning of these resources in the 8<sup>th</sup> plan (2005/2009) (Bashehab & Buddhapriya, 2013). The 8<sup>th</sup> plan objectives established a significant transformation for the country where the Ministry of Higher Education turned their attention and interest to using instructional technologies and integrating ICT into education (Oyaid, 2009; Al-Sulaimani, 2010). As a result, the Ministry's 8th (2005/2009) plan incorporated various university courses and programmes with an extensive use of ICT. The Ministry's vision of using innovative learning with technology was to provide more educational opportunities to the explosion of population through e-learning and distance learning programmes. The first national universities to embrace online learning are King Saud University, King Fahd University, Islamic University, and KAU, as they established deanships of e-learning (Almalki, 2011). As complete online learning programmes are not considered acceptable within the system, online learning activities complemented the traditional instruction.

Following on the country's innovation mission, the 9th plan (2010-2014) for Saudi higher education mainly focuses on establishing new universities and institutions, and emphasises performance standards of faculty and students. The Ministry of Higher Education announced blended learning as its selected mode of learning in 2006, and founded the National Centre for E-learning and Distance Learning (NELC):

*'..to allow creating unique educational environments, which contribute in building a wide range system to what is known as Blended Learning, to fulfil the needs of Higher Education in the kingdom and spread the e-learning centres in the region.'* (National Centre for E-learning, 2010, p. 3).

The Ministry of Economy and Planning announced a five-year development plan for 2015-2020 (Arab News, 2014). The plan endeavors to achieve 25 goals listed for the higher education system, which include: "Updating educational curricula to stimulate research and innovation"; "Continuing the scholarship program, to the renowned

international universities, in specializations demanded by the development plans and the labor market”, “Expanding graduate studies programs and establishing specialized universities of science; “Enhancing the research role of universities in line with the future needs of the society” (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2015, pp.13-14). The next sub-section presents the achievements of the country in online learning.

### **2.6.3 Online Learning**

Similar to many countries around the world, and upon the establishment of NELC, several universities and institutions in Saudi introduced e-learning as they made some of their programmes and courses available as online courses. The NELC has a leading role in spreading technological awareness, placing quality standards for designing digital educational materials, and assisting Saudi universities in achieving their goals for the adoption of online learning (National Centre for E-learning, 2016a). The primary mission was to redefine the three pillars of the educational process: teacher, educational content, and the learner. The NELC’s main goals are to: 1. Develop quality standards for e-learning and distance learning programs and educational digital materials; 2. Assist institutions to increase service capacity through electronic applications, especially Learning Management Systems (LMS); 3. Contribute to the information society through developing an e-learning and distance learning culture by addressing issues such as aligning online and blended learning with institutional goals, program costs, resistance to change and lack of experience with partnership; 4. Assist in evaluating e-learning projects and programs; and 5. Support research and conferences in e-learning and distance learning (National Centre for E-learning, 2016a).

The centre works jointly with universities by providing training, digital content, and technical and consultancy services. The centre’s offered services are: The Saudi Digital Library, ‘Jusoor’ LMS for managing e-learning, The Saudi Centre for Support and Guidance (SANEED), The Saudi Repository of Learning modules (MAKNAZ), award for excellence in higher education E-learning, rehabilitation and training, and QanaTech (for a safe educational environment). To date, twenty Saudi universities have introduced e-learning, using support and consultation, faculty



training and access to Jusur and Maknaz (The National Centre for E-learning, 2016b). Another recent achievement in the domain of online learning is the launching of The Saudi Electronic University in 2011 as a step forward in the country's vision of online learning and distance education (King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology Report, 2014).

It appears that the extent of technology and the use of online learning applications in teaching by Saudi academics is still in the early stages. According to Colbran and Al-Ghreimil (2013), instructors at seven universities reported that Email (79%) and LMSs (47%) are the most used digital tools across other technologies, such as social media, mobile learning, electronic recordings of lectures, smart boards and others. Also, 42% of staff declared that they do not use LMS in their teaching practice. This suggests that the tradition of using an LMS is not yet widely adopted by Saudi universities, as almost half of 338 instructors surveyed indicated that they are not aware of LMS being employed in their institutions. Despite the Ministry's efforts in supporting the adoption of online learning, many Saudi researchers found that the implementation of online learning is challenged by barriers, such as the traditional university culture, the transition to student-centred pedagogy, and instructors' beliefs (Albalawi, 2007; Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010; Al-Abdullatif, 2012). A detailed discussion of the challenges to technology implementation is tackled in Chapter 5 Section 5.2.8.

In terms of the Saudi universities' extent of engagement with new technologies, such as Web 2.0 or social media tools, research suggests that the level of adoption in an educational context is scarce and limited to individual instructors' endeavours (Alqahtani, 2015). Colbran and Al-Ghreimil (2013) suggest that only 14% or 36 members of staff indicated their use of social networking in an educational context. Despite Saudi's tremendous immersion in social media, according to a recent review about a number of Saudi universities, the adoption of these tools is superficial, where the universities' usage is limited to sending updates and announcements to staff and students through their Facebook and Twitter accounts (Al-Khalifa & Garcia, 2013). However, a handful of Saudi researchers and educators are conducting research into perceptions of using these social spaces in the Saudi context. A full account of this

research is detailed in Chapter 5 Section 5.2.9. The next sub-section takes one example of Saudi universities, the setting of this thesis, KAU.

#### **2.6.4 King Abdulaziz University (KAU)**

The university holds the name of the founder of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz Al-Saud. It is one of the oldest Saudi Arabian universities and has a unique position in the Middle East region due to the high number of its students. It was established in the port city of Jeddah in 1967 as the first private institution in the Kingdom. In 1971, it became a public university. KAU has been developed tremendously in terms of enrolment, and the various academic programmes under different faculties. The university is considered to be one of the most prestigious universities in the country, as it includes distinguished specializations such as Marine Sciences, Meteorology, Earth Sciences, Nuclear Engineering, Mining, Medical Engineering and Aeronautical Engineering. Currently, KAU constitutes 29 colleges, three educational institutions, seven research centres, eight centres of excellence and eight deanships, with 138 academic undergraduate programmes and 50 postgraduate programmes. The university strives to become a leading higher education institution in the country and among the world class universities (King Abdulaziz University, 2016).

In addition to the face-to-face academic undergraduate and graduate degrees, KAU was the first university to establish a Deanship for E-learning and Distance Education (DEDE), which offers a number of degree programmes in five specialisations. Besides following the Ministry's direction to achieve the goals of the development plans, KAU's e-learning and distance education programmes are considered to be compensation for the limited classrooms and places for its traditional face-to-face programmes, and the rapid increase in the number of high school graduates seeking higher education at KAU (Al-Nuaim, 2012). The DEDE at KAU serves both instructors who teach distance programmes, and regular full time students in terms of the online tools. Blackboard LMS was first implemented in the university in 2013 after replacing the home created EMES LMS in 2006, making Blackboard currently the main system in which most online learning activity occurs.

For full distance learning teaching, the LMS incorporates several tools, such as a virtual classroom, a discussion forum, synchronous and asynchronous interaction and communication tools, and electronic exams and grading tools. As listed on the university website for E-Learning and Distance Education, the distance learning instructor is required to adhere to one weekly meeting for course discussion purposes according to the course scheduled time, and the meetings' aggregate time should be equivalent to 40% of the traditional class hours. Students are assisted from a total of 100 available points for students, 30 points can be given for activities, discussion forum and class assignments, and 70 points for a final written examination (Deanship for E-learning and Distance Education, 2016). This system is designed in accordance to the approved education regulations from the Ministry of Higher Education.

As for regular or full time traditional teaching and learning, the e-learning unit at the DEDE has been tirelessly trying to instil the culture of blended learning in adherence with the Ministry's preferred blended learning approach as discussed in Section 2.6.2. This endeavour involves encouraging face-to-face traditional instructors to incorporate Blackboard LMS and other technological applications into their traditional instruction. The e-learning unit alongside the Centre for Teaching and Learning Development offers several voluntary training workshops for university instructors who show an interest in the blended learning approach. Workshops offered are focused on three main areas: how to use the LMS alongside the face to face instruction, designing digitized curricula, modern teaching and learning strategies, and workshops for integrating technology, such as animated cartoons, creating videos using Screen Cast (Deanship for E-learning and Distance Education, 2016; Centre for Teaching and Learning Development, 2016).

As for the instructors' adoption of blended and online learning tools, staff in colleges and faculties at the university differ in their use of online learning. For example, Science, Business and European Languages faculties have higher usage rates of online learning tools than do religious and social sciences faculties. Based on the annual reports produced by the deanship at KAU, there is a noticeable interest from instructors in using new technologies and creating websites, even from those who lack main technical skills. Instructors from Medicine and European Languages

departments are examples of the early use of such technologies compared to the other departments. KAU in general encourages and supports faculties' use of online tools by giving them financial and technical assistance. For example, faculties receive financial incentives and technical support when they place their websites within the university's portal.

As indicated in the deanship website, the deanship is involved in research measuring the readiness of faculty members and students at the university for blended learning and mobile learning. Furthermore, one of the university's latest achievements is 'MY KAU' mobile application for smart phones that was first launched in 2013. This application offers electronic services for both instructors and students, such as displaying course schedules, university announcements and system alerts, and the text messaging service. According to Al-Sharqi and colleagues (2015), 72% of KAU instructors showed an interest in integrating social media into their teaching as reported in a recent survey. This conveys a generally open attitude towards incorporating popular social media into teaching and communicating with students, with interest in using applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter.

## **2.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter takes us into a particular area of the world where the exploitation of oil reserves and a vision of a 'knowledge society' has created a nation with a persistent desire to develop its education system. The government takes into consideration the challenge of an increasingly young population. Thus, the Kingdom is undergoing consecutive socio-economic plans, with high investment in both economy diversification and education. While the Ministry of Higher Education's policy and plans have been securing infrastructure and resources to accomplish the massive expansion of education, and is striving to spread the culture of information and communication technology, especially in the educational sector, the Saudis are vastly immersed in social media and mobile demand is increasing due to this active involvement.

Although the educational system has undergone major developments and changes in terms of infrastructure and resources, and new universities and institutions are being

established, the traditional educational practices are not easily altered. University teaching and educational practices generally reflect lecture-based and large group teaching. Besides the cultural status of the teacher in the society, this form of cultural teaching firmly defines the norms of interaction practices between instructors and students. In such a context culture is of an apparent form that marks the character of behaviours, interactions and relationships. In light of the stability of the system, an important and general question concerns how resilient interaction practices are within this cultural context. In addition, the evolving social media including WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter have opened up new opportunities for communication and drastically changed the ways in which people communicate. As previously established in Chapter 1, social media redefinition of communication has had a tremendous effect where it has altered the basic rules of communication. Thus, another important question concerns how current pedagogies that take place within Saudi universities react to new communication media that the Saudi young students are engaging with in their everyday lives and how the labile identity of Saudi educational practice might be disturbed by engaging in these media in an educational context.

In order to investigate how evolving social media might reconfigure well-established interaction practices, which is one of the aims of this thesis, there is a need to first examine the nature of these educational practices within the classroom environment at Saudi universities. The way in which a certain educational system utilises a new medium is configured by the educators' approaches to the curriculum in that system. Thus, this investigation is of paramount significance in opening a window onto existing teaching perspectives within the system, by considering both instructors' and students' perspectives. As discussed in this chapter, up-to-date research that brings to the surface the current Saudi university instructors' and students' voices regarding the quality of the learning environment and educational practices is almost non-existent. Thus, Chapter 4 tackles and introduces Study 1 of this thesis with the aim of understanding the shape and form of Saudi classrooms in terms of interaction from both instructors' and students' perspectives. The implications of this important step of research will set the stage for investigating the stability of these practices within a social media context, Study 2 of this thesis.

### **3. Overview of Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter acts as an introduction to the methods for the two studies of this research. Section 3.2 presents the overarching research methodology and research structure of Study 1 and Study 2. Section 3.3 tackles the nature and character of a mixed method design, providing a rationale for choosing it to conduct this study. Section 3.4 reveals the philosophical orientations underlying this thesis, and Section 3.5 introduces the case study methodology and its relevance to this research. The researcher role as an insider is discussed and how the two strands of data collection were dealt with is explained in Section 3.6. Before ending the chapter with a summary in Section 3.8, Section 3.7 gives a brief note on ethical considerations.

#### **3.2 Overarching Research Methodology**

This thesis adopts a mixed methods case study design as its overarching methodological approach. This type of research design focuses on collecting, analysing, and integrating both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study in order to describe the phenomena of female instructor-student interaction practices within a Saudi higher education context. The research for this thesis consists of two inter-dependent studies, although this chapter is not going to present the particular methods of each study, rather, it will serve as an introduction to the more detailed chapters of the two studies, demonstrating each study's methods, analysis and findings.

##### **3.2.1 Two Research Studies of Saudi Women**

This research was conducted through two inter-dependent projects termed Study 1 and Study 2 in a Saudi women's campus.

##### ***Study 1- 'Instructor-student relationship in face-to-face contexts'***

This study collected two sets of different surveys distributed to female university instructors and their female students in order to examine the classroom environment

and the nature of instructors' interpersonal behaviour from a teaching perspective. In parallel, data from a series of 12 interviews of university instructors and five focus groups of undergraduate students was gathered to corroborate the findings and provide a more holistic understanding of the phenomena under study. It should be noted that this study has a comparative component where its results are going to be compared with results from similar studies conducted in different countries. Specifically, the surveys employed in Study 1 have been used in other cultural contexts and the survey scores could be compared to those resulting from this study. This comparative element should allow claims about the form of Saudi instructor-student relationship compared to other countries.

### ***Study 2- 'Interaction practices in social media contexts'***

Framed by the context described in Study 1, this study was conducted by examining female university instructors' and their female undergraduate students' interaction via exchanged text messages in a social media context over an eight-week period. Study 1 needed to be conducted first.

Thus, Study 1 informed Study 2. More specifically, conducting Study 1 is of significant importance in first opening a window onto interaction practices within a face-to-face context, laying the groundwork for Study 2, which considers how these practices might be re-mediated by online communication in text. Thus, the two-study thesis creates a tight interconnected structure for this research. Figure 3-1 shows the organisation of the thesis. A detailed rationale for the two studies is explained in the coming chapters.

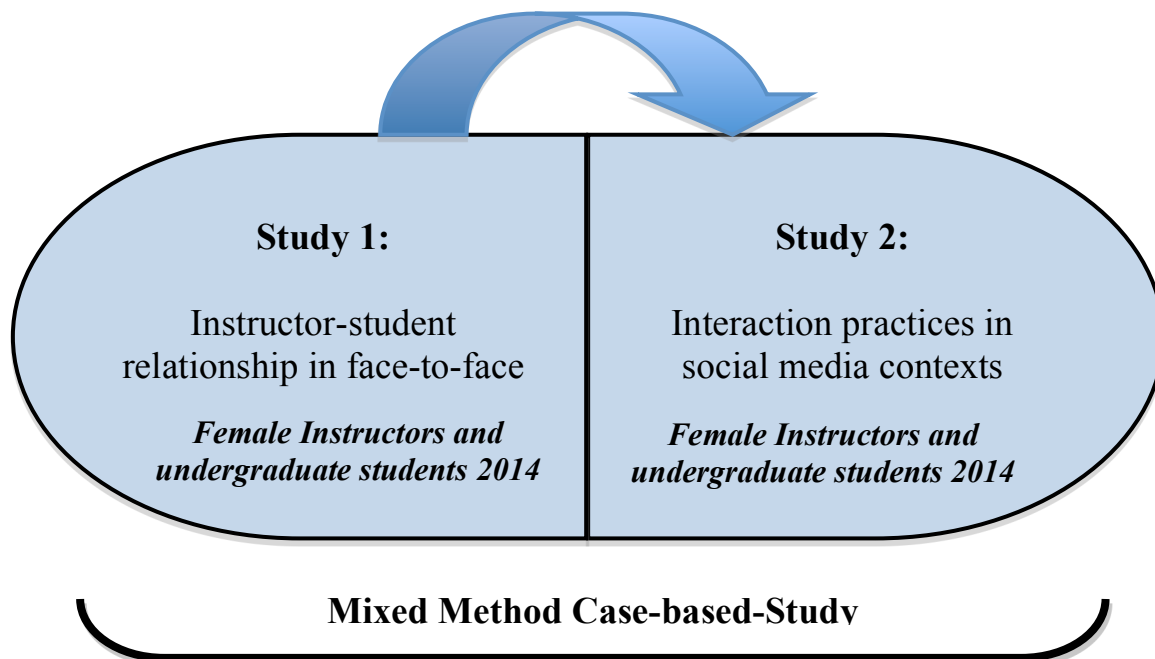


Figure 3-1 Overarching research design with two studies.

### 3.3 Sampling

The intrinsic difficulty in recruiting professionals and students for the purpose of answering several questions, whether for questionnaires or interviews, is inevitable. My primary aim was to achieve a large number of participants who were fairly approachable, and to reach a reasonable cross section of both instructors and students. This section discusses the process for selecting each type of participant.

#### 3.3.1 Instructor Sample

Purposive sampling was adopted to recruit instructors for both studies. Creswell (1998) describes purposive sampling as “*select cases that show different perspectives on the problem, process, or event I want to portray, but I also may select ordinary cases, accessible cases, or unusual cases*” (p. 62). However, Stake (2006) suggests that the most significant criteria for selection is the consideration of what the researchers learn from the case. In relation to this research, showing different perspectives on the phenomenon is the most suitable approach for the purpose of the study. In other words, my recruitment plan was to find volunteers for both Study 1 and Study 2 of this thesis.



Thus, I used word of mouth to spread the word about participating in interviews reflecting staff perceptions of the nature of interaction with their students (Study 1) as well as looking for 'receptive' instructors also interested in using technology in educational contexts in order to integrate a social media tool into one of their university courses as an outside-the-classroom activity (Study 2). In addition, a research invitation message was sent via email and SMS messages to receptive instructors at the university (where I work as a lecturer). Instructors were asked to respond via email/phone if they were interested in participating in either Study. Instructors who agreed to participate in Study 1 or/and 2 were contacted to arrange a date and time for the interview (Study 1) or/and a one-hour research presentation and an orientation session on a one-to one basis (Study 2). As a result, most instructors who participated in Study 1 interviews volunteered to participate in the social media experience (Study 2). In particular, a total of 12 instructors from different disciplines at KAU volunteered and were willing to participate in an interview (Study 1). A total of 13 instructors participated and were willing to explore the experience of interacting with students via social media. Four of the 13 instructors had a prior experience of using social media in an educational context. It is therefore possible that these instructors were information technology 'friendly' for Study 2. These instructors may experience less difficulty and ambiguity in communicating with their students in mediated spaces and they may feel more comfortable around technology. In addition, the instructors' formality of attitude may have eroded somewhat due to the background experience in using social media with their students. Thus, the sample may not be representative and will have implications for the study findings.

In order to recruit instructors for administering the survey (Study 1), online surveys were used in order to reach a large number of staff. Thus, a listserv administrator was approached by the researcher on campus and asked that a participation email, which included a link to an online survey, be circulated to all staff subscribers on the researcher's behalf. Questionnaires returned from this sampling procedure yielded somewhat low response rate. Therefore, available instructors at the time were approached in their offices and asked if they could answer the questionnaire manually on paper. Because it was the end of the semester, unfortunately this attempt was not a success as it did not raise the response rate significantly. At the

end, of the total number of 2855 instructors at KAU, a total number of 103 instructor questionnaires were obtained.

It should be noted that instructors who participated in the interviews were the same instructors who participated in the social media study, Study 2. However, those instructors did not take part in filling out the questionnaire in this study. Detailed demographics of instructors for Study 1 and Study 2 are described in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.5.1) and 5 (Section 5.3.4.1).

### ***3.3.2 Student Sample***

For the purpose of Study 1, it was anticipated that all female undergraduate students at KAU would represent the population from which the sample of this study was selected. To recruit students, I approached a listserv administrator on campus and asked that a participation email, which included links to the online surveys and an invitation to focus groups sessions, be circulated to all undergraduate student subscribers. In order to ensure randomization, students were assigned to questionnaires based on the birth month. More specifically, the first survey link was assigned to students who were born in an odd numbered month, and the second survey link was assigned to students who were born in an even numbered month. In addition, I approached a university administrator for advice on classes that are attended by a large number of students. Administering the questionnaires manually, a total of 24 classes were visited with a total of 1241 students.

With the class instructor's permission, I invited each class personally, in a 15-minute recruitment session, to fill out the questionnaires. I introduced the study and explained how to fill out the two questionnaires. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions, from an instructor point of view, and to avoid the personalisation of these questions, I decided on a deflecting reference point, where students were asked to fill out these questionnaires anonymously, based on the most recent class they had attended the previous day. This approach allowed obtaining a general baseline audit of the Saudi student experience of classes and tutors, which is the goal of this study. To achieve randomization, I handed out both questionnaires so that alternate ones went to alternate students. Students were given 10 minutes to finish and hand in the

surveys. Questionnaires returned from this sampling procedure yielded 781 respondents, with a 63% response rate. As for focus groups, a total number of 33 students presented themselves to me by emailing, calling, or talking to her in person to take part in the focus group sessions. A total of five focus groups were conducted for 5 different groups of students belonging to different faculties.

For Study 2, instructor participants selected their classes of students for the social media activity. However, students were given the opportunity to opt out from participating at any time without penalty. Detailed demographics about students participating in Study 1 and 2 are shown in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.5.2) and 5 (Section 5.2.4.4).

### **3.4. Mixed Methods Design and Rationale**

Mixed methods design is commonly used by social science scholars when the researcher combines more than one method, so methods could be said to be ‘mixed’ in one inquiry, such as using interviews with document analysis or logistic regression with inferential statistics (Symonds & Gorard, 2010). However, in this thesis the mixture refers to the traditionally labelled quantitative and qualitative methods, which provide deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena and corroboration of the findings (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). This methodology is believed to have the potential to offer more depth and breadth to a research problem than would a single method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In particular, the purpose of this sequential-phase mixed methods design (quantitative–qualitative) is to describe in depth (Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado, 2015) the Saudi female instructor-student relationship and interaction practices in a university classroom context and their communication practices in terms of informality or intimacy in a social media context. For instance, to achieve this in Study 1, the design first uses a quantitative investigation through surveys to measure instructors’ and students’ perceptions of instructors’ interpersonal behaviours (phase 1) and then it uses qualitative exploration of the problem (phase 2) through instructors’ interviews and students’ focus groups in order to deepen, describe and expand understanding of the findings of phase 1. Such design helps me as a researcher to penetrate, try to understand the reasons for participants’ response description, and explain the same phenomena in depth from both quantitative and

qualitative perspectives. Further, the context of practice in this study, the Saudi cultural educational system, is sufficiently complex that mixing methods becomes both possible and necessary. In other words, the multiple factors that appear to influence Saudi educational practices such as religion and the societal culture, as discussed in Chapter 2, cannot be fully understood from a single quantitative approach such as surveys or qualitative approach like interviews. Likewise, female instructors' and their students' text exchanges within such a complex context involving their cultural background and the nature of social media environment cannot be completely deciphered using one approach. This is one of the reasons why this research adopts a mixed methods design in which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected (Creswell, 2009). In this thesis, the combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods facilitates answering the research questions posed. In general terms, the quantitative methods employed here help the researcher to be more objective when looking at the quality of classroom environments within the Saudi traditional educational system and the count and trend of informal messages within a social media context. Similarly, qualitative approaches enable the researcher to be subjective, bringing her more closely to the participants, their interaction practices, their views and their social world (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Thus, the goal of attempting to find available evidence using multiple quantitative and qualitative methods is legitimate in this research, as it may produce evidence for educators and policy making in the Saudi educational system.

Another reason for adopting this design is to triangulate data sources as a means to seek convergence across qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as bringing together a comprehensive picture of the research problem (Bryman, 2008). For example, in Study 1, the results of some research questions employing a method such as surveys associated with one research strategy were cross-checked against the results when using a method such as interviews associated with the other research strategy. Methodology used in the individual studies will be discussed in further detail in chapters 4 and 5. The classification of approaches to mixed methods research have been proposed by authors from around the world and in the literature are referred to as sequential, multi method, convergence, integrated, and combined (Creswell, 2003; Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado, 2015). This study used the sequential mixed methods research design (Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado, 2015), where both

quantitative and qualitative methods were collected sequentially during the research process.

Since this thesis is using a range of mixed methods that serve to answer the overarching research questions, the path of research choices is aligned and reflects a pragmatic view. This underlying philosophical orientation discussed next will further rationalise the choice of adopting a mixed method design.

### **3.5 Pragmatism as the underlying philosophical orientation**

Epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods are the four elements whose alignment forms the research design. Guba and Lincoln (1994) have described a research paradigm as “*the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method, but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.*” (p. 105). After researchers first considered mixing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, by the 1990’s a pragmatic view had emerged that indicated that both approaches were essential (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Therefore, a mixed methods research approach is mostly driven by pragmatic assumptions, which encourage mixing quantitative and qualitative methods through the research process (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Pragmatism has obtained significant support as a position for mixed methods researchers (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Morgan, 2007; Feilzer, 2010), many of whom, with other theorists have made strong associations with mixed methodology and pragmatism (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004).

Pragmatism is focused on and directed ‘*toward solving practical problems in the “real world”*’ (Feilzer, 2010, p.8), rather than on assumptions about the nature of knowledge. In this thesis, the aim is to investigate the existing real world phenomena of Saudi instructors' and students' interaction practices in face-to-face and online contexts and their implications for instructor-student relationships. Thus, in the pragmatic view, the process is less important compared to the consequences, and what ‘works in practice’ is more important than the philosophical assumptions (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Creswell, 2009). In addition, the field of educational practice needs effective implementation of mixed methods research in order to

produce valuable and practical implications (Schram, 2014). This is true as research in education demands multiple data resources that provide rich and detailed accounts where the findings can complement each other. For instance, in this thesis, data results from semi-structured interviews, with instructors following a survey that might illuminate and uncover such issues as why instructors answer questionnaire questions in a specific way.

In that sense, pragmatism allows me as a researcher to be free of practical constraints imposed by the “*forced choice dichotomy between post-positivism and constructivism*” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 27). Adopting a pragmatic perspective enables me to employ “what works,” using multiple approaches of quantitative and qualitative methods, granting the first priority to my research problem and questions, and valuing both objective consequences (stemming mostly from quantitative data) and subjective processes of interaction practices and knowledge-constructing meaning by instructor and student participants (mostly from qualitative data). This mixed position allows me as a researcher to mix and match design components that I expect to offer the best chance of answering the research questions. In addition, I identify with the classical pragmatists Peirce, James, and Dewey who are all interested in examining practical consequences and empirical findings to help in deciding which action to take next in order to better understand real world phenomena (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004). A real world phenomenon in the present context is represented by how technology may reconfigure Saudi interaction practices and how these interactions are actually perceived in a classroom environment. Also, advocates of pragmatism identify an advantage of the design where the strengths of each method will surface while the weaknesses will be diminished.

As pragmatism, which very much aligns with a mixed methods design, opens the door to diverse methods, various world views, and different strategies of data collection and analysis, I believe that in many research situations, including this thesis, insights and procedures from both quantitative and qualitative approaches can be put together to provide a more workable solution and produce high-quality findings.

### **3.6 Case study design and its relevance to this research**

Case study research tells stories by presenting realistic and contextually ingrained incidents, which often involve a complex issue or problem that individuals in the case should negotiate. Case study is considered to be both a methodology and an object of study, where it involves an intensive description and analysis of single or multiple social phenomena (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). This social phenomenon can be a system, a program, an institution, or a process. This research methodology offers the researcher the opportunity to explore the bounded phenomena by using in-depth data collection methods with multiple sources of evidence. Yin (2003) suggested four conditions that could contribute to strategic decisions when researching a case study: (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) the behaviour of those involved in the study cannot be manipulated; (c) contextual conditions are covered because they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. The major research aim of this research is asking about ‘how’ social media might reconfigure the formal quality of instructor-student interaction practices. The second factor identified by Yin (2003) is the degree of control the researcher has over actual behavioural events. In this thesis, I do not have control over the behaviour of participants both in face-to-face or social media contexts, or the factors that affect them. In addition, the phenomena of interest – instructor-student interaction practices and the formed relationship -cannot be studied outside their natural setting. In other words, it is quite unreasonable to gain a true picture of interaction practices without considering the context where they actually occur (i.e. Saudi cultural context within KAU). Also, the boundaries between how instructors and students are communicating inside or outside-the-classroom, or in social media and the context of a Saudi higher education institution are not clear. Therefore, a case study is an appropriate research methodology for this study.

In this thesis, I examine the case of Saudi instructor-student interaction practices within two different contexts. This involves preparing a detailed description of the setting (Study 1: KAU institution and Study 2: the social media space), the instructor and student participants, and to engage in an analysis of the data for themes and

patterns (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009). In this study, the unit of analysis is different for each of Study 1 and Study 2 and will be discussed in their respective methodology chapters. There are three distinguished types of case study that exist in terms of case analysis: 1) the single instrumental case study, where research concentrates on phenomena, an issue, or a concern in one bounded case; 2) the multiple case study, which mainly demonstrates an issue; and finally 3) the intrinsic case study that concentrates on the case itself, as it introduces a distinctive case (Creswell, 2007). Among these variations of case study, this research is investigating a single intrinsic case of Saudi instructors and students within the traditional educational system, and as a result, the focus is on the case itself as it presents a distinct situation (Creswell, 2007). My rationale for focusing on a single case study, instead of multiple or collective case studies, is that I am more inclined not to sacrifice depth for breadth. When the number of cases increases, it is expected that the number of participants in each case decreases, and as a result, valuable rich contextual insights are often lost (Piekkari, Welch, & Paavilainen, 2009). Hence, I agree with Dubois and Gadde's (2002) conclusion that *'it is difficult to comprehend how a little depth and a little width could contribute to the analysis of any problem'* (p. 558).

Case study is typically associated with being a purely qualitative research methodology combined with qualitative methods, and rests comfortably within a constructivist epistemology (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). However, this does not prevent the use of quantitative data collection methods. According to Simons (2009), *'case study is not synonymous with qualitative methods'* (p.19). Therefore, in order to gain a holistic and embedded understanding of the Saudi case, in this thesis I draw on multiple quantitative and qualitative methods, such as surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and conversations. These multiple data sources will improve data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). According to Yin's (2003) perspective, the design of a case study consists of five ingredients: 1) research questions, 2) any existing propositions, 3) unit(s) of analysis, 4) the logical link between data and the propositions, and 5) the criteria for interpreting the results. These five components should be made connected and consistent between each other, with more emphasis on planning the data analysis steps (Yin, 2003). The research for each case study should be bounded, so for this purpose, a semester



period of time, from January to May 2014 was specified to ensure that the study remained reasonable in scope (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

### **3.7 Challenges: validity and generalizability**

This research methodology has often been critiqued for its lack of generalizability (Yin, 1994; Stake, 2000), with Yin (1994) indicating that case studies should not be generalizable to populations, but only to theoretical propositions. In addition, Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) provide another view on generalizability where they argue that the boundary of cases and the selection of cases should be carefully clarified and carried out in order to make generalizations. This suggests that providing evidence to indicate whether the case(s) studied are typical or atypical in different aspects should be helpful in making appropriate generalizations. Furthermore, an important characteristic of case study methodology is that generalizability is not the goal. Rather, the purpose of this kind of research is to expand theory or *transferability*, rather than statistical generalization (Yin, 1994). Transferability is when the case study findings provide ways of understanding and knowledge that can be applied in similar contexts and settings. Patton (1990) offers the phrase ‘context-bound extrapolations’ to refer to transferability and he goes on to define it as ‘*speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions.*’ (p. 489).

In terms of case study validity, Yin indicates that researchers should deal with four important tests (Yin, 2003). The first is construct validity, which could be guaranteed through the triangulation of multiple sources of evidence. The second validity test is for internal validity, which could be established by using analytic techniques, such as pattern matching. The third test is external validity, which as mentioned in the above paragraph, could be achieved by explaining transferability to similar contexts. The fourth test is reliability which could be established by case study protocols and databases (Yin, 2003). Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) who support a constructivist philosophical underpinning, suggest that it is nearly impossible to apply validity and reliability, as there are multiple versions of knowledge, as meaning is constructed between the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’. To this end, this thesis will attempt to address the validity and generalizability of this mixed method case study in terms of triangulating multiple sources of evidence, and by explaining

the possibilities of transferability. This can be achieved by providing a thick and rich description of design, the steps to analysis and interpretation of meaning that will provide the basis for enhancing trustworthiness and claiming relevance in some other contexts.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

One of the most important features of educational research is that it should be ethical. Thus, ethical considerations were placed foremost in all stages of conducting and reporting my research. Although well established ethical codes of practice such as the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) give valuable guidance to researchers, potential ethical dilemmas embedded in research require researchers' full engagement and reflexivity (Hammersley, 2006). Ethical issues and dilemmas are even more challenging when the research is not only conducted in a face-to-face setting, but in digitally-mediated social spaces. In such a difficult terrain as online environments, greater consideration about who participants are, the distinction between private/public spaces and other issues can go missing (Busher & James, 2015). This research involves dealing with both instructors and students for two different purposes related to two studies, with different research process, ethical issues and dilemmas in both face-to-face and social media or digital contexts. The discussion of ethics here is presented around two main themes: Informed consent and the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

#### **3.8.1 Informed Consent**

The published set of Ethical Guidelines of the BERA stressed the significance of granting not only the consent of all participants in the research, but also their 'informed' consent (BERA, 2011). It is common for informed consent to be considered as a formal contract between the researcher and the researched via a consent form (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Informed consent incorporates issues of clarity of purpose, trust, honesty and integrity (Lindsay, 2010). In other words, these forms should lay out what will be involved in the research, and the rights and responsibilities each side has (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Since this thesis consists of two studies conducted in different contexts (i.e. face to face and online

contexts), the practice, procedure and ethical issues of informed consent varied by context.

In administering the online survey for both instructors and students in Study 1, participants were provided with a link to the questionnaires and invited, through an email or a text message, to volunteer and answer survey questions. To confirm informed consent, the system allowed participants to complete the questionnaires only after they had checked a box verifying that they had read a brief description and purpose of the study that appeared at the top of the questionnaire. This procedure ensures that participants have access to the same information they would receive before completing a paper-based survey and which conforms to approved ethical procedure of online surveys (Roberts & Allen, 2015). Similarly, the manual administration used the same guidelines, with participants being informed of the reasons and nature of the research. The informed consent was attached to each survey and both instructors and students were invited to complete the surveys voluntarily. Both online and offline surveys were designed and administered in a way to offer full anonymity and confidentiality to participants and provided greater confidence that the consent is completely voluntary. Therefore, students were free to withdraw at any stage and had the choice to hand in empty surveys if they were not interested in participating.

For instructors' interviews and students' focus groups, participants were provided with an information sheet explaining their role in taking part in an interview or focus group, as well as an informed consent form. Although I was able to offer oral explanation instead of an information sheet, having to produce such a sheet was very useful in providing accurate and comprehensive information about the research and helped me to focus my thinking as a researcher (Lindsay, 2010). Participants were free to withdraw from the interview at any stage and were also free to not answer any question if they did not want to.

Study 2 takes into consideration the ethical issues surrounding participating in social media spaces. One of the central ethical issues in online and social media spaces around whether informed consent is required is what constitutes 'public' and 'private' spaces (Convery & Cox, 2012). One of the range of different views exist

suggests that data posted in open spaces without passwords or membership restrictions would usually be considered to be 'public'. Therefore, research can use such data without any informed consent from participants and that the researcher will have fewer obligations to protect participants' privacy (Convery & Cox, 2012). On the other hand, informed consent becomes essential when data is obtained from closed spaces with login details or requiring membership details. As a result, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity and seeking informed consent from participants becomes a moral imperative for the researcher (Convery & Cox, 2012). In Study 2, I considered that instructors were members of private WhatsApp and MessageMe groups while students participated in public groups in front of their classmates and instructors. For instructors, I introduced the study and the consent form to ensure that they understood the process, asked if they wished to volunteer to participate, and if so, to sign the informed consent form (Appendix 1a and 1b). Instructors could decline at this point, and if they wished, withdraw at any point during the study without penalty, and with the researcher's gratitude for taking the time to read the invitation. Once an instructor had agreed to voluntarily participate by signing the consent form, the class of participant students were selected by the participant instructor.

Conducting research in online spaces requires an ethical practice that is linked to building collaborative cultures in which the researcher clarifies the nature of engagement, so that the research is carried out in a respectful, safe manner, and maintains privacy and trust with participants (Busher & James, 2015). For the purpose of informed consent and clarifying the research, I presented an overview of the research activity in a session offering an opt-out opportunity to students in their classrooms. The opt-out form was distributed to all students in each participating class. If a student preferred to opt out, all she needed to do was fill out the opt-out form and hand it in to me, thus ensuring that any participation by this individual would not form part of the research study.

BERA ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011) were referred to when designing the participants' information sheet and consent forms. Both forms were checked for compliance with BERA's and The University of Nottingham School of Education's ethical standards. Ethical clearance was obtained for conducting this research. The

participants' information sheet and consent forms are in Appendix 1.

### **3.8.2 Researcher role and the researcher-participant relationship**

Researchers' and their participants' unique interaction and involvement in a research study produce a complex relationship because of the researchers' and the participants' important and sometimes conflicting roles (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009). In this research, participants are the main providers of data and the storytellers, while I was an insider researcher to the institution, the data collector, the analyzer of participants accounts, and the writer. Thus, this subsection discusses the ethical negotiations and tensions surrounding my role and the complex power relations between instructors, students and me.

The literature suggests several member roles for the researcher to take on when conducting research. These roles range from being 'an insider' who has a complete membership of the group being studied, to 'an outsider' who is a complete stranger (Adler & Adler, 1994). Insider-researchers can be defined generally as researchers who choose to study a group to which they belong, while outsider researchers do not belong to the group under study (Breen, 2007). In the context of my research, I was an insider-researcher who works as a lecturer at the Center for Teaching and Learning Development at KAU. There are many advantages of being an insider-researcher, which helped me accomplish this research study. First, as a member of KAU, I have a great understanding of the culture of the educational practice being studied, as well as the politics and the hidden rules of the institution (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). As a result of this knowledge, I know how best to approach people, which might take an outsider a long time to develop (Smyth & Holian, 2008). My research process is rather facilitated by the fact that I speak the same insider language; understand the local values, knowledge and taboos; recognise the formal and informal power structures; and have obtained permission to conduct the research, to interview, and to get access to online conversations (Rouney, 2005). However, this position involved dealing with many ethical and moral dilemmas once in the research field.

During the process of this research, my relationship with my participants was not simply a static power relationship, rather, it can be described as what Ritchie and Rigano (2001) conceptualised as a dynamic one in which the researcher and participant adopt changing positions throughout the research process. This fluid relationship was partly a result of being an insider researcher conducting a mixed method study. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), mixed methods researchers face a challenge in balancing quantitative and qualitative emergent views in utilising and presenting the outsider's view and the insider's view. Hence, it was a challenge for me as I was an insider to the institution. More specifically, in the quantitative strand of the research, where I administered questionnaires to instructors and students, I faced challenges associated with the balance of power and how to switch to an outsider (or observer) role. I tried to explain the questionnaire briefly and distribute it without communicating or participating much in these sessions. I kept a distance and observed until participants handed in their surveys.

In the qualitative strand of the study, I was more relaxed as I am an insider to the institution and there somewhat less pressure about which role I should be enacting. Being an insider researcher in an instructor-researcher position means that I am emotionally connected to the participants (Sikes, 2008), and I am an accepted member of KAU. Thus, I was friendly and treated with respect by staff and students of the institution. However, it should be noted that even though I managed to be in social contact with a number of staff members, I did not previously have much professional contact with them. As I am considered an early-career faculty member, I do not have power and authority over the staff, which can affect the data collection process negatively (Smyth & Holian, 2008). In conducting the interviews and focus groups with both instructors and students, I attempted to create a welcoming and non-threatening atmosphere, so that participants are encouraged to open up and share personal stories and conceptions (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). As a result, I was gaining access to some privileged information, where instructors opened up to me as an insider because I am aware of the cultural situations in which they were operating. For instance, some instructors would talk in details about an issue and then say: 'this is anonymous, isn't it?'. Confidentiality and anonymity in these situations were verbally stressed and emphasized to participants.

Although students were somewhat reserved and held back in initial attempts at focus groups, the various rapport-building approaches I carried out, such as self-disclosure and humour, to obtain the data needed for the study encouraged students to open up and share their experiences. In a number of focus groups, several students seemed empowered by the increased sense of self-worth and having someone to ‘listen to their story’ (Vincent & Warren, 2001). According to Kvale (1996), the caring and empowering nature of the qualitative interviews might hide the power differences where the exercise of power is covered by the feeling of empathy and equality in the researcher’s dialogue. Although most of the power was in my hands to control and guide the conversations, I was an ‘observer-as-participant’ (Bryman, 2008) in both instructors’ interviews and students’ focus groups. As a facilitator in the focus groups, I strived to be unintrusive and unstructured. I used fairly general questions to guide the sessions, when I made sure that students were given considerable freedom to participate and interact, and were made to feel welcome. Overall, I attempted to rely on the participants’ views of the situation as much as possible.

The literature notes some disadvantages of being in the insider position, such as role duality (instructor/researcher), overlooking certain routine behaviours, making assumptions about the meanings of events, and closeness to the situation, thus hindering the researcher from seeing all dimensions of the bigger picture (Smyth & Holian, 2008). I took careful consideration in deciding to what extent I should use my inside knowledge to question or discuss a participant’s account. Another challenge that I faced stems from the tensions that exists between my role as a practitioner from KAU and as a researcher. As a practitioner, I am actively engaged in this institution whereas as a researcher I need to step back and examine the evidence (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). Hence, I am fully aware of the possible effects of perceived bias on data collection and analysis. I was cautious at each and every stage of the research in respecting the ethical issues relating to the anonymity of the institution and participants, and access to privileged information (Smyth & Holian, 2008). I attempted to overcome some of the shortcomings by taking a preventative approach and I collected data without prejudice as much as I could.

### **3.9 Challenges of Language Translation and Interpretation**

Since this research was conducted in an Arabic speaking country, the dominant language used by instructor and student participants was Arabic. As a result, I, as a researcher, and the participants, have the same non-English native language and the non-English data lead to an English translation and reporting. Therefore, there were a number of language challenges that I faced in collecting, analysing, interpreting of meaning, translating of quotations and findings of all types of data collected: interviews, focus groups, and online exchanges. The importance of discussing the challenges and the implications for validity of moving across languages has gained attention in cross-cultural studies (Squires, 2009). Interviews and focus groups of Study 1 were conducted mainly in Arabic except for four instructors who kindly accepted to be interviewed in English. This resulted in having several Arabic transcripts of interviews and focus groups that needed to be translated and interpreted into English before making sense of the data. In relation to online exchanges of Study 2, more than half of the online exchanges were in Arabic language and only three instructors participated in English. Thus, the task of delivering meaning exactly as expressed by participants was more complicated.

As I was fully aware that language is central in expressing meaning and it influences how meaning is constructed, Arabic transcripts were carefully translated into English. For instance, I had to be careful in finding the closest English interpretation and translation of unique Saudi expressions used by participants to increase the validity of qualitative research findings as possible (Polkinghorne, 2007). I attempted to go through several trials of translating the quotations and the online exchanges until they were clearly communicated in a way that the reader understands the meaning as it was expressed in the source language. During the process of translation between the two languages which involved interpretation as well, the challenges in the representation of meaning were more complicated in this research due to the radically different cultural context. It was vastly difficult in several instances to find a perfect match of an Arabic culturally-ingrained word in the English language. In such situations, I did the best I could to put into place a representation that fit the meaning of the original source. Thus, I should acknowledge the fact that language differences generated multiplied challenges that



might have hindered the transfer of meaning or might have led to loss of meaning (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010).

### **3.10 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated the character of the research design, namely, a mixed method case based study. The chapter explains the rationale for adopting this mixed method design with discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of the research. The structure and characteristics of case study methodology are discussed, and the challenges of ensuring research validity and generalizability with approaches to cope with them. The chapter also provides briefly my understanding of the ethical considerations and the researcher role in collecting data for this mixed method research endeavour. This chapter should be considered an introduction to the methods of each, Study 1 and Study 2, with discussion in detail to be found in the following empirical chapters.

## **4. Study 1: Instructor-Student Relationship in Face-to-Face Contexts**

### **4.1 Overview**

One of the overarching research aims of this thesis, as proposed in Chapter 1, is to investigate the nature of Saudi educational and interaction practices that result in shaping instructor-student relationships in face-to-face classroom contexts. In this chapter, in order to frame focused and informed research questions for Study 1, a review of the current literature on classroom environment and instructor-student relationship within higher education is first undertaken in Section 4.2. Secondly, Section 4.3 presents the detailed methodology of Study 1. Thirdly, the finding of Study 1 is demonstrated in Section 4.4. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of findings and a summary in Sections 4.5 and 4.6.

### **4.2 Literature Review**

This review brings together a range of theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to clarify this research aim. Section 4.2.1 begins with an overview concerning classroom learning environments and the role of interpersonal behaviour in shaping the climate therein. Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 introduce instructor-student relationships as a climate dimension of special interest, and discuss its properties and aspects. Section 4.2.4 presents a useful systematic conceptualization of instructors' interpersonal behaviour in the classroom, based on Interpersonal Theory, which is Study 1 adopted theoretical perspective. Section 4.2.5 explores the quality and frequency of instructor-student interaction practices, and the factors shaping them. Section 4.2.6 discusses two forms and contexts of instructor-student interaction, while Section 4.2.6.1 presents a discussion of interaction taking place inside the classroom, and Section 4.2.6.2 reviews outside-the-classroom interaction practices. In Section 4.2.6, the review discusses the educational practices and instructor-student interaction and relationship within a Saudi cultural context. The review concludes with a summary in Section 4.2.9 re-stating the literature and theoretical underpinning framing Study 1 of this thesis.

#### 4.2.1 Classroom Environments: A Brief Background

Over the past decade, researchers, educators, institutional administrators, and educational systems' authorities have given considerable attention to the field of classroom environments. This interest from practitioners certifies the important position of environment in characterising classrooms and the overall educational system. The terms 'classroom climate' and 'classroom environment' have been used in higher education to refer to different levels of concepts, as well as the availability of various definitions that include a range of variables that define the classroom environment. Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro and Lovett (2010) define classroom climate as "*the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environments in which our students learn*" (p.170). Many researchers in this field have concentrated on a mixture of variables within the classroom environment, such as ecological elements, the course content, teaching and assessment content, instructor-student relationships, and student cultures (Entwistle, McCune, & Entwistle, 2003).

However, this thesis is particularly interested in the fact that a classroom environment is a social system populated by humans whose interaction practices continuously shape the environment. This is in alignment with research in the field of learning environments, which has roots in social psychology, where it is suggested that a learning environment is often subject to psychological and cultural influences (Afari, Aldridge, Fraser, & Khine, 2013). A predominant concept in this field is that behaviour is situational (Hartshorne & May, 1928) and is a result of the interaction between the individual and the environment (Lewin, 1936). In a recent review of research on learning environments by Fraser (2014), the author discusses the ground-breaking contributions to the field of learning environments particularly in education, which were established by Moos and Walberg in the 1960s (Fraser, 1998). Moos and Walberg established the idea that students could provide valid and useful perceptions about their learning environments (Dorman, 2002; Fraser, 2014), and that the learning environment in classrooms can be conceptualized and measured (Taylor, Fraser & Fisher, 1997). Over the last four decades, the literature also identified that students and instructors' perceptions are significant factors for the social and psychological aspects of the learning environments of school classrooms (Fraser, 1998). Moos (1974) established his social climate scales, a scheme for

classifying human environments into three dimensions: relationship, personal development, system maintenance and change. This scheme, along with Moos' interest in social climate, led to the invention of an extensive set of validated instruments and scales in several domains (Fraser, 2014) that have guided contemporary research in learning environments (Fraser, 1998).

The individual's interpersonal behaviours enacted within a space form the character of the relationship among inhabitants. Thus, the psychosocial dimension of the environment, which focuses on human behaviour as represented by instructor-student interaction and relationship, is the focus of this study. In other words, instructors' interpersonal behaviour is the main concern here. This interest originates from the consequential influence of classroom climate on students' affective, social, and cognitive outcomes (Myers & Rocca, 2001, Hurtado et al., 2012). In addition, as the educational environment is shaped by the relationships constructed between instructors and students, the quality of this relationship contributes to students' motivation and performance (Fraser, 1986). Thus, for the purpose of this thesis, the concept of classroom environment as employed in educational settings is defined as the psychosocial characteristics of the atmosphere, tone, or climate that permeates the classroom context. Consequently, the psychosocial characteristics of the climate are associated with the resultant instructor-student relationship. At this point, the classroom environment concept within this thesis has been established, and the interest in the classroom dimension of the instructor-student relationship has been established. Thus the need arises to understand how the literature looks at this relationship within higher education contexts. This is presented in the following section.

#### **4.2.2 Instructor-Student Relationships (ISR) in Higher Education**

The role of the instructors as institutional and socializing agents on students has been emphasised in numerous empirical studies within higher education research contexts (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Dika, 2012; Kim & Sax, 2014). A number of studies have long shown the importance of instructor-student relations and interactions as a strong motivator and indicator of students' learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Christensen & Menzel, 1998), and this continues to be emphasised in recent years

(O'Meara, Knudsen, & Jones, 2013). It is indicated that a positive interpersonal relationship between instructor and students enhances students' attitudes towards the learning environment (Richmond et al., 1987) and the university (Tinto, 1975). Similarly, there is evidence that students who successfully know at least one instructor closely have more tendencies to feel satisfied with their university experience and career aspirations (Rosenthal, Folse, Allerman, Boudreaux, Soper, & Von Bergen, 2000).

An examination of the literature that centres on the instructor-student relationship reveals a lack of research that informs practitioners about what constitutes the relationship from both instructors and students' perspectives (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Another observation of the literature around instructor-student relationships proposes that the quality of the instructor-student relationship can be thought of in terms of two facets: 1) the characteristics that instructors exhibit towards students, and 2) the quality and frequency of the *interaction* that occurs between instructors and students. A discussion of the characteristics that shape the instructor-student relationship is introduced next. The second facet is discussed in Section 4.2.5.

### **4.2.3 Instructor-Student Relationships (ISR) Dimensions and Aspects**

Hagenauer and Volet (2014) critically reviewed the ISR literature and identified two main themes that summarise what has been established about the relationship in that literature: 1) the affective dimension, which describes the bond built between students and instructors, such as being caring, and 2) the support dimension, which describes the support provided to students, such as clear expectations and accessibility. One of the prevalent elements of the affective dimension of the relationship that was identified as important in several empirical studies in higher education is the ethic of care.

#### **4.2.3.1 Caring**

An instructor's care is the most visible quality reflected among instructors' interpersonal behaviours in the literature that contribute to a positive relationship and positive students outcomes. However, the literature appears unstable, as this

psychological relationship concept, caring, is discussed as abstract idea exchanged daily or in some studies refers to the same qualities without explicitly referring to their distinct meaning. For instance, Kezar and Maxey (2014) noted that instructors demonstrate care for students through different actions, including showing respect, individualized attention, valuing students' responses and contributions, and encouraging participation. Fitzmaurice (2008) analysed 30 philosophy of teaching statements to examine which of the moral and ethical dimensions of good teaching are considered important from teachers' perspectives. His study revealed that care, honesty, respect, responsibility, and compassion are fundamental to good teaching. In Fitzmaurice's study, care was usually referred to as an abstract concept by instructors and is associated with responsibility, respect and trust without explanation of actual behaviours related to these concepts.

Other studies have identified positive outcomes, both direct and indirect, from instructors' caring attitudes towards students. Gasiewaski, Eagan, Garcia, Hurtado and Chang's (2012) primary focus was examining students' and instructors' views of the characteristics and behaviours of instructors that demonstrate an ethic of care. The authors found that when instructors exhibited care for students, humour and passion for the course, students were more engaged in the classroom. The authors gave examples of showing care for students, such as learning students' names, asking how they are doing, demonstrating warmth, friendliness and attentiveness. The study emphasized 'care' as a valuable aspect of the instructor-student relationship and a crucial element in developing strong relationships. Furthermore, Crombie and colleagues (2003) surveyed students about their perceptions of their own behaviour and their instructors' behaviours. The authors found that students demonstrate more engagement with their course content when they sense from their instructors that they are cared about, by for instance, acknowledgement of their contribution to class discussion. Despite the useful insight from Crombie and colleagues' study that emphasises the significance of instructor's behaviour and its impact on students, the instructors' part of the evaluation is missing in their study.

Another prevalent characteristic of instructors that persistently appears in the higher education literature within the support dimension (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014) is approachability and accessibility.

#### ***4.2.3.2 Approachability and Accessibility***

Approachability is another pervasive theme that appears to contribute to the occurrence of instructor-student interactions and, in turn, contributes to the quality of instructor-student relationships. However, this quality does not have one united meaning, needs conceptual clarification (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014) and has been frequently described as involving several instructors' behaviours, such as demonstrating willingness to support students' needs (academic or personal) through personal attention, being available in their offices, or through a timely response to students' emails. Approachability of instructors is not limited to the above mentioned attitudes. Denzine and Pulos (2000) classified instructors as approachable in their survey if they know students names, stay in class to meet students, say 'hi to students on campus, smile often, and exhibit warm and caring behaviour. The reader cannot help but notice that these behaviours overlap with the concept of instructor immediacy (Sibii, 2010), which is going to be discussed in Section 4.2.5.1.1. Although students and instructors recognize the importance of instructors' approachability, not many studies have attempted to reveal both parties' perceptions of instructors' approachability and accessibility (Denzine & Pulos, 2000; Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Cox, McIntosh, Terenzini, Reasonm, & Quaye, 2010).

Previous research argues that many university students have limited contact with their instructors and find that approaching instructors is an unspontaneous act due to several factors (Denzine & Pulos, 2000; Cotton & Wilson, 2006). Among other factors hindering approaching instructors, such as students' time, interest and uncertainty, students in Cotton and Wilson's (2006) study reported instructors' attitudes, presence and personality as influencing their impression of instructors' accessibility. When students become isolated due to the difficulty in accessing their instructors, a poor relationship is an inevitable outcome, besides students becoming less motivated and less engaged in their university learning experience (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010). Some studies provided evidence of some instructors' characteristics that signal to students the extent of their approachability, such as a student-centred philosophy of teaching (Cotten & Wilson, 2006), a friendly personality, and strong interpersonal skills (Einarson & Clarkberg, 2004; Wilson,

Wood, & Gaff, 1974).

In summary, it is reasonable to argue that the quality of ISR is partly dependent on the characteristics of instructors as communicated in a particular setting. The research above highlighted several qualities, such as the ethic of care, openness and accessibility, as essential in promoting a positive instructor-student relationship. Also, these qualities of the relationship appear to exert an influence on students' success and academic achievement. In a school research context, the importance of this interpersonal relationship for teachers, and students' successful adjustment and learning has been vastly acknowledged and developed in primary and secondary education research (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011; Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013). Unlike school level literature, research on instructor-student relationships in a higher education context is not comprehensive, as there have been far fewer studies than in the school context. In addition, studies on instructor-student relationships in a school context have primarily relied on long-standing theories and frameworks, such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2002) and Attachment Theory (AT) (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008).

Despite the useful insights gained from interpersonal relationship research in higher education addressed above, the majority of that research is either not targeting instructor-student relationships as the focus of the investigation, is explorative in nature, or is one-sided, where either the instructor, or student side is often researched. Thus, a holistic understanding of what both instructors and students perceive as important characteristics of a healthy instructor-student relationship was rarely achieved. In addition, it is difficult to distinguish and navigate through the array of familiar terms that are usually invoked to describe relationships and their dimensions. As a result, there is an inconsistency in conceptualizing the instructor-student relationship as a construct. This instability in operationalizing ISR makes comparison between studies very difficult. Thus, it is important at this point to introduce a useful theory that suggests turning to instructors' interpersonal behaviours to describe the relationship. This theory examines the classroom environment from both instructors and students' perceptions of interpersonal behaviours.



#### 4.2.4 Interpersonal Theory: An Interpersonal Perspective on Teaching

Wubbels and his colleagues (1985) developed a useful interpersonal perspective, extended from the work of Leary (1957), to describe and analyse teaching in terms of instructors' interpersonal behaviours. Thus, this interpersonal theory can be used to conceptualize interpersonal relationships through interaction in education (Wubbels et al., 1985). The Teacher Interpersonal Circle (TIC), as shown in Figure 4-1, is a circumplex model describing instructor's behavioural patterns (Wubbels, Brekelmans, & Van Tartwijk, 2006) and is an application of interpersonal theory to the classroom context. Students' perceptions, instructors' own perceptions and the instructor's ideal of the interpersonal instructor relationship can be mapped in this model. This model helps to provide a 'language' to describe the relationship between instructors and students.

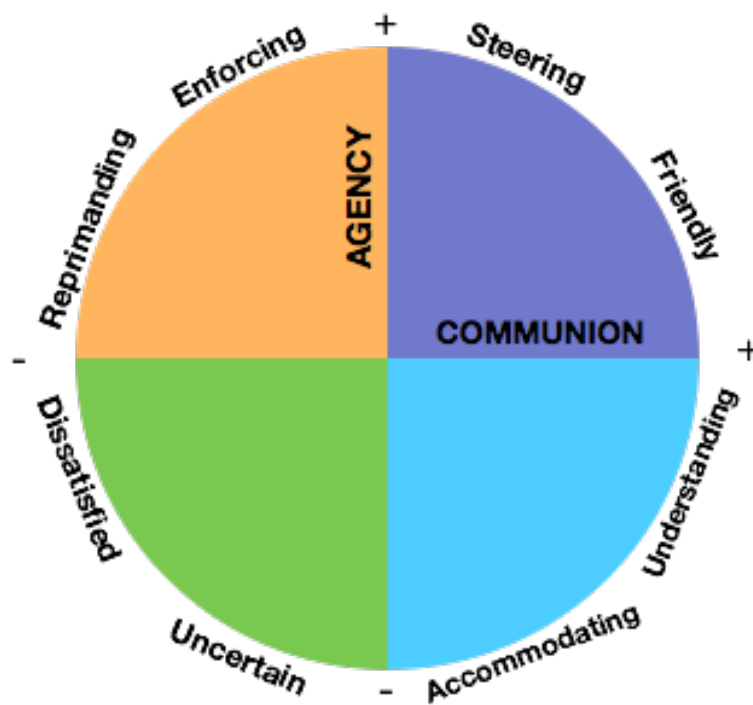


Figure 4-1 Teacher Interpersonal Circle. *Previously called the Interpersonal teacher behaviour circumplex.*

The model highlights an instructor's behavioural pattern as conveyed in class through two key dimensions: Agency (dominance, interpersonal influence) and

Communion (friendliness, interpersonal proximity) (Wubbels, Brekelmans, den Brok, Levy, Mainhard, & Tartwijk, 2012). These two dimensions are further separated into eight sectors, each describing different behavioural aspects: Steering, Friendly, Understanding, Accommodating, Uncertain, Dissatisfied, Reprimanding and Enforcing behaviour. A student's perceptions of the two dimensions and the eight sectors can be used to map interpersonal interaction and also represent the overall classroom social climate (Wubbels et al., 2006). A high position on the Agency dimension means that the person is dominant, has power, and takes matters into their own hands, while a high position in Communion means the person shows friendliness, closeness and affiliation. Although both dimensions are independent, and considered as separate facets of instructor behaviour, the interpersonal meaning of each behaviour is actually a specific mixture of Agency and Communion and can translate into the interpersonal circle with the eight sectors (Leary, 1957).

As discussed in this section, this interpersonal theory supports the aim of conceptualizing the instructor-student relationship, and describing it in concrete terms based on instructors' behaviours. The importance of these contacts between instructors and students in any context lies in the notion that they are the building blocks that form the overall relationship between instructors and students. Thus, aspects and characteristics of instructor-student relationships, the first facet of instructor-student relationships is opened up and tackled previously in Section 4.2.3. The second facet of understanding the relationship is tackled next, as well as how the literature looks at the quality and frequency of those interactions.

#### **4.2.5 Instructor-Student Interaction**

Considerable research conducted over more than 50 years provides clear evidence that interaction between instructors and students is a key element in enhancing the quality of students' learning and their overall educational experience (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; ; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Kezar & Maxey, 2014). Upon examining the literature on instructor-student interaction, several factors appear to affect the occurrence and nature of interaction. More specifically, the following discussion introduces several factors emerging from studies on instructor-student interaction that have distinguished instructor-student interaction by

frequency of interaction, by culture, by gender, and by the teaching approach employed.

#### **4.2.5.1 By frequency of interaction**

Previous research established positive relationships between the occurrences of instructor-student interactions and academic achievement, educational aspirations, personal, social and intellectual growth, and academic satisfaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Thompson, 2001; Kim & Sax, 2007). Enhancing students' self-concept, persistence and satisfaction with life are other benefits of instructor-student interactions that extend beyond the classroom walls (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978). Such influence could strengthen the bond between instructor and students. Many research studies come to the consistent conclusion that instructor-student interaction does not happen frequently (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Cox et al., 2010; Cole & Griffin, 2013). Besides the limited interaction, the nature of interaction is also poor, with interactions characterized as brief and focused mainly on course-related issues (Jaasma & Koper 1999; Anaya & Cole 2001). Thus, it appears that the outcomes linked to instructor-student interaction depend on the *type* of contact occurring.

This strand of research that focuses on the frequency of interaction acknowledges the importance of the nature of these interactions. For instance, in their comprehensive review of instructor-student interaction, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicate that the quality and type of instructor-student conversation is more significant than its frequency. Also, Glass, Buus and Braskamp (2013) highlight unequal experiences of instructor student interactions and the lack of social connection experienced among international students within different countries, including Saudi Arabia. Although the frequency of interaction is similar, the quality of those interactions, in-class and out-of-class, was rated as significantly different between international students and their U.S. peers. Saudi Arabian undergraduates, in particular, rated the quality of their interactions with faculty members as exceptionally low (Glass et al., 2013). Thus, the quality of instructor-student interaction appears to be of significance to the relationship.

#### **4.2.5.2 By culture**

Different cultures hold different understandings of what the instructor-student relationship should be like. For instance, the views of the relationship from the perspective of Chinese academic staff, who are teaching in UK institutions, are incompatible with their UK counterparts (Hsieh, 2012). In addition, McCarger's (1993) study emphasized the notion that instructor-student relationships vary across cultures. His quantitative study of eight cultures (Indonesian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Persian, Arabic, Hispanic, and Thai) shows that Indonesian and Chinese students are against disagreeing with the instructor, while the Arabic students mildly agreed with the idea that instructors should encourage students to disagree with them. In his study of Asian student perspectives on learning in an American university, Liberman (1994) describes Asian students perceiving a lack of respect for instructors from their US counterparts. Both studies found, compared to US contexts, remarkable differences between the expectations of students from non-US cultures concerning the instructor and student roles. These results suggest that the instructor-student relationship is a context-dependent construct (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014), where different understandings of the instructor and student roles and expectations of interaction stem from the prevailing culture.

#### **4.2.5.3 By gender**

In general, Sax, Bryant, and Harper (2005) note that females interacted generally more frequently than males, where females reported that such interactions offered them intellectual challenge and respect, while males more frequently reported challenging acts on instructors' ideas in class. In addition, Kim and Sax (2009) identified that females have more tendencies to communicate with instructors by email for course-related matters, while males tend to communicate more frequently during class sessions than do females.

#### **4.2.5.4 By teaching approach**

It is established that instructors differ in adopting teacher-centred and student-centred approaches across disciplines and across teaching contexts (Lindblom-

Ylanne, Trigwell, Nevgi, & Ashwin, 2006). For instance, an instructor might use a teacher-centred approach in a science class, while using student-centred approaches in a social sciences class. It could be argued that the teaching context also affects instructor-student relationships besides the teaching approach. In seminar or workshop settings, which can include presentations, role play discussions and others, opportunities for approaching students for more interaction are multiplied compared to large lectures (Cotton & Wilson, 2006). When students were asked about their preference of teaching approach, considering their relationships with instructors, they identified a collaborative environment where interactions with the instructors are always encouraged (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002). Thus, it could be argued that the opportunities for interaction increase with student-centred approaches used in a small seminar group compared with using teacher-centred approaches in a large group of students.

As discussed in this section, there are several ingredients that form the occurrence and the type of interaction, and which consequently shape the emerging relationship between instructors and students. It would seem apparent that these interactions do not occur in a vacuum. Instructor-student interactions take place in different contexts. An interaction that takes place in a classroom entails a different form and content of interaction compared to a contact that happens outside-the-classroom walls. Thus, it is now important to identify the forms that instructor-student interactions take.

#### **4.2.6 Forms of Instructor-Student Interaction**

Instructor-student interaction usually falls within the continuum of two extremes of interaction: formal and informal, or social and academic (Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Meeuwisse, Severiens, & Born, 2010). These forms of interaction are distinguished by the place and content of the interaction. Formal interactions typically occur within the classroom and are characterized by brief and professional approaches, where conversations are usually about traditional academic matters and asking for information about the course (Endo & Harpel, 1982). Such conversations may also focus on written or oral feedback on a student's course performance (Terenzini &

Pascarella, 1978). However, informal instructor-student interactions usually take place outside-the-classroom, such as talking with the instructor in university hallways and corridors, having coffee with an instructor in a café, being a guest in the instructor's house, and working on a research study with a faculty member (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Kuh et.al, 2006). One of the criticisms of past instructional research is that instructors' behaviours are viewed as the only determinant of interaction events between instructors and students (Sprague, 2002). Hence, it seems essential to shift attention to a closer look at classroom interaction in order to understand what other factors exist, beside an instructor's set of behaviours and actions that contribute to forming (or not) opportunities for instructor-student interactions that consequently shape their relationship. The following section introduces a discussion of interaction that takes place 'inside' the classroom.

#### ***4.2.6.1 Classroom Interaction***

This section explains how several instructors and students' factors facilitate or hinder opportunities for interaction to occur in a classroom context. Instructor *immediacy* is one of the valuable concepts in understanding the instructors' variables that affect instructors' teaching practices and learning in higher education classrooms (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Christophel & Gorham, 1995). The following subsection introduces this concept.

##### ***4.2.6.1.1 Instructor Immediacy***

During the past three decades, immediacy, as a behaviour exercised in a learning context, has been primarily associated with explanations of instructor-student relationships. Established by social psychologist Mehrabian (1971), the concept of immediacy can be defined as the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between instructors and students (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006). According to McCroskey and Richmond (1992), "*immediacy creates a more engaging atmosphere for the teacher-student relationship*" (p. 102). Immediacy can be verbal or non-verbal. Verbal immediacy can be expressed in an educational context through praise, humour, encouragement, asking questions, self-disclosure, calling students by name, and giving positive feedback (Edwards & Edwards, 2001;

Park, Lee, Yun, & Kim, 2009). In addition, the highly immediate instructor uses non verbal cues to communicate at a close distance, using smiles, eye contact, body orientations, gestures and being vocally expressive (Richmond et al., 1987). Both verbal and non-verbal immediacy expressions often communicate the desire to approach the other relationally within the context of a relationship (Witt & Wheelless, 2001). Thus, these sets of behaviours produce perceptions of psychological closeness with students (Andersen & Andersen, 1982). In relation to teaching practices, an instructor's immediacy has been discussed within teacher effectiveness literature, where teachers are encouraged to implement immediacy behaviours in order to develop effective strategies for the classroom (Witt & Wheelless, 2001). Anderson (1986) describes a non-immediate instructor as someone who typically reads from the textbook, uses a monotone when lecturing, exhibits dull gestures, and gives textbook examples.

The benefits of instructor immediacy have been widely established within the literature. Goodboy, Weber, and Bolkan (2009) examined immediacy in the instructional context, revealing three learning outcomes: affective learning, cognitive learning, and student motivation. Furthermore, research suggests that verbal immediacy leads to students' greater willingness to interact in class (Richmond et. al, 2006), an increase in students' attendance (Rocca, 2004), and a greater frequency of out-of class interaction with the instructor (Jensen, 2002). Jensen (2002) also found that verbal immediacy decreases students' interaction apprehension. Richmond and McCroskey (2000) argue that students' high perceptions of immediacy lead to more compliance, respect, liking power, and conformation to wishes of the instructor. Research regarding instructor immediacy behaviours identifies a relationship between instructor immediacy and instructor-student communication outside-the-classroom (Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Waldeck et al., 2001). In addition, Jaasma and Koper (1999) indicate a significant correlation between instructor immediacy behaviours and the frequency of student office visits, the frequency of student informal contact with instructors, and the length of these visits. Richmond et al, (2006) argue that nonverbal immediacy may enhance students' perceptions of instructor-student interactions. Informal interactions and socialising are positively associated with trust, empathy and credibility (Nadler & Nadler, 2001).

In summary, this sub-section has established instructors' various verbal and non-verbal behaviour in class and how that affects students' perceptions of the instructor, attendance, and willingness to interact in class and out of class. However, the instructor is not the only party that has a role in shaping classroom interaction; the individual student has an important role in framing this activity and the overall classroom climate. This is discussed in the next sub-section.

#### **4.2.6.1.2 Students' Factors**

Classroom interaction involves student participation in the classroom, which is an essential ingredient that contributes to building instructor-student relationships. The literature suggests that the instructor's actions and behaviours in class play a vital role in students' tendencies to interact with the instructor. Karp and Yoels (1976) noted that "*the actions of the teacher are indeed most crucial in promoting classroom interaction*" (p. 426). Cotton and Wilson (2006) reported that students felt more comfortable interacting with the instructor in class when s/he shows immediacy behaviours, such as a sense of humour or self-disclosure. Richmond and McCrosky (2000) demonstrate that students would be more willing to feel less apprehensive and ask questions in class when the instructor exercises high immediacy behaviours. Classroom climate, where instructors encourage, praise and nurture respect and care is of paramount importance for students' participation (Crombie et al., 2003; Dallimore, Hertenstein & Platt, 2004). Thus, students' positive perceptions of the climate increase the likelihood of students' participation.

Class size is among the frequently emerging factors that promote or hinder a student's tendency to interact with the instructor. Gleason (1986) found that large classes tend to hinder students' participation, and students are more willing to participate and are less anxious in smaller classes (Myers Horan, Kennedy-Lightsey, Madlock, Sidelinger, Byrnes, & Mansson, 2009). Large group classes make it easy for students to 'hide' from interacting. However, small group classes seem to enable students to naturally engage in class activities and interact with instructors. This is in agreement with Cotton and Wilson's (2006) findings, where class size was a recurring theme in students' reporting in relation to interaction with instructors. In addition, course type can also be a determinant of students' participation where



students are more likely to participate in communication courses compared to social sciences or natural sciences classes (Crombie et al., 2003).

The instructor's teaching style, as previously discussed in the above section, shapes the nature and occurrences of interaction in and outside-the-classroom. When the instructor's teaching practices involve hands on activities, students feel more comfortable interacting in class (Cotton & Wilson, 2006). This could be explained by the fact that teacher-centred methods can often lead students to disengage from the content, especially when the instructor accepts the first answer to questions very quickly. In contrast, student-centred classes offer students plenty of time for thinking about the questions, participating in discussions and receiving feedback and guidance.

Cultural difference in relation to students' confidence and self-esteem is among the most motivating or demotivating factors for students' participation. Significant literature points towards the reason that students may not participate due to their feelings of intimidation or inadequacy in class (Howard & Henney, 1998; Fritschner, 2000; Weaver & Qi, 2005). For instance, students from East Asian countries appraise themselves less positively than American students on a cognitive measure of self-evaluation (Cai, Brown, Deng, Oakes, 2007). Another study suggests that cultural orientation significantly predicts self-esteem. Thus, it could be argued that the background culture of instructors and students may affect their tendency and approach to interaction in class.

To summarise, Section 4.2.6.1 illustrates how different factors can promote or hinder classroom interaction. Instructor immediacy, teaching style, class size, and cultural orientation plays a significant role in encouraging students' interaction, increasing their motivation, and consequently their learning. While the classroom maybe a primary point of interaction between instructor and students, the contact between the two parties does not end when class ends. On the contrary, an important kind of interaction occurs in other than the formal classroom context: outside-the-classroom interaction. As established in this review, instructor-student interaction in all contexts is a building block that enables understanding of the quality of instructor-student relationship. Thus, outside-the-classroom instructor-student interaction is

discussed next.

#### ***4.2.6.2 Outside-the-Classroom Instructor-Student Interaction***

Instructor-student interactions in the context of higher education are expected practice. Students have to seek instructors' contact through their coursework, assignments and classroom activities. As for outside-the-classroom interaction, instructors kindly offer, as part of their job, some level of interaction with students through office hours, and academic advising activities, which differs across institutions and cultures (O'Meara & Braskamp, 2005). Although both formal and informal types of interaction play a crucial role in students' academic success (Jacobi, 1991), interactions occurring outside the formal setting of the learning 'classroom' have gained particular attention from many scholars over the years (Wilson et al., 1974; Astin, 1993; Thompson, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Research found that students who experience out of class interactions with their instructors are likely to experience increased satisfaction with college experience and satisfaction with their faculty (Astin, 1993), critical thinking development (Wilson et al, 1974), increased personal development (Kuh & Hu, 2001), and increased motivation and involvement in learning (Thompson, 2001). Thus, this evidence for the strong association of outside-the classroom interactions and student outcomes gives weight to the importance of instructors' involvement in out of classroom conversations with their students.

Another observation about the impact of informal outside-the-classroom interaction is its relation to how students view their instructor and consequently form their relationship. For example, one of the interesting findings stems from Wilson and colleagues' research (1974) involving a mixed methods longitudinal study in 8 institutions. Instructors who were consistently nominated by students as the '*most outstanding*' and the most influential instructors professionally were the ones who interacted most frequently with students outside-the-classroom settings (Wilson et al, 1974). Thus, conversing with the instructor outside the formal zone usually shows students that their instructors are real persons. Therefore, it could be argued that outside-the-classroom interaction provides a loose context for communication

between instructors and students, as people are freed from their formal roles, which has a significant influence on students' outcomes.

While the studies in this section stress the importance of the instructor's role beyond the classroom context, studies that examine the underlying pattern of instructor-student outside-the-classroom relations are not sufficient in clarifying our understanding of the dynamic processes active in these interactions. In an attempt to investigate the content of outside-the-classroom interactions, Cox and Orehovec (2007) developed a useful typology that includes five contextually-influenced types of outside-the-classroom instructor-student interaction along a continuum of frequency. These types of interactions are defined in terms of the subject, frequency, and its meaning to the student: Disengagement, Incidental Contact, Functional Interaction, Personal Interaction and Mentoring. Cox and Orehovec (2007) indicated that Disengagement, where students simply choose not to interact with the instructor outside the classroom, having the highest frequency of occurrence and Mentoring, where the instructor acts as a mentor in a helping relationship with students, the lowest. Incidental Contact is the second most frequently echoed type of contact, where polite greetings and waves are typical examples of such trivial and brief contacts. Functional Interaction takes place for a specific academic purpose and can include instructors directing academic questions to students or students asking their instructors course-related questions. The fourth type is Personal Interaction, where conversations can centre on purely social or personal interests (Cox & Orehovec, 2007).

Although the majority of studies conducted in outside-the-classroom domains were quantitatively supporting the relationship between instructor-student contact outside-the-classroom and students' educational outcomes, the dynamic nature of the conversations usually exchanged outside of class has rarely been examined. It is still rather unclear 'why' outside-the-classroom experience is powerful. As discussed here, unfortunately, the literature concludes that the frequency of this contact is small (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Cox et al., 2010). This social interaction is often not given adequate weight within the institutional arrangement. In fact, outside-the-classroom contacts are decreasing due

to several factors, including instructors' focused time engaging in teaching and research compared to the little time easily devoted to interaction outside-the-classroom (Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991). As for students generally, Cotton and Wilson (2006) demonstrate that students usually choose not to interact with instructors beyond the classroom, as they are often uncertain whether the instructor is receptive to their interaction. Therefore, it could be argued that students need clear signals that show that their instructors are available and willing to interact with them outside-the-classroom. Fortunately, the literature provides evidence of a number of signals that indicate the instructor's willingness to interact with students. These are highlighted in the next section.

#### ***4.2.6.2.1 Signals for Out of classroom interactions***

According to Wilson et al. (1974), there are specific classroom signals that show an instructor's desire to receive student contact outside-the-classroom. These 'accessibility cues' include students' in-class experiences with the instructor's teaching style, classroom discourse, and instructor's interest in interacting with students outside-the-classroom (Wilson et al., 1974). A number of researchers have emphasized that instructors employing a student-centred teaching approach, and those who value their profession as instructors, tend to encounter more contacts with their students (Einarson & Clarkberg, 2004; Cotton & Wilson, 2006). Also, another factor that researchers believe increases an instructors' tendency towards more informal contact with students is their affiliation and friendliness, as well as their powerful interpersonal skills (Wilson et al, 1974; Einarson & Clarkberg, 2004). Instructors' cues of their 'psychosocial accessibility' to students (Wilson et al., 1974) can be exercised in explicit actions, such as repeatedly inviting students to ask questions during or after class. Some cues are more implicit, such as particular facial expressions, keeping office hours, and responding to questions in supportive and genuine ways (Cox et al., 2010). Besides an instructor's behaviour, accessibility cues include student experiences and perceptions of the classroom, such as the ability to challenge the instructor's ideas.

Furthermore, Cox et al. (2010) tested Wislon et al's (1974) hypothesis that the frequency and types of instructor-student interaction are the outcome of instructors'

in-class behaviour and their personal characteristics. Cox and his colleagues found that when effective pedagogies are promoted in classrooms, more contacts outside-the-classroom occurred. They argue, however, that it might be that student factors might also be a controlling influence on the instructor-student interaction. Thus, this conclusion makes investigation of instructor-student interaction through mixed methods necessary to advance understanding of instructor-student interaction.

In this review, it is evident how the instructor-student relationship norms and traditions of interaction inside and outside-the-classroom are resilient. This resilience is inevitably influenced by the social contexts in which interactions with instructors occur, as well as being affected by the ecological context (i.e. classroom environment), where opportunities for forming and managing interpersonal relationships are created (Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015). In this vein, a question arises as to what happens to these interaction practices in a context where there is a firmly defined form and strong character of relationships and interactions? How labile or stable are these practices within such contexts? These questions could be explored in such a cultural context where traditions of teaching, norms of interactions, and classroom environment are well established. An exemplar of such a culture is the Saudi culture, which is of special interest here. Chapter 2, Section 2.6.1 offers the reader a window into the resilient state of the educational system within this culture. Now the question arises as to how these entrenched traditions of educational practice within Saudi culture might nurture or hinder the instructor-student relationship. The following sections present this cultural context's particular educational practices, specific forms of relationship, and how Saudi educational practices are set within other cultural practices.

#### **4.2.7 Variations between Saudi culture's and other cultures' educational practices**

Culture is defined by Matsumoto (1996) as *"the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours shared by a group of people"* (p. 16). Hofstede (2001) later argued that people communicate their understanding based on their individual country's values, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes. Hofstede defined the term as *"the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of*

*people from another"* (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9). Studies on culture identify it as a social construction, situated within human social contact that matures within any social group over time. It is observed that most definitions of culture that exist in the literature are linked to education. Concepts, such as knowledge construction and acquisition are used when explaining how people use or construct knowledge to produce behaviour (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008).

Cultural characteristics are manifest in teaching and learning practices in a way that educators from different cultures can vary in their teaching perspectives. In comparison to western educational systems, there is a tremendous difference between the Saudi educational system, which was born from an Islamic heritage, and others born from a United Kingdom (UK) or United States (US) heritage. Interactive approaches to learning, which involve active learning with a focus on collaborative, synthesis and discussion tasks are deployed in the UK and US (Joy & Kolb, 2009). Such student-centred approaches are hampered in the Saudi context by the distance between instructors and students in classroom interactions, created by the social and cultural obstacles of the Saudi culture. This notion is supported by Gay (2000), where he argues that such sociocultural factors can impede effective teaching and learning. In fact, since establishing public education in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, the country has conformed to a traditional educational culture. This system is based on delivering knowledge from the instructor, who is considered to be powerful, to students, who are the disempowered passive recipients of information (Alkaeid, 2004; Asiri, 2013), or the empty vessels (Hamdan, 2014). Saudi education still holds dear many aspects of the traditional didactic model that is the opposite of what has been adopted by western educational systems: systems that often declare the significance of dialogue and equality.

In addition, it is suggested that the individual's sense of self and cognitive processes vary between individualist and collectivist cultures (Joy & Kolb, 2009). For example, Saudi is a country that has historically favoured the collective good of people over the personal experiences of the individual. As a result, and in contrast to western countries, where citizens tend to question and challenge authority, Saudis are habituated to receiving information and decisions that are already made on their behalf. This set of behaviours is reflected in the Saudi classroom where students are

habituated to be passive learners, while the curriculum that they should absorb is delivered by an authoritarian instructor (Asiri, 2013). However, such roles of the instructor and students portray a certain form of relationship that has rarely been investigated within this culture, and specifically within a higher educational context. It appears that the importance of the instructor-student relationship has often been overlooked within the available literature. Thus, a brief discussion of instructor and student roles within this established culture of communication is important to understand the basic background information about this topic of interest.

#### **4.2.8 Instructor-Student Relationship within the Saudi Culture**

The Saudi culture is identified as one high on power distance based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2001). As a consequence, it could be argued that this power distance could shape the frequency and quality of instructor-student interaction. Unequal instructor-student relationships are more promoted in high power distance cultures compared to low power distance. Hofstede's (2001) power distance influences the instructional style of the instructor, where the Saudi instructor's authoritarian method of teaching provides the instructor with control over the classroom and students are expected to conform to orders (Alkeaid, 2004). Furthermore, it is suggested that people from Eastern cultures prefer authoritarian teaching that concentrates on knowledge transmission, memorization and conformity (Ho, 2001; Zhang, 2006). Research has asserted for years that the hierarchical power distance culture, and inequalities in instructor-student relationships largely exist (Park et al., 2009). In order to understand the nature of instructor-student relationships within this culture, an important step is to first understand the status of the instructor, as perceived by Saudi society, the educational system and the student. The following section presents the status of the Saudi instructor within this culture.

##### ***4.2.8.1 The Saudi Instructor Status***

In most Muslim countries, the position of the instructor differs from its status in secular contexts, where it is permeated by spiritual power. In Saudi, the role of the teacher is considered more of a spiritual profession than just a payable job. The reverent image of the teacher originates from his/her role as a channel of knowledge.

Both the status of the instructor and the importance of knowledge are vigorously promoted in Saudi culture. The following celebrated and commonly used Arabic proverb in Saudi schools explains the importance of the role: *'He who taught me a letter became my master'*. Kamis and Mazanah (2007) mention a saying by a famous Muslim religious scholar: *'the teacher is like the sun, which being luminous itself sheds light. The student-teacher relationship is thus sacred'* (Kamis & Mazanah, 2007, p. 30).

Another significant fact that strengthens the preacher-like image of the instructor is that the Prophet is usually looked upon as a *'teacher'* of good behaviours and an ultimate example for morals and values that all Muslims desire to obtain every day. As a result, most Muslims, if not all, see the instructor as a living manifestation of the teaching of the Prophet. Thus, in religious authority, the Prophet is second only to God-Allah, while the instructor is seen as the absolute authority on non-religious knowledge and an embodiment of the utter authority in the class. As for the regulations and rules in the classroom, the code of practice of the instructor is to transmit knowledge, while students are expected to obey and nurture the *'quietness of loving to listen'* (Jamjoom, 2010, p.7). Thus, this historic image of the instructor may play a role in the dynamic of the interaction between instructors and students.

#### **4.2.8.2 The Saudi Learner**

Consequently the role of the instructor in Saudi culture, as explained in the previous section, may influence how students communicate with their 'role models'. As the instructor is highly respected in Islamic tradition and society, students are expected to exercise proper conduct when communicating with the instructor. More specifically, Saudi students' culture of learning often stems from their idea that there is always an optimum religious truth. Therefore, their basic preconception is that there is a best method, a best answer and only a single optimum answer to questions, and this optimum answer usually comes from the channel of knowledge: the instructor (Cortazzi & Jin, 1977). In addition, another characteristic that Saudi students possess is their pattern of dependency, conformity and shyness, where the Saudi female learner, the concern in this thesis, is likely to be more 'shy' than the



male learner. These characterises result from upbringing within Islamic Saudi culture. Walker (2004) gives an accurate description of the Arabic student:

*‘Another feature of Arab students that would puzzle an educator working from a western world view is their conformist and dependent behaviour. In western society where independence is highly regarded, dependence is likewise interpreted as immaturity. In a society that does not encourage individual independence and where conditions support conformism, conformity and dependency are natural results’ (Walker, 2004, p. 437).*

As they conform to the authoritarian instructor in the classroom, students are only encouraged to learn materials directly related to the assigned curriculum (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005). Thus, students lack the skills to think critically (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2013), and cannot solve learning problems without instructor interference. This may explain why Saudi students prefer authoritarian learning, where they are less likely to be encouraged to ask questions from curiosity, or engage in inspiring discussions, all of which inevitably results in deprivation of communication skills (Mahrous & Ahmed, 2010).

Although the available discussed studies in the domain of Saudi educational practices provide useful insights into the educational practices employed by instructors within the system, to the best of our knowledge, research that investigates the current nature of the educational practices of Saudi instructors in university classrooms, and the nature of instructor-student interaction that forms their relationship is absent. More specifically, the instructor-student relationship as a research focus within this cultural educational system has often been overlooked despite its major influence on students’ outcomes. Thus, this review concludes with a summary of this review and Study 1 research challenges or questions.

#### **4.2.9 Review Summary**

Section 4.2 developed a literature review involving useful studies for the purpose of framing Study 1 of this thesis. In particular, Study 1 is mainly informed by the

Interpersonal theory, instructors' interpersonal behaviours and its associated model and perceptions measures, and research on the classroom environment and instructor-student relationship, as well as instructor's immediacy concept in the face-to-face university classroom context. Section 4.2.1 identified that students and instructors' perceptions are significant factors for the social aspects of the learning environments, and that the psychosocial characteristics of the climate are translated into the resultant instructor-student relationship, which is of special interest in this thesis. Also, Section 4.2.4 established that the learning environment in classrooms can be conceptualized and measured from a teaching perspective using the Interpersonal Theory (Wubbels et al., 1985). As previously mentioned in Chapter 1 Section 1.2, Study 1 proposes four sub-research challenges and has the significant purpose of opening a current live window onto the existing teaching perspectives and perceptions of the classroom environment within the Saudi educational system, from both instructors' and students' perspectives. Thus, Study 1 investigates these issues within a selected female only campus of a Saudi institution.

### **4.3 Methodology**

#### **4.3.1 Research questions and methods**

The overarching aim of Study 1 is to understand the nature of the instructor-student relationship based on interaction practices, as well as an examination of the psychosocial aspects of the university learning environment in a Saudi female only campus. Based on the pragmatic foundations for conducting mixed methods case based research, appropriate methods, and strategies were determined that best address the research problem and answer the research questions. The quantitative methods include two questionnaires: 1) Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI), and 2) College and University Classroom Environment Inventory (CUCEI), while the qualitative data includes instructor semi-structured interviews, and students' focus groups. Table 4-1 is an "evaluation crosswalk" table that maps out which method(s) will be used to answer each research question and the rationale behind the selection.

Study 1 uses the convergent mixed methods research design (Creswell, 2003), where both quantitative and qualitative methods were collected during the research process.

The qualitative data helped offset the weaknesses of the quantitative data in decontextualizing human behaviour from its real world context. More specifically, the quantitative data provided a general picture of the research problem, namely how instructors and students perceive the relationship between them, while the qualitative data and its analysis illuminate those statistical results and provides insights through exploring participants' views about their face-to-face interactions with their instructors in classrooms. Both sets of quantitative and qualitative data are triangulated and mapped to interpret the results.

Figure 4-3 shows the convergent research design and data sources. In this figure, the design is illustrated by blocks. Blocks are used to demonstrate the qualitative and quantitative data collection and analytical methods, including the number and type of participants. Below the figure is an explanation of the triangulation process of the findings.

Research Question	Quantitative Methods		Qualitative Methods		Necessity
	Questionnaires		Interviews	Focus Groups	
	QTI*	CUCEI**	Instructors' interviews	Students' Focus groups	
<b>RQ1:</b> What are students' perceptions of the current nature of interpersonal relationships with their instructors at KAU?	χ			χ	QTI provides students' perceptions of instructors interpersonal behaviour, which can be explained by narratives from students' focus groups
<b>RQ2:</b> What are students' perceptions of the university-learning environment at KAU?		χ		χ	CUCEI offers students' perceptions of the social climate at the university. With the focus groups, they will give a more comprehensive account of KAU social climate.
<b>RQ3:</b> What are instructors' perceptions of their interpersonal relationships with their students at KAU?	χ		χ		Instructors' illustration of the nature of their relationships with their students can feed the 'dry' evaluation of their relationships with students using QTI
<b>RQ4:</b> To what extent is there a difference in the perception of instructor-student relationships between instructors and students?	χ	χ	χ	χ	To provide a holistic picture, determine convergence of perspective and corroboration of results from the different perspectives of instructors and students.

Table 4-1 Research questions mapped to methods, instruments, and necessity of use.

\* *Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction* \*\* *College and University Classroom Environment Inventory*

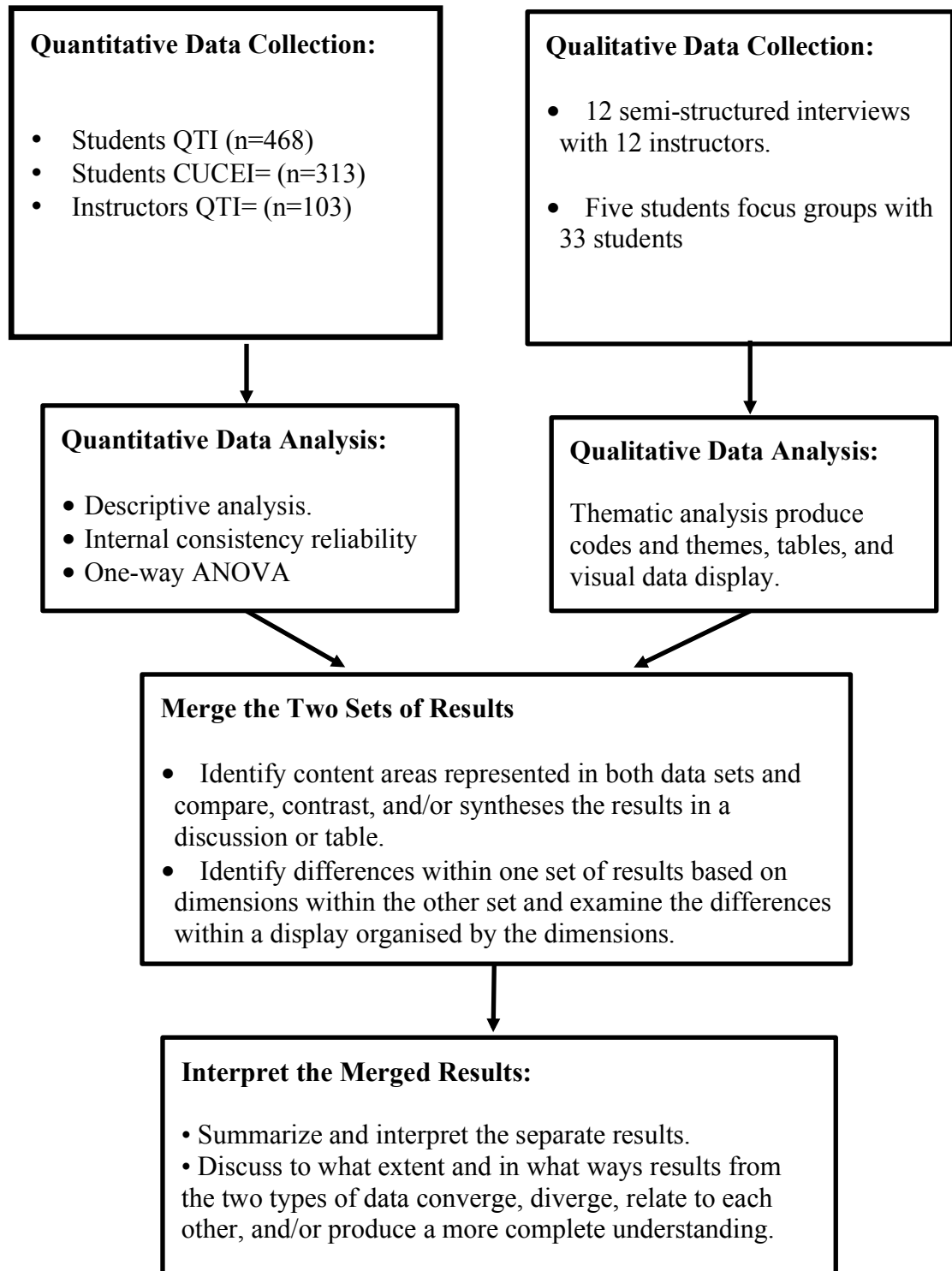


Figure 4-2 Implementing a convergent mixed methods design procedure.

### **4.3.2 Quantitative Methods Choice**

A hallmark of the learning environment domain over the past few decades is the availability of a variety of valid and widely applicable questionnaires that have been developed and used for evaluating students' perceptions of the classroom environment. Although the research in learning environments has been conducted using different qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches, the dominant approach has been the use of questionnaires to assess students' perceptions (Fraser, 1998; Fraser et al., 2010). Such questionnaires have psychosocial and pedagogical dimensions which clearly affect one another (Fraser et al., 2010). In this study, two instruments have been employed that have been used internationally to measure the psychosocial aspects in the context of basic formal education: QTI and CUCEI. QTI was designed solely to examine interpersonal behaviours, the role of the instructor in the classroom social climate and its impact on students' perceptions of the interactional and mutually influencing relationship between instructor and students. CUCEI was useful in assessing students' perceptions of educational practices and aspects of the classroom environment at the classroom level. A detailed account of the two instruments follows.

#### ***4.3.2.1 Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI)***

Among the various available and economical instruments developed over the years, that have made major contributions to learning environment research is the development of the QTI by Wubbels and his colleagues in The Netherlands (Wubbels et al., 1985). The significance of QTI is that it examines the interpersonal behaviour of the teacher and is concerned with the interpersonal relationship between instructors and students, which is a crucial dimension of the learning environment (Wubbels & Levy, 1993). This survey is in fact based on the Interpersonal Theory and the Teacher Interpersonal Circle discussed in Section 4.2.4 and the model is shown in Figure 4-1. It does offer an attractive graphical representation for human interaction. As explained in Section 4.2.4, teacher behaviour is mapped with an Agency dimension and a Communion dimension to form eight sectors, each describing different behaviour aspects: Steering, Friendly, Understanding, Accommodating, Uncertain, Dissatisfied, Reprimanding and

Enforcing Behaviour. One advantage of the QTI is that it can be used to obtain the perceptions of interpersonal behaviour of either students or teachers. Also, there is evidence that the Leary model is cross-culturally generalizable (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Several studies have been conducted in the field of learning environments in non-Western countries, which have confirmed the cross-national validity of the QTI including Turkey (Telli, den Brok, & Cakiroglu, 2007), and Indonesia (Fraser, Aldridge, & Soerjaningsih, 2010). In addition, research has been conducted on the reliability and validity of the QTI (Wubbels & Levy, 1991), and the Cronbach alpha reliability was greater than 0.70 at the student level and greater than 0.80 at the class level.

QTI was originally developed to assess student perceptions at the primary and secondary levels. However, to date, QTI has not been used extensively in tertiary contexts (Coll, Tylor & Fisher, 2002; Fraser et al., 2010; Telli & den Brok, 2010). Coll, Taylor and Fisher (2002) administered the questionnaire alongside CUCEI in multicultural classes in the Pacific Islands. In Turkey, Telli and den Brok (2010) applied the Turkish version of the survey from the primary to the higher education context with 1767 students. Fraser and colleagues (2010) used QTI at a private university in Indonesia to investigate the relationship between students' outcomes and the quality of teacher-student interaction. Despite the international popularity of the QTI and reported outcomes, research on instructor-student interpersonal behaviour in higher education using QTI has not yet been conducted in Saudi Arabia. This study employed QTI, since although there is a lack of suitable instruments that address the interpersonal behaviour of instructors at the university level, there is a high validity and reliability of the QTI, the purpose of which matches that of this research study. This study reports the validation and use of QTI for assessing university-level students' perceptions of their instructor's interpersonal behaviour. Since the QTI was designed according to the two-dimensional Leary model and the eight sectors (Wubbels et al., 1985, 2006), it was useful to map interpersonal instructor behaviour as a way to understand and describe the case under study.

The latest English version of the QTI includes 48 items, with six items for each of the teacher behaviour eight scales. Table 4-2 represents the nature of the QTI by

providing a scale description and a sample item for each of the eight scales. The 48-item version of QTI was used in this thesis.

Scale	Description	Sample Item
Steering	Extent to which teacher provides leadership to the class and holds student attention.	This teacher knows what is going to happen next in this class.
Friendly	Extent to which the teacher is friendly and helpful towards students.	This teacher helps us with our work.
Understanding	Extent to which the teacher shows understanding and care to students.	This teacher trusts us.
Accommodating	Extent to which the students are given opportunities to assume responsibilities for their own activities.	This teacher allows us to take responsibility for what we do.
Uncertain	Extent to which the teacher exhibits her/his uncertainty.	This teacher allows us to tell her what to do.
Dissatisfied	Extent to which the teacher shows unhappiness/dissatisfaction with the students.	This teacher thinks that we cheat.
Reprimanding	Extent to which the teacher shows anger/temper and is impatient in the class	This teacher gets angry quickly.
Enforcing	Extent to which the teacher is strict with demands of the students.	This teacher is strict.

Table 4-2 Description and an example of each scale in the QTI.

#### ***4.3.2.2 College and University Classroom Environment Inventory (CUCEI)***

Using the QTI instrument in this study has covered the examination of instructors' behaviour and instructor-student relationships. However, it was essential to shed light on educational practices and provide a holistic picture of the university-classroom environment. The CUCEI was developed to measure the perceptions of the psychosocial environment in university classrooms. This instrument was initially developed by Fraser and Treagust (1986) to be used in small classes (up to 30 students) sometimes referred to as 'seminars' (Fraser & Treagust, 1986). The



instrument is based on Moos' theory that all human environments include four dimensions: 1) relationship dimensions, 2) personal development dimensions, 3) system maintenance and 4) system change dimensions (Moos, 1974). These dimensions of the environment are measured on the CUCEI using the following seven scales: Personalization, Innovation, Student Cohesion, Task Orientation, Individualization, Involvement, and Satisfaction (Fraser, 1986).

The CUCEI version used in this study contains seven scales with 49 items. Each item has four responses (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) and the polarity is reversed for approximately half of the items. Table 4-3 shows the seven scales used in the original form of the CUCEI. The characteristics of the CUCEI instrument were examined before translating and employing the survey for this research study. In addition, satisfactory internal consistency for the seven subscales has been measured in a variety of studies based on the Cronbach alpha coefficient figures indicated that ranged from 0.73 to 0.94 (Fraser, 1998; Fraser, 1986). Hence, it was considered a suitable instrument to gather students' perceptions about their university classroom environments.

<b>CUCEI Scale</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>Student Cohesiveness</b>	Extent to which students know, help and are friendly toward each other
<b>Individualization</b>	Extent to which students are allowed to make decisions and are treated differentially according to ability, interest, or rate of working
<b>Innovation</b>	Extent to which the instructor plans new, unusual class activities, teaching techniques, and assignments
<b>Involvement</b>	Extent to which students participate actively and attentively in class discussions and activities
<b>Personalization</b>	Emphasis on opportunities for individual students to interact with the instructor and on concern for students' personal welfare
<b>Satisfaction</b>	Extent of enjoyment of classes
<b>Task Orientation</b>	Extent to which class activities are clear and well organized

Table 4-3 Explanations for the seven psychosocial dimensions of classroom environment.

#### ***4.3.2.3 Arabic versions of QTI and CUCEI: Back Translation***

A review of the existing versions of QTI and CUCEI revealed that none were available in the Arabic language. In this study, both the 48-item version of QTI and the 49-item version of CUCEI went into a process of forward and back translation (Brislin, 1970). The goal of the translation process is to produce Arabic versions of the surveys that ask the same questions and offer the same response options as the source texts. This includes conveying the same information and the communicative intention of the source surveys (Harkness & Schoua-Glusberg, 1998). Back translation involved the translation into Arabic of the English survey, which itself is a translation, and then back into the original English, allowing the comparison of the two versions to ensure that each item retained its original meaning (Brislin, 1970). The researcher assesses not only the technical and semantic appropriateness and adequacy of the survey questions, but also the cultural relevance of the questions included in these instruments (Erkut, 2010). Six staff from the Faculty of Home Economics helped the researcher in the translation and back-translation process. The staff have a range of 5 to 10 years teaching experience and upper intermediate to advanced levels of competency in English.

The surveys were discussed with each member of staff and the translation was made. The researcher then compared the results of the translation and made another visit to the assisting staff to finalise of the surveys. Field-testing of the QTI and the CUCEI was carried out by distributing the questionnaires to a seven staff members at the university. The researcher sought opinions from staff members regarding the accuracy, clarity and general comprehensibility of items in both instruments. Staff noted a few problematic items, such as those with ambiguities, to be further modified to ensure that they were clear. The feedback information contributed to enhancing the wording of the questionnaires to reflect and adapt to cultural aspects (Wubbels et al., 2012). The final Arabic translation of the surveys was checked by an Arabic language expert before the application. The QTI and CUCEI questionnaires with demographic questions are presented in Appendix 2.

### **4.3.3 Qualitative Methods Choice**

#### ***4.3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews with Instructors (12)***

The semi-structured interviews were critical in gathering more in-depth insights, thoughts, and actions from Saudi instructors in order to illuminate the survey's results of how they perceive the nature of their relationships with students and the ways they interact with students. The interview should provide an interpersonal context where instructors can elaborate on their ideas of relationship aspects, and describe perspectives in their own words. The researcher as an interviewer can use the list of questions, provide clarifications and re-shape the predefined questions and probe and follow up on instructors' responses. Appendix 3 outlines the interview question guide used in conducting the interviews, which were constructed in a way to complement and further explain the quantitative instruments.

#### ***4.3.3.2 Student Focus Groups (5)***

Focus groups are used for generating information on collective views and the meaning that exists behind participants' views. The distinguishing feature of a focus group is the interaction between participants, which helps the researcher elicit collective views and emotional processes, while facilitating the discussion based on a topic s/he suggested. In this study, focus groups were selected as a research method because they would allow me as a moderator to explore students' views about the topic, their values, and beliefs about the issue under investigation. Multiple understandings and meanings are expected to be revealed with multiple explanations of students' behaviours and attitudes. Focus groups also allow students to negotiate or share an understanding about instructor-student relationships, ask questions of each other and discuss freely their own experiences. Questions were constructed to complement the quantitative instruments used. Students were asked general questions about how they perceive the learning environment at the university, and the nature of the relationship with their instructors in face-to-face contexts based on their personal experiences. Appendix 3 outlines the focus group question guide used in conducting these interviews.

#### 4.3.5 Sampling and Selection of Participants

Before selecting samples of instructors and students, a letter of approval was required from the research administration at KAU to conduct this study. This noted the significance of the study and encouraged instructors to cooperate with the researcher. As previously explained in Chapter 3 Section 3.3, a systematic approach was used to achieve the aims of recruiting both instructors and students. The following sections discuss the processes for selecting each type of participant.

##### 4.3.5.1 Instructor Sample

As described in Chapter 3, Section 3.3, a total of 12 instructors from different disciplines at KAU volunteered and were willing to participate in an interview. Table 4-4 shows interview participants' details.

<b>Instructor's Faculty</b>	<b>Instructor (n=12)</b>	<b>Position</b>	
Home Economics	5	Lecturer Nadia, Ghadah, Ruby	3
		Assistant Professor Hala, Maya	2
Sciences	2	Lecturer Amira, Hana	2
English Language Institute	3	Lecturer Raya, Galiah	2
		Assistant Professor Khadija	1
Administration and Economics	1	Lecturer Ash	1
Education	1	Lecturer Maryam	1

Table 4-4 Demographics of interviewed instructor participants.

As for recruiting instructors for filling out the survey, at the end, of the total number of 2855 instructors at KAU, a total number of 103 instructor questionnaires were obtained. Details about instructor participants who filled out the questionnaire are

shown in Table 4-5 and 4-6. The paper-based questionnaire had a 28.75% response rate, while the online-based questionnaire, which was a link sent to all instructors at the university by email, had a 4% response rate.

Faculty	Instructors (n=103)		
	Sample	Total no. of Instructors	Proportion of Total %
Economics and Administration	12	207	5.8
Arts and Humanities	15	344	4.4
Sciences	18	407	4.2
Home Economics	33	302	11
Computing and Information Technology	7	150	4.7
Arts and Design	3	14	21.4
Engineering	1	15	6.7
Education	6	166	3.6
Medicine	8	75	10.7

Table 4-5 Proportion of instructors, participants and sample of QTI.

Teaching Experience (Years)	No.	%	Position	No.	%
1-5	39	37.9	Teaching Assistant	23	22.3
6-10	20	19.4	Lecturer	43	41.7
+10	45	43.7	Assistant Professor	19	18.4
			Associate Professor	13	12.6
			Professor	6	5.8

Table 4-6 Demographics of instructor participants in QTI.

#### 4.3.5.2 Student Sample

As previously explained in Chapter 3, Section 3.3, questionnaires returned from students' sampling procedure yielded 781 respondents; with a 63% response rate, as some of the returned surveys were either mostly not complete or empty. Table 4-7 shows QTI and CUCEI students' demographics, and Figure 4-4 and 4-5 gives the number of surveys based on students' year of study.

Faculty	Total no. of Students	QTI (n=468)	Proportion of Total %	CUCEI (n=313)	Proportion of Total %
Economics and Administration	2456	123	5	124	5.05
Arts and Humanities	3809	100	2.6	72	2
Sciences	1544	82	5.3	24	1.56
Home Economics	1546	79	5.1	55	3.6
Law	486	25	5.1	6	1.2
Computing and Information Technology	642	13	2	11	1.7
Communication and Media	489	7	1.4	9	1.8
Arts and Design	201	5	2.5	4	2
Engineering	66	3	4.5	3	4.5
Education	802	3	0.4	4	0.5
Foundation Year	5080	28	0.6	1	0.01

Table 4-7 Demographics of student participants in QTI and CUCEI surveys.

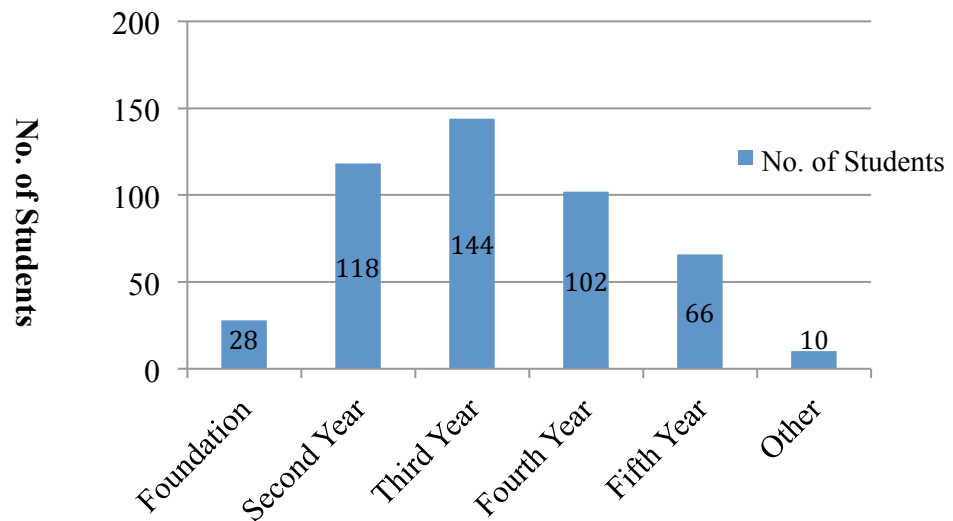


Figure 4-3 Number of QTI responses from students based on year of study

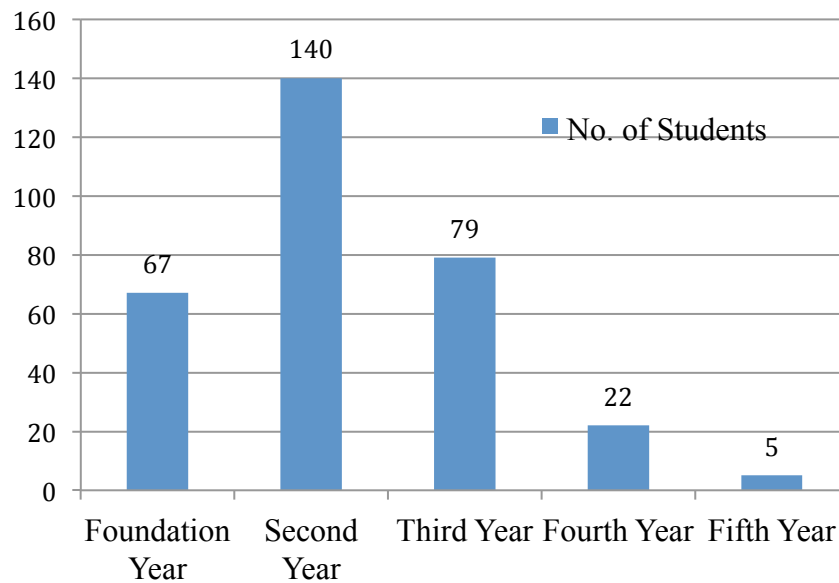


Figure 4-4 Number of CUCEI responses from students based on year of study.

As previously explained in Chapter 3, Section 3.3, a total of five focus groups with 33 students were conducted for 5 different groups of students belonging to different faculties. Table 4-8 shows the focus groups demographics.

Focus Group	Department	Faculty	No. of Students
Focus Group 1 (FG1)	Child Studies	Home Economics	7
Focus Group 2 (FG2)	Business	Economics and Administration	6
Focus Group 3 (FG3)	Psychology	Arts and Humanities	8
Focus Group 4 (FG4)	Business	Economics and Administration	6
Focus Group 5 (FG5)	Arts	Home Economics	6

Table 4-8 Focus groups of students demographics.

#### **4.3.6 Research Procedure**

The study was conducted at KAU in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in the fall semester over the period from January 2014 to May 2014. At the beginning of the semester, and for the period of one month, QTI and CUCEI were self-administered online for instructors and students. Due to the low response rate of student respondents, questionnaires were paper administered in classrooms by the researcher. During the term, instructor participants were interviewed for the purpose of gaining an insight into their perspectives of the interpersonal relationships. All of the interviews took place in person in instructors' offices, based on their choice of a comfortable venue. Interviews lasted between one hour and one hour and a half and were all recorded digitally, and then transcribed. In addition, five focus group meetings were held with groups of volunteering students from different faculties at the university. Each focus group meeting constituted 6 to 8 volunteering students. The participating students met with the researcher, who acted as the focus group interview facilitator, in an unoccupied classroom during regular school hours. The role of the researcher as a facilitator was to be in the background, from where the topics of the discussion were directed and guided whenever necessary. Those meetings were conducted within a 50-90 minute time period. All focus group meetings were recorded digitally, and then transcribed. Toward the end of the semester, the researcher approached instructors available in their offices, and administered QTI manually.

#### **4.3.7 Data Analysis Methods**

##### ***4.3.7.1 Quantitative analysis methods***

The QTI and CUCEI have been further expanded to include demographics. Both instructor and student version of QTI are identical apart from identification for the participant as "This instructor" used on the student version to refer to the teacher, and "I", or "My" used on the instructor version. The QTI survey yields three main scores: total QTI score, Agency dimension score, and Communion dimension score. Based on the corresponding blend of Agency and Communion scores, both instructors' and students' perceptions generated interpersonal profiles that could be positioned, plotted and charted in the Teacher Interpersonal Circle.



There are five possible responses to each question (5-point Likert scale) to indicate agreement ranging from responses of “Never” (1), “Almost Never” (2), “Neutral” (3), “Almost Always” (4), and “Always” (5). The total score for a particular scale is simply the sum of the circled numbers for the six items belonging to that scale. For analytical purposes, a total QTI score variable is created (minimum score of 48 and maximum score of 240) by summing the responses to all 48 questions. Additionally, eight subscale variables are created by summing each of the six-question scales (each with a minimum score of 6 and maximum score of 30).

The CUCEI contains 49 statements, with 7 items belonging to each of the seven scales. Each item is responded to on a four-point scale with the alternatives of (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree, and (4) Strongly Disagree. The scoring direction is reversed for approximately half of the items. The CUCEI yields a total of seven scores, one for each dimension. Items are scored 1, 2, 4, and 5, respectively, for the responses Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. All reversed items are scored in the reverse manner. For analytical purposes, a total CUCEI score will be created (minimum score of 49 and maximum score of 245) by summing the responses to all 49 questions. Additionally, seven subscale variables are going to be created by summing each of the seven-question scales, each with a minimum score of 7, and maximum score of 30.

A number of statistical tests are used to investigate the results of the QTI and CUCEI surveys. First, means and standard deviations for continuous (interval/ratio) data are calculated to explain each scale in both questionnaires for instructors and students. Second, to test the reliability of both surveys, the Cronbach alpha coefficient is computed for each QTI and CUCEI scale as a measure of internal consistency. Third, the QTI scores were used to calculate inferential statistics such as one-way ANOVA for each QTI scale with the group (instructors or students) as the independent variable. This was investigated to look for differences and statistical significance between instructors' and students' perceptions across the eight scales. All statistical calculations are to be performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (Version 22.0.0).

#### ***4.3.7.2 Qualitative Analysis Methods: Thematic analysis***

I decided on using a combination of both inductive and deductive thematic analysis approaches. An inductive approach was used in order to give voice to instructors' and students' experiences, and descriptions and meanings to their relationships as reported in the data. A deductive approach was employed to examine how those experiences are constructed and what the ideas and assumptions are that inform the narratives. Furthermore, deductive thematic analysis allows me to draw on relevant literature, such as that regarding instructor-student relationships (Anderson & Carta-Falsa, 2002; Hagenauer and Volet, 2014), instructor immediacy (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Witt, Wheelless & Allen, 2004), classroom and outside-the-class interaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, Cox & Orehovec's, 2007), and pedagogy and teaching and learning (Fry, Ketteridge, & Marshall, 2008). Exploring the literature helps in considering noticeable concepts that participants did not clearly articulate, but were implicitly suggested. I followed the six-phase approach to thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; 2013).

In the first stage, I immersed myself in the data by first listening to the audio recordings of every interview while transcribing each interview and focus group. Since half of the interviews were in Arabic, the process was to transcribe and then translate into English before starting the analysis. Then, every interview and focus group document file was electronically saved into ATLAS.ti software: a powerful software tool that deals with qualitative data analysis. The software was powerful in allowing me to make notes, comments, and highlight remarkable quotes, while reading and rereading the transcript of interviews analytically and critically. Initial observations of many quotes were noted, such as, "instructor Hala values students' participation in class", "instructor Maya reports that cultural norms dictate silence from students", "students dislike being the centre of attention in class." Other quotes seem to be less relevant to the study research questions and were discarded.

In the second phase of thematic analysis, I began constructing descriptive or semantic codes through looking at portions of data. Although most of the generated codes were a mix of the descriptive and interpretive, most of them were descriptive and others mirror the instructors' languages and concepts. For example, the code

“reciprocal give and take” was Dr. Hala’s language when she said, “I like the relationship to be reciprocal... the way I give you, you take.. I take you give...” Other codes needed more than looking at the surface of the quotes. Some codes refer to chunks of data, others refer to only a line, and sometimes two codes refer to one chunk of data as the narrative suddenly took different directions. I was continuously coding and recoding each data item that was potentially relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012). I continued a systematic analysis of coding until all interviews and focus groups’ data were fully coded with each code combined with its relevant data.

In the third stage, I started to look for themes that hold something significant about the data and present patterns or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I started to review my list of codes and re-read the coded data as a way to recognize patterns, similarities and overlaps between codes. Table 4-9 provides two examples from instructors’ interviews, of the process of identifying clusters of codes that appear to share a uniting concept that explains a meaningful pattern in the data.

Theme	Code Cluster
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility in communication, assignment/exams deadlines</li> <li>• Tolerance of cultural attitudes</li> <li>• Thinking about students</li> <li>• Listening and respecting students</li> <li>• Being empathic with students' difficult circumstances</li> </ul>
Tension between authority and tolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing with Disagreement</li> <li>• Instructor’s power status</li> <li>• Setting Boundaries</li> <li>• Balancing care and control</li> </ul>

Table 4-9 Examples of “Searching for Themes” stage.

Several codes were found to be redundant of one code, so they were discarded and the original code was incorporated into a theme. In this stage, I began to notice

relationships between the generated themes where together they told a coherent story about how instructors and students viewed their relationships with each other. Due to the large sets of data I was working on, and to avoid losing coherence, I focused on analyzing and reporting the data that told specific stories that answer the research study questions. ATLAS.ti supports the analysis process by providing a codebook table outlining potential themes and codes with the written notes and comments.

In phase four and five of the process, the generated potential themes were critically questioned by checking them against the combined data. Some codes under specific themes were discarded or relocated under another theme. For example, in instructors' interview codes, the code "Balancing care and control" was first under the Care theme but was moved to the Control theme as the coded extracts of data for the code more clearly represent a feature of the Control theme. Some other themes generated from students' focus groups, such as "Dissatisfaction" and "Affability" were collapsed into a broader theme named "Communication Style," where boundaries of the theme were redrawn in order to meaningfully and coherently capture the relevant data.

This stage also involved defining what each theme is mainly about. It was essential that each theme presented an obvious scope and purpose, as well as all the themes together offering a meaningful story about the narratives. While examining the themes, I found that some needed to have a sub-theme. The last phase involved the write-up of the qualitative report. I used both descriptive and conceptual styles to produce both the analysis and the discussion of the analysis. In some areas data was employed in an illustrative style, while in others, data needed more detail and interpretation of the meanings they constitute. In discussing the analysis, I focused on building an argument that attempted to illuminate how instructors and students perceive their relationships with each other. This included attempting to connect the produced themes reasonably, in a way to support the quality of the relationship story. Thus, the final themes of the semi-structured interviews with instructors that demonstrate how instructors viewed their relationships with students and what elements constituted those relationships, is shown in Table 4-14 and discussed in Section 4.4.2.1.

## **4.4 Results**

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative results from Study 1 and then integrates both results to discuss the convergence of the findings and provide a holistic understanding of the study claims. Section 4.4.1 reports the statistical analysis and results of the QTI and CUCEI questionnaires. Section 4.4.2 reports the qualitative results from the instructors' interviews and student focus groups. Section 4.5 discusses the integration between quantitative and qualitative data based on the study research questions and concludes with a synthesis of the instructor-student relationship in Section 4.5.5. The chapter ends with a summary in Section 4.6.

### ***4.4.1 Quantitative Data Results***

#### ***4.4.1.1 QTI Survey***

Two questionnaires are used to explore one of the fundamental research questions of this study, which concerns instructors' and students' perceptions of the quality of their instructor-student relationship within their learning environment. First, reliability and validity of the QTI instructor and student versions are examined. Secondly, differences in instructors' and students' perceptions using independent t-test and ANOVA are explored, and average instructor and student profiles are produced. The researcher selected the 0.05 as the level of significance in this study, as it is the most commonly used level of significance in educational research (Gay et al., 2009).

##### ***4.4.1.1.1 QTI Reliability***

In order to check the quality of the Arabic version of the QTI for the present sample, reliability analysis was conducted on the eight scales of both the instructors' and students' versions of the QTI instrument. Table 4-10 reports the reliability of each of the eight scales of the QTI for the individual student score (n=468) and individual instructor score (n=103). The data suggests that the QTI has satisfactory reliability, with scale coefficients ranging from 0.53 to 0.81 for the instructor's QTI version, and, the alpha reliabilities varied from 0.61 to 0.86 for the student's version. This confirmed that each QTI scale has acceptable reliability.

Scale	Unit of Analysis	Instructor's Version Alpha Reliability	Student's Version Alpha Reliability
Steering	Individual	.80	.84
Friendly		.70	.86
Understanding		.70	.86
Accommodating		.53	.63
Uncertain		.70	.62
Dissatisfied		.68	.84
Reprimanding		.77	.74
Enforcing		.81	.61

Table 4-10 Internal consistency reliability for the two versions of the QTI.

#### ***4.4.1.1.2 Instructors and Students QTI: Independent Sample t-test and ANOVA***

As previously explained in Section 4.3, the QTI is a self-reporting survey designed to examine instructors' behaviour in the classroom, their interaction with their students, and the different perceptions of these interactions. A general descriptive analysis was first performed to obtain the average profile of instructors (n=103), and students (n=468) in the sample. The average item means and standard deviations for each of the QTI scales (sectors) are provided in Table 4-11.

An independent sample t-test was performed to compare the perceptions of instructors and students on the QTI overall scores and on the eight scales. Levene's test for equality of variances showed a significant difference between the variances of instructors' scores on all the subscales, and the scores of the students for the same scales. Thus the researcher assumed unequal variances when looking at the t-test results. First, an independent sample t- test was conducted on the overall QTI score for students and instructors. There was no significant difference in instructors' QTI scores (M=138.79, SD= 10.288) and students' QTI scores (M=139.10, SD= 13.139);

$t(183.2) = -.11, p = .91$ . However, performing a one-way ANOVA on the eight scales of the QTI will give a detailed explanation of how instructors and students differ in their perceptions. Therefore, a one-way ANOVA was performed on the eight QTI scales. Five of the QTI scales (Steering, Friendly, Uncertain, Dissatisfied, and Reprimanding) revealed a significant difference in scores ( $p < .05$ ).

As can be seen in Table 4-11, instructors perceived themselves as displaying more leadership attitudes, such as noticing what is happening in the classroom, leading students, giving orders, and determining the procedure and structure of the classroom, compared to students' evaluation of their instructors. Although students viewed their instructors as adopting fewer leadership qualities, they found their instructors displaying more reprimanding behaviour. Being a reprimanding instructor entails getting angry, expressing irritation and punishing students. This result logically leads to students viewing their instructors as being significantly less friendly and more dissatisfied when they do not show affiliation and consideration. Also, students do not expect to be inspired by these instructors, nor expect them to make jokes. Furthermore, while instructors viewed themselves as exhibiting fewer confident actions, students see them showing significantly less uncertainty. The difference on the five scales was significant at 0.05 level as can be seen in Table 4-11. Figure 4-6 shows the significant difference on scales ordered from largest to smallest differences.

QTI Scale	Scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always)		ANOVA	Eta Square
	Instructors' Average Item Mean and SD	Students' Average Item Mean and SD	<i>P</i> value	
Steering	4.23 (0.55)	3.95 (0.91)	.004*	.18
Friendly	4.04 (0.46)	3.48 (1.08)	<i>p</i> <.001*	.32
Understanding	4.00 (0.43)	3.82 (0.91)	.054	.13
Accommodating	2.46 (0.47)	2.53 (0.73)	.822	.06
Uncertain	1.86 (0.60)	1.72 (0.51)	.002*	.12
Dissatisfied	1.57 (0.42)	2.13 (0.98)	<i>p</i> <.001*	.35
Reprimanding	2.00 (0.61)	2.42 (0.89)	<i>p</i> <.001*	.27
Enforcing	2.91 (0.63)	3.11 (0.80)	.093	.14

Table 4-11 Average item mean, standard deviation, and ANOVA results for instructors' and students' QTI scales. \*Significant value at .05 level.

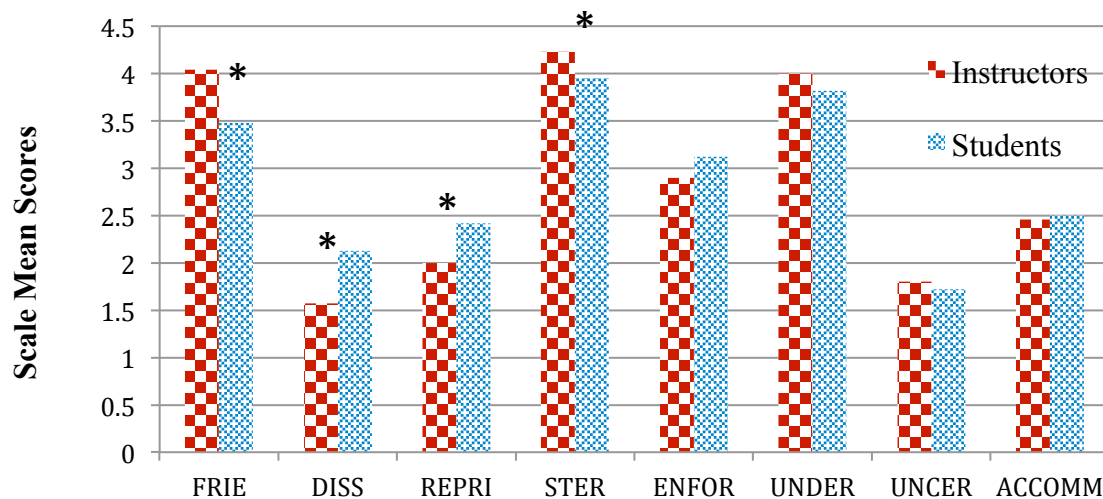


Figure 4-5 Instructor's and student's interactional behaviours organised from the largest to the smallest differences.

\* Indicates a significant difference.



#### ***4.4.1.1.3 Profiles of the Saudi Instructors' Interpersonal Behaviour from instructors' and students' perspectives***

Figure 4-7 offers graphic profiles of average interpersonal styles of Saudi instructors based on the Interpersonal model. The figure shows how instructors assessed their own interpersonal behaviour, and represents how students perceived their instructors' interpersonal behaviour based on the shadow colour in the legend. As shown in Figure 4-7, generally instructors rated their own behaviours as displaying high levels of cooperative attitudes (Steering, Friendly and Understanding), compared to oppositional behaviours (Uncertain, Dissatisfied, and Reprimanding). In other words, the results show that instructors evaluated their own behaviours as exhibiting significantly more favourably on almost all scales (i.e., higher scores on scales with a positive connotation, and lower scores on scales with a negative connotation) than did students. Similarly, students also perceived instructors to exercise more cooperative behaviours than oppositional behaviours. However, when we compare instructors' and students' perceptions in terms of the individual eight scales, there is an obvious difference on those ratings.

Generally, students' average perceptions indicate that instructors were perceived as somewhat dominant, yet highly cooperative. In relation to cooperative behaviours scales, students see their instructors as significantly less friendly, and slightly less understanding and steering compared to instructors' own perceptions. As for the oppositional scales, students' average scores suggest that they perceived their instructors to exhibit notably more negative qualities in their interactions (Dissatisfied, Reprimanding, and Enforcing) compared to how instructors perceived their own behaviour. In addition, students perceived instructors to be less uncertain compared to the instructors' perceptions, while both instructors' and students' average scores were almost the same in terms of the Accommodating scale.

In terms of the two dimensions, Agency and Communion, as shown in Figure 4-8, instructors viewed themselves as much more controlling ( $DS=.67$ ) and a lot more affable ( $CO=.84$ ) compared to students' perceptions. As for students' perceptions, it appeared that Saudi instructors were viewed as somewhat dominant ( $DS=.44$  on a possible score range between  $-3$  and  $+3$ ) and fairly cooperative ( $CO=.53$  on a

possible score range between  $-3$  and  $+3$ ). This means that students see the Saudi instructor as someone who shows care, friendliness and affiliation, nevertheless they view the instructor as someone who takes matters into her own hands, has power, and control.

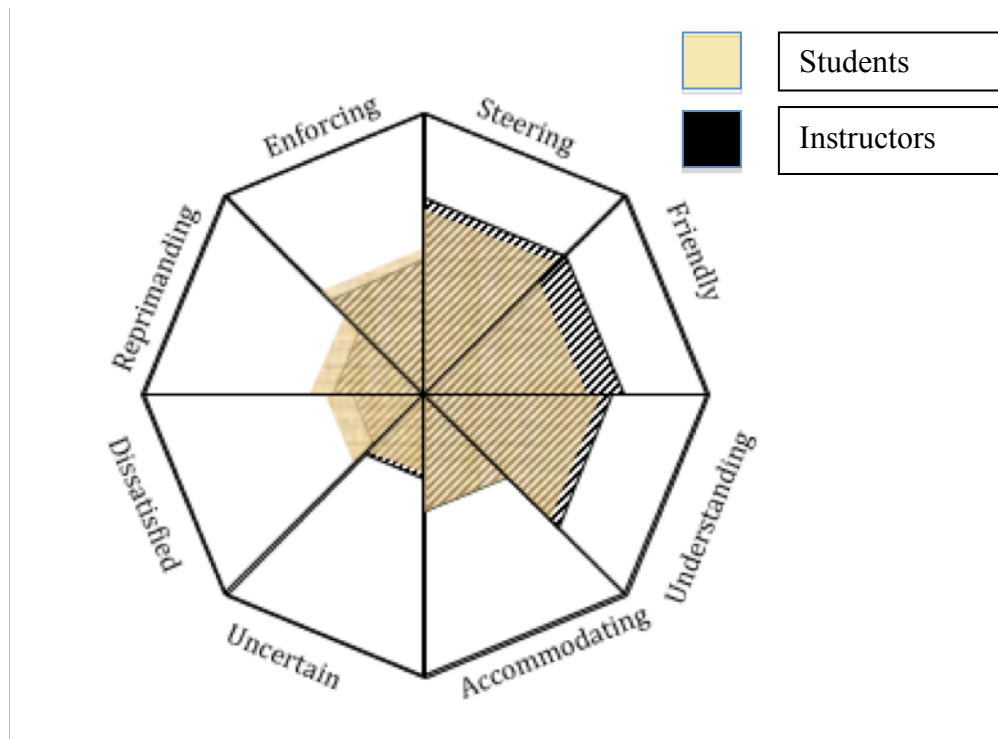


Figure 4-6 Instructors' average profile based on instructors' and students' evaluations.

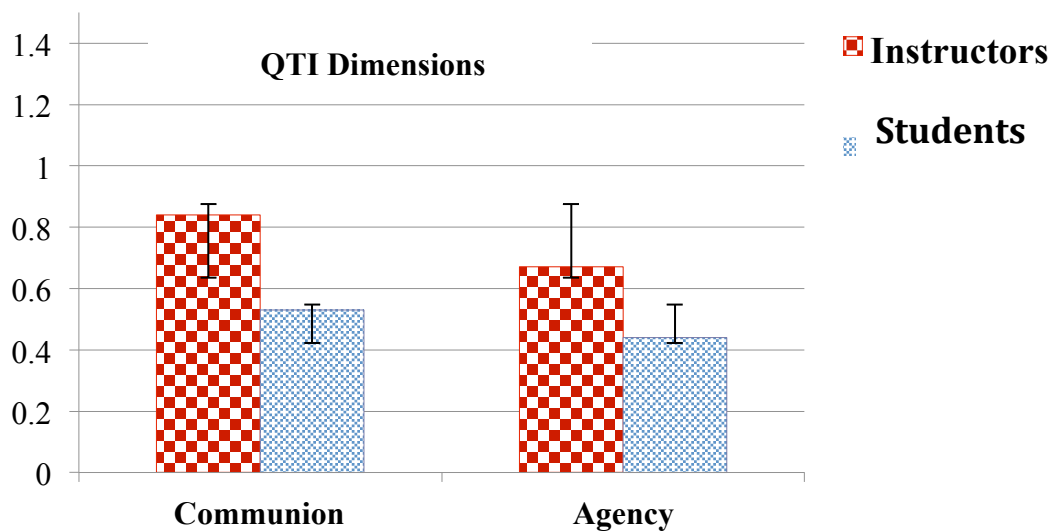


Figure 4-7 Graphical profile of instructors' interpersonal style based on dimension scores and showing error bars.

#### **4.4.1.2 CUCEI Survey**

One of the important research questions of this study is how students perceive the Saudi university classroom environment. CUCEI was used in an attempt to explore this research question. Thus, CUCEI provides quantitative evidence of what Saudi classrooms at the university level look like in terms of the seven CUCEI subscales: Personalization, Involvement, Student Cohesiveness, Task Orientation, Innovation and Individualization. First, reliability and validity of the CUCEI student version is presented. Secondly, students' ratings on CUCEI seven scales are introduced.

##### **4.4.1.2.1 CUCEI Reliability**

In order to check the quality of the Arabic version of the CUCEI for the present sample, an internal consistency reliability analysis was conducted on the seven scales for the instrument. Table 4-12 reports the reliability of each of the seven scales of the CUCEI for the individual student score. The data suggests that the CUCEI has satisfactory reliability except for one scale, namely *Involvement* with .40 alpha coefficients. As can be seen in Table 4-12, the scale coefficients ranged from 0.54 to 0.82.

Although a number of previous studies on the reliability and validity of the CUCEI showed a slightly higher internal consistency, with the coefficient ranging from .53 to .90 with the individual as the unit of analysis (Fraser & Treagust, 1986), the reliability of this Arabic version of CUCEI is considerably higher than Coll and Taylor and Fisher's study (2002) giving adequate reliability for only two scales, *Satisfaction* and *Cohesiveness*. One explanation for the low reliability of the scale involvement in this study is that it is usually assumed that the reliability coefficients using the 'individual student' as the unit of analysis is lower compared to the 'class of students' as the unit of analysis. Hence, the studies that used the 'class of students' as the unit of analysis reported a higher reliability compared to the 'individual student' as the unit of analysis. Overall, CUCEI scales have adequate reliability.

Scale	Unit of Analysis	Alpha Reliability
Personalisation	Individual	.71
Involvement		.40
Student Cohesiveness		.82
Satisfaction		.81
Task Orientation		.54
Innovation		.60
Individualisation		.61

Table 4-12 Internal consistency reliability for CUCEI scales

#### ***4.4.1.2.2 CUCEI Ratings: Students' evaluation of classroom environment***

This section explains how students perceive their university classroom environment in terms of the seven scales of the CUCEI survey. In Table 4-13, the mean (n=313), standard deviations, the percentage agreement, and coefficient of variations, as a measure of relative variability, were calculated to understand students' evaluation of the Saudi classrooms. The scale mean indicates that Saudi students at KAU evaluate their classroom environment to be slightly higher in personalisation, involvement, task orientation and satisfaction compared to cohesiveness, individualisation and innovation. More specifically, more than half of students (n=313), between 54% to 58%, agreed or strongly agreed that their classes offer opportunities for interaction with students, that students participate in class, students are satisfied and enjoy their class, and believe that their class activities are clear and well organised. While less than half of student respondents (49%) agreed or strongly agreed that their classes contain cohesiveness, where students know, help, and are friendly to one another, 67% of students perceive that their instructors do not apply innovative teaching approaches or unusual activities in classes. Similarly, 54% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are allowed to make decisions and are treated differently according to their ability and interest. These findings suggest high variability across

student evaluations of their classroom environment at KAU. Further discussion of the survey finding is presented in Section 5.4.2.

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Scale Mean</b> Scale from 5 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree)	<b>Scale SD</b>	<b>Agreement</b> (% of agree or strongly agree)	<b>Coefficient</b> <b>of</b> <b>Variation</b> <b>%</b>
Personalisation	3.25	.73	54	22
Involvement	3.25	.54	55	17
Student Cohesiveness	2.92	.89	49	30
Satisfaction	3.18	.81	59	25
Task Orientation	3.38	.61	58	30
Innovation	2.61	.65	33	25
Individualisation	2.75	.64	46	23

Table 4-13 Scale mean, standard deviation, percentage agreement, and coefficient of variation for each CUCEI scales.

The next section discusses the qualitative results from instructors' interviews and students' focus groups, which will shed some light on the quantitative findings.

#### **4.4.2 Qualitative Data Results**

This section discusses the emergent themes, sub-themes and codes from instructors' interviews and students' focus groups, which open a window into the Saudi classroom learning environment, as well as the quality of instructor-student relationships described by both instructors and students. Section 4.4.2.2 presents students' qualitative descriptions that illuminate their ratings on the surveys, while the following section provides a detailed account of instructor's perceptions and

interpersonal behaviours with students as they occur in context from the instructors' point of view.

#### ***4.4.2.1 Results of Instructors' Interviews***

There are three major themes that appear to contribute to shaping the instructor-student relationship: 1) Instructor immediacy which describes concepts such as Accessibility and Approachability, Care, and Control, 2) Instructor's beliefs and conceptions which explains the instructors Conceptions of the Relationship and their Conceptions of Teaching, and Students, and 3) Instructor-Student Interaction and Contextual Constraints illustrates instructors perceptions of Classroom Interaction and Outside-the Classroom Interaction. Table 4-14 shows the final themes of instructors' interviews and Figure 4-9 shows a diagram of emerged themes.

Theme	Subtheme	Codes
Instructor Immediacy	Accessibility and Approachability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students' reluctance to approach instructors.</li> <li>Students' preference of communication channel</li> <li>Conditional or limited availability</li> <li>Extended approachability</li> </ul>
	Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empathic, considerate and understanding</li> <li>Balancing care and understanding</li> </ul>
	Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Articulating power in the classroom</li> <li>Balancing care and control</li> <li>Shared control</li> <li>Acknowledging students' voice</li> </ul>
Instructor's Beliefs and Conceptions	Conceptions of Instructor-Student Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mutual respect</li> <li>Traditional formal relationship</li> <li>Balanced and equal relationship</li> </ul>
	Conceptions of Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More communicative</li> <li>Shyness and lack of confidence</li> <li>Lack of academic competencies, such as commitment and motivation.</li> </ul>
	Teaching Conceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Satisfaction about teaching</li> <li>The existence of didactic pedagogy</li> <li>Teaching within a traditional educational system</li> </ul>
Instructor-Student Interaction and Contextual Constraints	Classroom Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Methods of establishing a communication with students: i.e. memorising students names</li> <li>Factors influencing communication with students: Student's uncertainty to interact, instructor's interest, group size</li> <li>Forms of classroom interaction: limited academic interaction on course related matters.</li> </ul>
	Outside-the-classroom Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of out of class interaction for: students' shyness, students willingness or interest</li> <li>Forms of outside-the-classroom interaction: academic and personal interaction.</li> </ul>

Table 4-14 Final themes and codes of instructors' perceptions of the instructor-student relationship

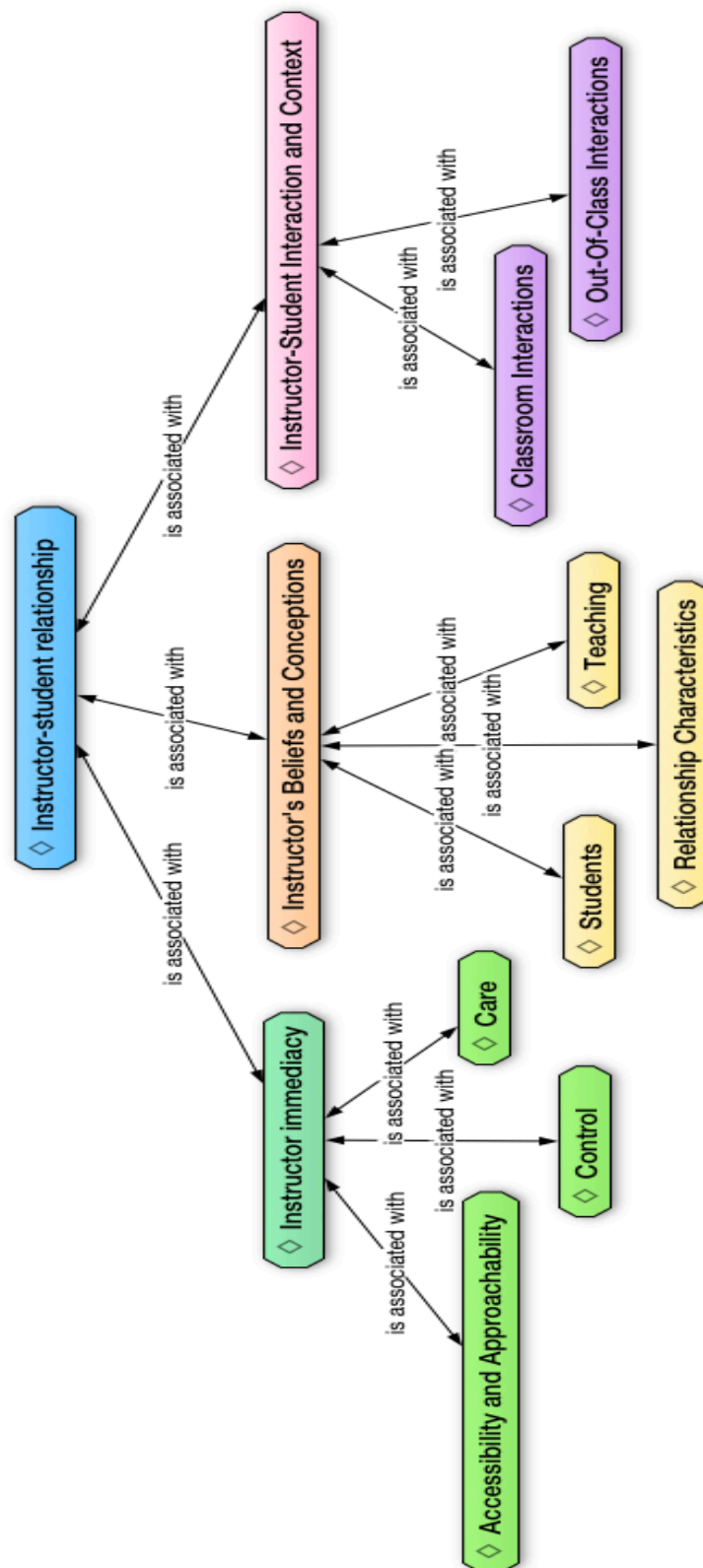


Figure 4-8 Final themes, subthemes and codes based on instructors' perceptions of the relationship



Next, Saudi instructors illustrate their views of their own interpersonal behaviour, their beliefs, intentions and conceptions of several aspects, and the quality and frequency of interactions with students.

#### ***4.4.2.1.1 Theme 1: Instructor Immediacy***

As instructors shared anecdotes about their relationships with students, their ideas about immediacy emerged. Within an educational context, and as discussed in Section 4.2.5.1.1, immediacy can be defined as the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between students and instructors (Richmond et al., 2006). Accessibility and Approachability, Care, and Control were subthemes of this theme, where instructors unveiled their perceptions of their psychological closeness to students.

##### ***Sub-theme: Accessibility and Approachability***

Although this sub-theme is prevalent among all 12 instructors, they differed in the available channels they offered to communicate with students, and in their perceptions of themselves as an approachable and easy to access instructor. Generally, all 12 instructors reported that they provide their email address to communicate with students outside of office hours. Five out of the 12 instructors offered more communication channels, where students can send requests/questions via popular social networking applications. In addition, two out of the 12 instructors find it acceptable to communicate with students by phone. Codes of this sub-theme include students' reluctance to approach instructors, students' preferred communication channel, limited or conditional availability, and extended approachability.

Generally, all 12 instructors reported that the majority of students chose not to approach them personally during office hours. Instructors claim that students prefer to communicate by other means, such as email, and instant messaging mobile applications. For example, instructor Nadia points out the lack of student visits to her office during the semester:

*“We are in the middle of the semester and only 3 students have come during my office hours... they do prefer other ways.” Quote 1, Instructor Nadia<sup>6</sup>, Home Economics.*

Five out of the 12 instructors were wondering about students’ reluctance to approach them in office hours. Some of the reasons instructors declared students’ avoidance of face-to-face communication were students’ shyness, or it being a tiresome journey to the instructor’s office, so they prefer to use easier ways of communication. Instructor Ash explains:

*“Sometimes students themselves don’t like to come to office hours... you know... maybe they find it difficult or tiring to come... or maybe some are too shy to approach the office... or they don’t want to come... so they prefer to send an email instead.” Quote 2, Instructor Ash, Administration and Economics.*

Five out of 12 instructors appear to be more accessible than others, as they offer several ways in which students can reach them. For example, in addition to office hours and email, these instructors were receptive to new forms of communication with students, such as using Twitter and WhatsApp. Although the majority of Saudi instructors seemed to avoid communicating with all students using their phone numbers, they came up with the idea of a volunteer student who would act as a messenger between the instructor and the class of students. Instructor Raya explains:

*“I give them my twitter account... they can contact me through twitter... email... they can come to my office hours... I don’t prefer to give them my mobile number...unless it’s the class leader... a student who is appointed as a leader... she goes and creates a WhatsApp group with the rest of my students...and I contact her only and she contacts the rest... because if I give my number to all class... you know... they will be calling me all the time..and there is no time to answer all those phone calls... so I give my number to one leader..and she would be contacting the rest... and I would be on one-to-one basis with her.. and she would be forwarding the message to the others... this is how I*

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<sup>6</sup> Instructors are given pseudonyms and these are not their real names.

*would be contacting them... for this, I would use WhatsApp usually... "Quote 3, Instructor Raya, European Languages.*

Three out of 12 instructors seem to have conditional or limited availability. For example, instructor Maryam declares to students that they need to give her notice before a student comes to her office. Similarly, Hala finds her work and investment of self, emotionally and physically draining, leading to fatigue and frustration with her profession. Because of that, she limits her own communication channels to only office hours, helping her to deal with situations in the classroom, while limiting her feelings of burnout (Hargreaves, 2001). Hala explains:

*"They can reach me... but there is a limit... because if I opened the door to them I'd lose my mind... for example if office hours did not fit in with students' schedule... I tell them I can stay for extra hour on a condition that you are no less than 5 students, I am not going to stay for one student only... I'm busy and I don't have time to waste...honestly...otherwise I'd lose it." Quote 4, Instructor Hala, Home Economics.*

Furthermore, three instructors, who teach relatively smaller groups of students compared to the norm in Saudi classrooms, seem to offer extended accessibility, where they are available to communicate with students by phone, during and outside of school hours. Instructor Ghadah declares:

*"I don't mind taking students' phone calls at home ... even late at night...[...] and yes... its totally fine to call me ... for example in the morning... if they need anything they can call... all students have my mobile phone number... they are only 12 students... there is the email also... but because we started to use WhatsApp ... I don't use email as much anymore.. also during class hours... all my students know my class schedule... and in labs... so they usually know where I am at anytime... if I'm not in office... I will be in the lab... and if they couldn't find me... they can always call or text to ask... where are you Mrs. Ghadah.?" Quote 5, Instructor Ghadah, Home Economics.*

According to instructors' narratives, it seems that instructors who teach small groups of students are more accessible to students. Their transparent schedules help students approach them anytime.

The overarching claim that could be taken from this sub-theme is that the majority of instructors are receptive to use new forms of communication with students other than face-to-face communication. This shift towards other means of communication may be occurring due to students' preference for new communication channels, or/and to instructors' openness to the advent of new technologies. The majority of Saudi instructors perceived that being approachable means offering more communication channels for students, such as face-to-face during office hours, emails, and sometimes social media communication, such as WhatsApp and Twitter. Instructors differed in the extent of their availability to communicate with students on a one-to-one basis during office hours with a few instructors expressing administration work, or avoiding burnout as the reasons behind their limited availability. The majority of instructors also acknowledged students' hesitation to approach them in office hours. This signals a low tendency for instructor-student interaction outside-the-class, which may contribute to the overall instructor-student relationship.

#### ***Sub-theme: Care***

The instructors' ethic of care surfaced in several instances where they described a number of basic concepts, such as empathy, understanding, acting in the best interests of the other, as well as balancing understanding. This sub-theme was prevalent for 8 out of the 12 instructors. Instructors talked about being empathic, considerate and understanding towards students, and the importance of balancing being a caring instructor and understanding the situation at hand. Several instructors contend with the necessity of being empathic and understanding of students, regarding both university issues and personal circumstances. When she was asked about how she would manage a situation if a student asks for an assignment deadline extension, instructor Ghadah empathically stated:

*"I always consider what they are going through... some instructors make rules and things like that.. where no body can cross them... I don't do that.. for example.. when my students have to submit final projects... there is a week before final exams and after lab exams... they are usually free in that week... although they are supposed to submit projects in the week of lab*

*exams with all other courses deadlines... I feel it is so unfair for them and they would go through so much pressure... so I always extend that submission for them... because I know that they have so much to do and finish before the end of the semester.” Quote 6, instructor Ghadah, Home Economics.*

Ghadah’s consideration for students’ circumstances is obvious when she puts herself in their shoes and attempts to unburden them. Ghadah also refers to a generally strict practice from Saudi instructors, where students' conditions are not usually taken into account. All eight instructors declared that they would usually act in the best interests of students as long as they have legitimate reasons. For instance, instructor Galiah explained how these incidents of consideration strengthen the instructor-student bond and increase student motivation to learn from the instructor. In the following quote she describes an incident with a student who got married and was not able to submit her book for evaluation within the deadline:

*“but sometimes again... you have to be considerate... sometimes there is a death in the family... or a wedding... a sister... or the student herself is actually getting married... like yesterday I had a student... and guess what... she sent me an email saying that she was getting married yesterday and she didn't tell any of her classmate.[...] [laughs]...so I had to congratulate her of course.. and I said... ok... no problem... inshallah when you come next time just let me know when you’re going to be available so that we can meet...and then you can show me the book... so I was considerate... so these situations happen... and you have to be little bit considerate.” Quote 7, Instructor Galiah, European Languages.*

The above two examples surfaced in the reporting of a number of instructors; however, one important observation that should be acknowledged here is that these incidents do not occur in class, where all students witness the warmth of these instructors. Rather, such few incidents tended to occur on a one-to-one basis in private. Other instructors articulate their caring attitudes without providing real life episodes, where their caring attitudes are practised with students. Rather, they appear to explain idealised goals and latent ambitions of how a caring instructor should react. For instance, instructor Maya explained that she has to be understanding and patient with students in relation to some cultural attitudes they normally exercise:

*“I have to understand... and to be a little bit flexible to some issues in the culture... our culture here doesn't have the “on time” thing.. it doesn't have duty... but I'm trying to teach them... I think my role is to teach them.. the things they lack from the culture... and I remind them... for example... commitment.. being on time... I always tell them we do pray on time... we do fast on time... i can't fast tomorrow instead of today... no... so you have to understand commitment from religion... I don't tell you to commit because I want to... being committed is in our religion... in our life... Islam organised time for us... so that we know when is afternoon prayer.. sunset prayer.. etc... so we have to be committed in appointments.” Quote 8, Instructor Maya, Home Economics.*

For some instructors, being understanding and empathic requires evaluation and considerable thinking about the student's circumstance or request. This process, as instructors suggest, helps them balance their caring reaction and rationalize it according to the situation and the group of students. For instance, Ash believes that sometimes being understanding with one student becomes injustice to the rest of class, and students need to feel equity in class. This is her explanation when she was asked about extending a deadline for a student:

*“hmmm...as for submission... I do take off marks for every late day... because our assignments are specific and clear... there is a small trick or idea in every assignment... if the student knew it she would be able to do the assignment... so when she is late in submitting... and all her classmates have submitted and they have discussions over how they solved it... so she comes and submits late and gets the full mark..? it's unfair to give her a full mark and the other students submitted on the deadline... she is not like the students who did the assignment and submitted it on time... so I actually mention this to them before... that every passing day over the deadline.. you lose a mark... a system and they know it.”*  
*Quote 9, Instructor Ash, Administration and Economics.*

Also, three instructors believe that sometimes students become less enthusiastic to learn when the instructor shows abundance of empathy and understanding to them.

Instructor Ghadah asserts that whenever she feels students' low achievement, she becomes demanding:

*"sometimes I feel that some students start to do badly and become careless when it comes to the course... so because of this negligence... I start to be like... "no excuses for submitting Thursday's assignment"... and things like that... so when I find them becoming good girls again [laughs]... so yeah... it needs balance... I think...although I like to bend a lot [laugh]... sometimes student take advantage... so sometimes they need a hit on the head to do the right thing." Quote 10, Instructor Ghadah, Home Economics.*

To conclude, the majority of the Saudi instructors perceive that being a caring instructor entails empathy, understanding, and balancing understanding towards their students. The few reported real-life examples of instructors' caring attitudes occurred privately on a one-to-one basis, where the class of students did not have the chance to witness such warmth. Some of the instructors believe that they should balance their caring act to support students' achievements and to ensure justice and equity to all students. Despite perceiving themselves as caring and understanding, exerting control is a strategy that Saudi instructors appear to embrace with their students. This is discussed in the following subsection.

### ***Sub-theme: Control***

In the traditional educational system, it is assumed that instructors hold power and control in the classroom and always have greater status than students. Similarly, instructors' interaction with students normally brings with it relational tensions that have to be negotiated in classrooms. A sense of authority and some of these relational tensions surfaced in instructors' narratives within this sub-theme, such as articulating power in the classroom, balancing care and control, shared control, and acknowledging students' voice, which were prevalent in instructors' narratives with varying degrees of emphasis. More specifically, almost half of the participating instructors (7 out of 12) perceived exercising power over students as an essential and healthy attribute of the instructor-student interaction practice.

Some instances suggest that Saudi instructors are habituated to articulate authority in the classroom, where emphasis is on the higher position of the instructor compared to the student. These instances involve statements like: *'I am as a teacher... I cannot come down to your level.. YOU.. you have to go meet me half way..'* Instructor Maya, Home Economics. More specifically, Maya described an incident in class where she believed that she needed to teach the student a lesson:

*"when a student came late and opened the door and with a loud voice saying 'Salam everyone'... while I was in the middle of a lecture... I stopped lecturing and said "you shouldn't be doing this... when you come late you should enter the class quietly... sit down... and wait until I finish talking... then you can greet us"... I try to teach them the right behaviour... because sometimes they really don't know... nobody taught them..." Quote 11, Instructor Maya, Home Economics.*

Such verbal control messages show how instructors articulated their right to command according to the instructor-student power relationship norms. It appears that some Saudi instructors hold this belief that requires them to focus their attention on keeping ownership of classroom power. However, instructors like Ash, Galiah, and Maryam foresee that exerting power would not support building a "close" relationship with students.

In addition, two instructors clearly expressed the view that they sometimes find it difficult to be tolerant with students without giving out commands as they usually would. More specifically, these instructors tend to be careful when it comes to being too empathic towards students, as they are very keen to balance or maintain the level of control over students' experience. Maya stated:

*"a student came to me saying that she delivered a baby... I told her why didn't you send an email? any message...? you said nothing... you send no body to talk to me, she was absent for 4 weeks... I understand that she has a baby and all responsibility... but I told her... you didn't contact me... she said I'll bring a medical report... I told her sorry... how could I know what happened to you... I scared her... so teachers should understand*



*students and the culture... but she still needs to know that she broke the rules.” Quote 12, Instructor Maya, Home Economics.*

Across instructors’ narratives, not all instructors seem to accept sharing power with students in the classroom. Three instructors articulated being constrained by institutional policies, meaning that they cannot provide students with choices, or allow them to have input into the content covered, grading, assignment submissions, or other aspects of the class. Other instructors drew attention to the importance of reminding students of the instructor status and their authority when necessary. Here is an example of the absence of shared control in Hala’s authoritative voice:

*“sometimes students say we don’t wanna do this and that... bla bla bla... I say ok.. I’m gonna do this... I don’t care.. I’m the instructor... and this is my organisation... I’m not gonna change because certain things happen in your life...you should organise... I do have my own issues and schedule.... I usually say to them that... it’s ok ... you should adapt to our disagreement and live with it... this is my classroom and you are in my classroom.” Quote 13, Instructor Hala, Home Economics.*

On the contrary, three instructors clearly stated their liberal attitudes towards empowering students by ‘granting’ or ‘sharing’ power with their students. Galiah expressed this:

*“I usually tell them I’m a very democratic teacher...like if you don’t want to do this... just let me know and I’ll work it out in any other possible way... some instructors think like this is a weakness of the teacher because she is discussing matters with students... negotiating deadlines and stuff like that... but I don’t feel it’s a weakness at all because as I said before I’m treating my students as individuals... so that we can all reach a common ground.. so that we could work towards that...” Quote 14, Instructor Galiah, European Languages.*

Ash here is describing how important it is to honour students’ voices and let them have their say in course related matters:

*“We have to agree on this... it’s not because I’m the instructor so I have the final say... and you... as students have to do what I say....no... I feel that it’s very important to come down to their*

*level... what do you want.. and what I want... they should feel it's flexible.. we should be in full agreement on things... it feels right to me... and it feels good actually.. being an instructor and giving the student her value... instead of denying her existence and ... I make the decision myself.” Quote 15, Instructor Ash., Administration and Economics.*

For the most part, these narratives that negotiate practice of power and authority of instructors show that some Saudi instructors are not the sole owners of classroom power. In fact, the perspectives of instructors in this theme could be split into two groups: instructors who still practise and paint the traditional Saudi picture of the classroom in which they have absolute power over students' experience, and the second group who are jointly responsible with their students for establishing power in the classroom. Instructors construct control in the classroom through several interactional practices, such as setting classroom rules, arranging deadlines, negotiating course lectures, teaching students appropriate attitudes and managing incidents of a breach of student discipline. Instructors who practise the authoritative voice, viewed this power attribute as a legitimate form of authority to be exercised as part of their role. This sub-theme demonstrates both the existence of an authoritarian voice stemming from the traditional Saudi teaching ecology, as well as an 'opened up' and liberal voice, which points towards a possibility of 'change' in this system. The following section discusses instructors' beliefs and conceptions as a theme that appears to contribute to instructor-student relationships.

#### ***4.4.2.1.2 Theme 2: Instructors' Beliefs and Conceptions***

The beliefs that instructors embrace influence their thoughts and their instructional decisions (Pajares, 1992). According to Hamre and Pianta (2006), teachers' conceptions about teaching, perceptions about students and about their own roles are particularly salient to the development of instructor-student supportive relationships. This theme constitutes beliefs and conceptions that Saudi instructors share about several issues, including how they view the instructor-student relationship, students, and teaching and learning.

### ***Sub-theme: Conceptions of Instructor-Student Relationship***

A number of instructor-student relationship characteristics such as, mutual respect, balance, formality and boundaries, surfaced in instructors' conversations. Eight out of the 12 instructors described their beliefs about what the relationship with their students should be based on. For example, when instructor Nadia was asked about how to relate to students, the conversation drifted into her describing her own thoughts and perceptions about what the relationship between instructors and students should be like. Nadia emphasizes the importance of two-way communication with students through a respectful, balanced relationship.

*"I actually don't know... but I feel like... when I came back here... when I finished studying abroad... I feel that I started to think differently about what should the relationship between instructors and students be like... Like... here in the past... because we were brought up here... and because of our educational system... we always keep these big boundaries between the instructor and the student... and its fine... it's good to keep this mutual respect and every party knows their limits.. But at the same time... I feel that if we crossed those boundaries just a little bit.. the educational process becomes more flexible... aahh... it's not about flexibility... it's more about reception and transmission... you know... like... the two ends need to come closer to each other... it makes students have more creativity... in the past... I used to think that...noooo... the instructor must be strict and she needs to keep distant... but now... I feel like... it's just that it's important to keep this balance...you know... and I believe that it's bad that students need to think million times before they approach a stiff instructor... so I bet that students would drop the idea... and they would be afraid of that instructor all the time..."* Quote 16, Instructor Nadia, Home Economics.

Instructor Nadia in the above quote is differentiating between traditional formal conceptions of instructor-student interaction practices and her new conceptions of a more balanced relationship that should be practised. Her quote above describes the

traditional power relations between instructors and students that are the cultural norm, while it appears that Nadia's educational experience in a western country, similar to other five instructors in the study, contributed to this transformation of traditional beliefs. Three instructors articulated the traditional formal relationship between instructors and students in the Saudi culture. For instance, instructor Ruby believes that keeping the formalities and clear boundaries are the highlight of the relationship with her students. She declared that she is '*not actually used to being close to them*', which signals the traditional formal instructor-student relationship that she has been exposed to within the cultural context:

*"I like my relationship with students to be formal... the problem with our girls here is that when they see you acting informally with them... they think she would be an easy instructor... and she wouldn't mind if they come to class late... or if they didn't do their tasks... and then they are surprised with the grade... they don't differentiate between commitment and formality... I'm not actually used to being close to them... and I'm more comfortable keeping a distance." Quote 17, Instructor Ruby, Home Economics.*

Four instructors described a more humble and equal relationship characterised by reciprocity, where students exercise respect, so that the instructor provides more support. Ash explained:

*"I feel that the students and instructors should have a close relationship... the instructor should try as much as she can to descend to the student's level... at the same time... there should be a mutual respect.. so that she can sense her status as an instructor... as much as she feels their respect... she descends to their level and gives them more...this is how I think the relationship should be like." Quote 18, Instructor Ash, Administration and Economics.*

In summary, instructors' descriptions constitute positive conceptions of the relationship, and how it should mainly resemble mutual respect, two-way communication, and balance. Although some instructors describe a typical Saudi instructor-student relationship that is mainly characterised by formality and maintaining the instructor's cultural position intact, the majority of those reporting

hold transformed beliefs of a more relaxed relationship. This shift in conception appears to be taking place partly because of instructors' exposure to western teaching traditions during their studies abroad. The coming section explores the instructors' conceptions of their students.

### ***Sub-theme: Conceptions of Students***

This sub-theme is prevalent, with 9 out of the 12 instructors, sharing their views about students' positive and negative characteristics that may be linked to the formation of instructor-student relationships. Positive conceptions include the tendency to be more communicative, and negative characteristics include students' shyness, lack of confidence, and lack of academic competencies, such as commitment and motivation. Two instructors associate students' cultural shyness with hindering the development of their skills. In the following episode, instructor Maryam describes a relational style of a student who is shy and less confident, which may have contributed to this instructor's type of relationship with her students:

*"I had a student in class... She was so shy that she couldn't speak up... then I asked how will you face students when you become a teacher one day... so I believe that... when I work on strengthening their confidence during the semester... I find that the same shy student finally speaks up... and even if her answer is wrong... she doesn't care much any more... this will help her later on in the field." Quote 19, Instructor Maryam, Education.*

According to some instructors, although the conception of Saudi students as shy and apprehensive individuals still exists in university classrooms, several instructors compared today's students with the traditional generations of students. They identified somewhat changed personalities, with some students transformed from passive to becoming more vocal and expressive. Maya explains:

*"Some students now are asking more questions compared to girls from previous generations... I think with the use of technology and internet and all of this... the social effects influenced their culture... they're becoming more personal... they can talk.. they can express... so I think some of them are expressing their*

*thoughts and speaking up better than before.” Quote 20, Instructor Maya, Home Economics.*

Thus, it appears that the digital world that Saudi students are immersed in has contributed to the emerging of a new conception of students. These qualities as described by instructors, appear to be desirable, as they may foster more opportunities for instructor-student interactions in the long run. As for instructor Galiah, she differentiates between the traditional older generation's qualities, marked by conformity, and today's students as being open, responsive and interactive:

*“the teacher is usually the one who tells [laughs] ... we were a little bit shy.. we were a little bit negative... we were recipients to whatever the teacher gives us ...[....] but... today’s students are changing... more open...and a bit demanding... so today’s students are very much different than the way I used to be taught for example.” Quote 21, Instructor Galiah, European Languages.*

The issue of students’ lack of commitment and motivation surfaced in four instructors’ views when they compared today’s students with their traditional counterparts. Instructor Nadia explained:

*“we used to be serious about our education... and more responsible... but today’s students... you feel like they come to university to have fun... for example, when I give them a bonus task... they don’t really care... actually they barely do what they are required to do... and not very well either... in the past.. I remember...when the instructor tells me to bring something... I bring 10 of that thing... not just one... this is not in today’s students.” Quote 22, Instructor Nadia, Home Economics.*

In addition, instructor Ash argued that students’ lack of motivation and interest is due to the fact that they do not have real goals. Therefore, they need the instructor to motivate them and give them reason to study. She adds that their interest in a course depends on the quality of the relationship between students and the instructor who teaches that course.

In summary, this sub-theme shed light on how instructors perceive current Saudi students. While the traditional image of the shy, passive and dependent student remains to some extent, a new image of more communicative and responsive Saudi students emerged. Instructors' explanations for this change is that it is due to students' immersion in the use of digital tools, where they practise voicing their opinions and communicating with the outside world. In addition, some instructors expressed low expectations of students, describing them as less committed and motivated to learn. It appears that instructors' conceptions and expectations of students may be shaped by their interaction with students, therefore, a clear educational contract between the instructor and student is essential in clearing misconceptions and being in agreement on various aspects of their relationship.

### ***Sub-theme: Conceptions about Teaching***

This sub-theme was prevalent across all 12 instructors' responses, where they illustrate their conceptions about teaching and learning, represented through two main concepts: their satisfaction with their profession, and teaching within the Saudi educational system. In terms of instructors' satisfaction with their profession, all 12 instructors shared anecdotes about what is rewarding about teaching from their perspectives. The most prevalent perceived rewards for instructors are students' learning, engagement and communication. For example, instructor Ash, Nadia and Ghadah associate their satisfaction with students' comprehension of the subject matter and positive achievements. Ghadah states:

*“I love teaching very much... Of course I never expected to like teaching but I discovered that I do... and what makes me thrilled is ... when I see a level of student improved by the end of the semester... and it makes me feel bad when I don't see any improvements... because I feel like they didn't benefit from learning all those things... I am always keen to ask them... did you learn something?” Quote 23, Instructor Ghadah, Home Economics.*

Galiah and Nadia expressed their joy at how teaching in the classroom opens the door for communication and learning from students. Also, Raya suggests that

students' engagement and participation is another aspect that seems to contribute to her motivation and increased involvement:

*"what I find motivating about it is when I find students engaged... for example... you know... I always offer them to interact with me ...to communicate with me through social media... there are just a few students that I find motivated enough to like... interact and post something or to reply... seeing that... you know... gives me a sense of fulfilment... and... at least I'm reaching to someone on this level ...[laughs]... if I'm affecting just one person and this person ... you know... in the long run... will remember what I've taught her... or use this knowledge or this skill that I passed down... that's pretty much fulfilling as a teacher... you know."*

*Quote 24, Instructor Raya, European Languages.*

While instructors expressed pleasure in practising their profession, traces of their teaching practices can be extracted from their descriptions. On the one hand, a more open attitude towards teaching can be identified from some instructors' comments including instructor Raya's above comment. She explains how she uses social media tools as a way for her students to learn and communicate. On the other hand, traces of didactic traditional teaching practices can be recognised in some instructors' comments. For instance, while instructor Maryam was describing her classroom rules, her comment drifted to show a view of her lecturing-based teaching when the student's job is apparently to 'listen'. She states:

*'I always tell my students... for example the mobile... if you have an important phone call... don't interrupt my lecture... and don't wait for my permission... because I suppose that she wouldn't leave the class unless its something important... more important than listening to the lecture... because I know that if she stayed she won't actually be listening.'* *Quote 25, Instructor Maryam, Education.*

Another traditional teaching practice appears in instructor Ruby's comment when she explains what she wants her students to achieve:

*'Students do not need to leave the lecture recalling every word I say... the main points are enough... but its disturbing when they leave the class without getting anything I have been saying the last three hours... and I always tell them... you can choose either to focus or not... and you can see this outcome*



*in the exam grades... so I always advise them to please... if its lecture time, try to focus on the lecture... focus all your senses so that it would be easier for you to study later on for the exam... you won't need much time to study.'*

*Quote 26, Instructor Ruby, Home Economics.*

At first glance this comment appears unremarkable and expected from an instructor who is annoyed by students being distracted in class. However, a closer look at the quote indicates an emphasis on 'recalling' or memorising knowledge, and not understanding, which reflects a teacher-centred and transmissive approach. Students in this classroom need to focus on the lecture, so that they can obtain high grades at the end of the semester. This reflects a side of the tight Saudi educational system where the classroom tends to be instructor-oriented and the prominence is given to grades, not 'learning' (Mahrous & Ahmed, 2010).

Although a small window to the didactic pedagogy can be observed in some comments, the majority of the instructors' comments reflect more open-minded and liberal ambitions. This is shown through several instances where features of the rigid educational system, with which instructors are not satisfied, are described. More specifically, five out of the 12 instructors generally complained about the institutional, systematic, decision-making control system, fear of change, relying on teacher-centred approaches and rote learning, and influence on students. Here is instructor Hala describing her struggle with the leadership to change her course curriculum and assessment methods:

*"so you feel like you are between two choices... whether you are an academic at this institution and follow their instructions, which you can hardly break... or struggle to apply the new knowledge that I brought back with me... I tried so hard to change my course from theories... theories and theories... and from written tests to practical projects... this happened after a long struggle between me and the authority because there are many individuals here who fight against this change... It's the fear of the new.. the unknown."* *Quote 27, Instructor Hala, Home Economics.*

In addition, instructors such as Raya started to discuss how this restriction in teaching and learning has contributed to decreased opportunities for interaction with

students. Instructor Raya pointed out how the institutional control left no room for hearing out students, or incorporating their input, which may in turn influence relationships with students:

*“perhaps if we listen to them... listen to what they have to say... we can relate more... but I mean... If we assume that these are the instructions that were given to us and you know... we must apply them all without taking into account what their (students) opinions are and this will make it hard for us to relate ...” Quote 28, Instructor Raya, English Literature.*

Similar to some instances, when she was asked about the reasons behind students’ lack of participation in class, instructor Hala suggests that students are used to a spoon-feeding approach to learning, so they do not have to participate. She explains the underlying reason behind students’ dependency: *“this is also happening because we have very closed-minded syllabus and course plans...” Quote 29, Instructor Hala, Home Economics.* In the same vein, instructor Maya's students are not used to assessment with critical thinking questions:

*“... and I know that my questions are hard... because you know I came back from the west with a different type of evaluation... and they are not used to this kind of evaluation. I use multiple choices and I don’t use open ended questions... I hate rote kind of questions which they adore... and I like analytical and comparison questions...but they are not used to this...” Quote 30, Instructor Maya, Home Economics.*

Thus, these instructors are advocates for change within a traditional educational system where it significantly influences students, pedagogy and instructor-student interaction. This receptiveness to change may be explained by the fact that 6 out of the 12 instructors here have experienced teaching and learning in western countries and brought back positive attitudes towards the student-centred tradition of teaching.

To conclude, this sub-theme gives a snapshot of instructors’ conceptions of teaching within the Saudi educational system. A few instructors’ comments show scenes of a traditional educational system that does not support increased instructor-student interaction, as it focuses on transmissive teaching approaches to ‘listening’ students. However, the majority of instructors’ comments describing the educational system

reflect their transformed practices, which tend to follow more liberal perspectives. Instructors' receptiveness to change in many aspects of teaching and learning makes it possible for new forms of instructor-student communication to be adopted, and in turn increase interaction. The following is an important theme that may contribute to shape the instructor-student relationship.

#### ***4.4.2.1.3 Theme 3: Instructor-Student Interaction and Contextual Constraints***

Considering that instructor-student relationships develop through ongoing interactions between students and instructors, the occurrence of the interactions are at the heart of these relationships. The context in which instructors teach or interact greatly affects the type of relationship that is possible with students. Thus, this theme highlights the context dependency characteristic of the relationship and discusses instructors' reporting of instructor-student interactions in two contexts: classroom interaction, and Outside-the-classroom interactions.

##### ***Sub-theme: Classroom Interactions***

This sub-theme offers a snapshot of the nature of interaction in Saudi university classrooms. When instructors were asked about the extent to which they know their students, only three instructors shared strategies to establish a social connection with students in class. However, the majority of instructors (9 out of 12) reported that it is difficult to learn about, or know their students and identified contextual constraints to instructor-student communication. These contextual constraints to interaction are: students' uncertainty about such interaction, instructors' varying interest, group size and class time.

In a few instances, instructors described their attempt at "getting to know" students. For example, instructor Galiah believes that it is difficult to get to know students unless instructors actually take a step forward and make an extra effort to learn about them. Two other instructors stressed the importance of, at least, memorising students' names in order to motivate students to interact in class. Amira said:

*"But I feel that at least I should memorise their names because I know that when I call a student's name, it makes her happy and*

*encourages her to participate more. I try my best to call students with their names.” Quote 31, Instructor Amira, Sciences.*

Instructor Maryam devoted an activity to begin the process of relationship building with her students on the first day of class where she describes a “getting to know each other” activity she usually arranged. On the other hand, the majority of instructors identified factors that hamper opportunities of instructor-student communication. One factor is students’ uncertainty about communicating and their culturally known ‘shyness’, which emerged in several instances. Instructor Maya explains that although she is down to earth and trying to be close to students, the influence of culture on students being reserved complicates it. As she puts it: *‘we build big walls, some students let you in.. they open up.. but other students... I couldn’t get through... these walls you know...’*. Instructor Raya reflects this notion of students when she was asked whether students would tell a ‘joke’ in class. She explains:

*“no it hasn’t happened before... usually I’m kind of a serious person in the classroom...but... yeah...I do tell funny stories sometimes in the classroom... but most of our students are pretty shy...it’s a cultural thing.. I mean a student wouldn’t tell a joke unless... you know... she is like... I mean... you’ve known her or she is some kind of relative... you know... that... very familiar with you... but... that hasn’t happened before with me...” Quote 32, Instructor Raya. European Languages.*

The idea of loosening the interaction in classes by telling jokes was not encouraged by a number of instructors (5 out of 12), who vocalised their perspectives. For instance, instructor Maryam suggests that class time does not allow other than course-related matters to be discussed. When the researcher asked her how would she react if a student tells a joke in class, she states:

*‘If this happened while I am lecturing...which I suspect it would happen... because its class time... I might laugh ... but then try to warn her... or I would say ‘ok thanks... but please this should not happen again during class time’... if I didn’t comment on this incident... the formality of the lecture will be lost.’ Quote 33, Instructor Maryam, Education.*

Several instances like Maryam's and Raya's comments above show that a social incident, such as sharing a joke never happens in their classes, painting a picture of a

formal class where knowledge time is highly respected by both instructors and students. Thus, the extent of instructors' interest or type of reaction to social interaction in class, establishes the extent and type of interaction allowed to happen in classes. Similarly, instructor Ash described that she adopted a formal communication style to establish a demarcation line and keep the classroom environment serious and respectful. She states:

*"I'm not social in class... I don't like to talk about other things other than the course... I like to keep boundaries...because some students might lose respect and start to make jokes and laugh during the lecture...even me... if I made a mistake in class... I continue without trying to comment on it or laugh about it..."*

*Quote 34, Instructor Ash, Administration and Economics.*

Another constraint to a relaxed instructor-student interaction and learning about students is the usually large group sizes of students in classes and the idea that the only time available for them to interact is class time. This constraint was echoed by six instructors. For instance, instructor Amira's comment implies the limited opportunity she has to connect with her students:

*"I don't know... I think I don't know them... the only way I could know a good student is that when she answers my questions in class... their personalities... no... It's difficult... especially with only three hours a week... and I have to deliver the assigned units and explain the assignments. I barely have time to do what I have to do... to over 30 students... or so' Quote 35, Instructor Amira, Sciences.*

Instructor Ash explains how difficult it is to know students, memorise their names, or even their faces when teaching a large group. Similarly, instructor Ruby emphasises the difficulty of building a close relationship with relatively large groups of students where she only meets them in formal classes:

*'I know some of them... but it takes me about 6 to 7 weeks to know them well... or build an image for them... I barely memorise the names after 7 weeks... it's difficult with 5 sections of students each section with over 40 students.. a total of 250 students... I only see them twice a week... and with these big numbers of students... it's difficult to become close to them.'*

*Quote 36, Instructor Ruby, Home Economics.*

These comments demonstrate an absence of other contexts for instructor-student interaction to take place and show that the classroom is perceived as the only context to communicate with students. However, according to the majority of instructors, the classroom context is an opportunity that welcomes only course-related interaction. Thus, supporting a positive instructor-student relationship demands an expectation of both instructors and students to be there, discuss and argue in a relaxed atmosphere.

In summary, it appears that attempts to strengthen the instructor-student relationship through classroom interaction are limited. This limitation is due to a number of factors that inhibit either formal or informal conversations with students, such as students' uncertainty and reservedness, instructor's interest, group size and class time. As a result there is a lack of incidents that portray the sort of social conversations that occur with students during class time. Instructors consider the classroom as formal territory, where there is little or no room for sociability to exist, and their interactions with students in class appear to be restricted to academic interaction or course-related matters. The classroom interaction appears to exist in the form of directing questions to students, answering students' questions, or lecturing. Considering that the majority of instructors hold a positive position towards promoting instructor-student interaction, and showing care and willingness, the significant hindrance for a relaxed interaction to occur that strengthens their relationship seems to be the absence of other arenas for that interaction.

### ***Sub-theme: Outside-the-Classroom Interactions***

This sub-theme describes the forms and frequency of instructor-student interaction outside-the-classroom. Ten out of 12 instructors articulate receptiveness and a welcoming attitude when it comes to interacting with students and report students' lack of communication with them out of class. Instructors reported that students' cultural shyness and interest may have contributed to the low frequency of outside-the-classroom interactions. A few examples of outside-the-classroom incidents were reported, the form of these interactions being academic interaction, such as advising on specialisation decisions, and unintentional or personal interaction, such as conversations about non-class related issues. It appears that the pattern of instructors interaction differs for in class and outside-the-classroom contexts. More specifically,

it appears that most instructors show a more casual attitude towards students when they meet outside-the-classroom walls. For example, Nadia was asked about her reactions when she accidentally sees her students around campus. She explains:

*“It’s normal to greet them... even if outside campus... I do greet them... in university... I normally greet them and usually...you feel students’ effort to show a respect signal... I think there is no harm in that as long as the student didn’t start to lose politeness and respect... you know... but outside campus...I think as long as she is outside campus... I would probably interact with her in a more natural and informal manner... you know.. when we are in the classroom is different than when we are outside the classroom.” Quote 37, Instructor Nadia, Home Economics.*

According to the instructors' reporting, several complained about the uncommunicative nature of students and the difficulty of encouraging them to ask questions outside-the-classroom due to their conservative nature. Maya stated:

*“...these are the types of questions that I get asked about usually after class... otherwise... girls are shy... I am the one who always try to drag them you know [laughs].. I try to get them talk about the course... their feelings or anything else... but... it’s just them.. and I always tell them in class.. my door is open.. don’t be shy... and by the way I don’t bite... I am always waiting for people to show up at my door.. but no body comes.” Quote 38, Instructor Maya, Home Economics.*

Instructors explained that most students’ outside-the-classroom visits involved academic conversation. For example, some students approach instructors asking for advice in deciding their specialisation, explaining some concepts in previous lectures, or asking about their grades. In addition, the majority of instructors express a welcoming attitude, while a few articulate their happiness to meet students out of class, which contributes to strengthening the instructor-student relationship that they have with those students. For example, instructor Galiah describes how she perceives the unintentional interaction she had with a former student in a cafeteria:

*“I do remember that one day I was having breakfast in the cafeteria at the faculty of science... and I was sitting with a friend of mine... and all of a sudden an ex-student... I taught her a long*

*long time ago... she came and she kissed me and she said don't you remember me? to be honest ... [laughs]... I am not good at remembering names... so I wasn't able to remember her name but I remembered the face...and... oh....it was reaaaaally a waaarm welcome and warm feeling because she remembers me and she remembers my name as well... so yes... I'm very keen on keeping like...a very warm social relationship with them. "Quote 39, Instructor Galiah, European Languages.*

Such informal incidents outside-the-classroom did not occur with many of the instructors. Similarly, instructor Ash was delighted when she incidentally met a student of hers at a wedding ceremony. This incident with the student seemed to have contributed to a more supportive instructor-student relationship. She describes the incident:

*"I met one of my students at a wedding [laughs]... she approached me first ...she greeted me... and sat down with me... and we talked... I remember asking her about how she came to this wedding... and whether she knows the bride or the groom... and I mentioned that I didn't notice her... and she directly said... I saw you when you first entered the hall... [laughs]... thank god I wasn't dancing [laughs]...and then she left... yeah... so I introduced her to my mom and sisters... and she was over the moon... I felt like she was going to cry from happiness [laugh]... she was a bit shy but happy I could see that... I asked her about her family... honestly, I felt it was a very nice incident... you know... But for me... I wasn't embarrassed or something like that... on the contrary... it was a nice memory... I told my mother...here's one of my girls [laughs]..." Quote 40, Instructor Ash, Administration and Economics*

Although limited in nature and forms, outside-the-classroom interactions appear to leave positive imprints in instructors' memories, and as a result, can shape a more positive instructor-student relationship. Instructors who encountered such unintentional or personal incidents outside campus reported more positive feelings towards students. Even though instructors rarely reported any interaction initiated by



them, they believe that students' shyness and lack of interests or visits to instructors are the main reasons for the lack of outside-the-classroom interaction.

#### ***4.4.2.1.4 Summary of Instructors' Views***

Generally, the overarching conclusion that stems from instructors' interviews suggests that a formal balanced instructor-student relationship exists. Saudi instructors offer a mixture of positive qualities and rules that they believe make the educational environment and their instructor-student relationship as 'they' and their students aspire to be. Instructors illustrate the ways in which they perceive themselves as highly approachable, caring and exerting an acceptable control to balance the relationship. Instructors shared their conceptions of the relationship, beliefs about teaching and the Saudi educational system, as well as conceptions of their students. The reporting suggests an open attitude towards interacting with students inside and outside-the-classroom. However, instructors highlighted a number of factors that appear to hamper more frequent contact with students, such as the limited arena available for two-way communication to happen and as well as students' cultural reservedness. In an educational system where class time does not allow instructors ambitious and latent positive qualities to come to light, and small group seminars or classes are not the norm, the process of building instructor-student relationships may be slowed down. The following section discusses narratives from the other side of the instructor-student relationship equation, students.

#### ***4.4.2.2 Results of Students' Focus Groups***

Results from students' focus groups uncover three major themes describing and shaping the quality of instructor-student relationships: 1) Affective dimension, which describes concepts like Care, Encouragement, and Instructor's Communication Style; 2) Support dimension, which illustrates the sub-themes Approachability, Exercising Authority, and Formality; 3) Instructor-Student Interaction and Contextual Constraints, which discusses Classroom Interaction and Outside-the-Classroom Interactions. Figure 4-10 shows the resulting themes, and Table 4-15 shows the final themes, sub-themes and codes of students' perceptions of the instructor-student relationship.

Theme	Subtheme	Codes
Affective	Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal care and understanding students' difficult circumstances</li> <li>• Flexibility in negotiating issues such as extending assignment deadlines</li> <li>• Nurturing students' characters by trust.</li> </ul>
	Communication Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reported communication style: displeased, friendly and convivial.</li> <li>• Instructors' negative or positive mood and students' perception of the instructor</li> </ul>
	Encouragement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructors' enthusiasm, motivation and mutuality.</li> <li>• Praising and encouraging students.</li> </ul>
Support	Approachability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being responsive to students' questions</li> <li>• Being easy to access</li> <li>• Showing welcoming attitude</li> <li>• Being interested in the subject matter.</li> </ul>
	Exercising Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displaying no regard for students' opinions</li> <li>• Formal ways of addressing instructors</li> <li>• Obedience-oriented approaches.</li> </ul>
	Formality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closeness or too much 'informality as inappropriate.</li> <li>• Relationship as a balancing act</li> <li>• Keeping boundaries for a culturally proper instructor-student relationship.</li> </ul>
Instructor-Student Interaction and Contextual Constraints	Classroom Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual vs. group instructors'</li> <li>• Teaching practices</li> <li>• Lack of student interaction</li> <li>• Instructors' interpersonal behaviour</li> </ul>
	Out-of-Class Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of out of class interaction</li> <li>• instructor's interpersonal behaviour in class</li> <li>• The extent of instructor's welcoming attitude</li> <li>• Knowing students' names</li> <li>• Perceived availability of instructor's time.</li> <li>• Forms of out of class interaction: academic interaction, and personal interaction.</li> </ul>

Table 4-15 Final themes and codes of students' perceptions of the instructor-student relationship

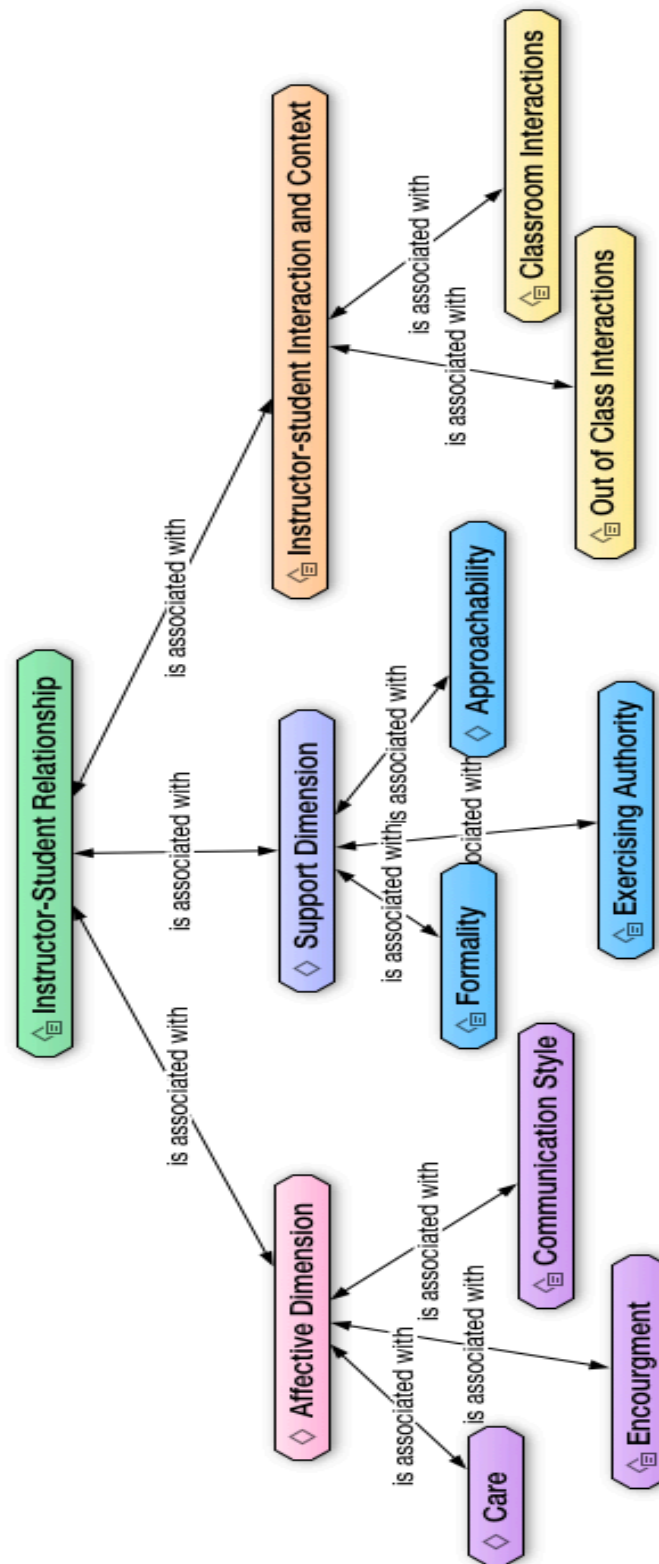


Figure 4-9 Final themes, sub-themes and codes based on students' perceptions of the relationship

#### **4.4.2.2.1 Theme 1: Affective Dimension**

The affective dimension describes students' perceptions of the emotional connection built between them and their instructors that shapes the basis for their relationships. Students' perceptions of instructor-student relationships in relation to the affective dimension constitute the following sub-themes: Instructors' Care, Encouragement, and Communication Style. The following section demonstrates students' perspectives of instructors' care towards them.

##### ***Sub-theme: Care***

From students' perspectives, this sub-theme illustrates the extent to which Saudi instructors exercise a caring attitude towards students. Codes in this sub-theme are ideal personal care and understanding students' difficult circumstances, nurturing students' characters in the form of trust, and flexibility in negotiating issues, such as extending assignment deadlines. While students have differing views when it comes to the extent of instructors' care displayed towards them, students from all faculties are in agreement regarding the significance of a caring instructor as a basis of their relationships with instructors. Although a few examples of caring instructors surfaced within the five focus groups of students, the majority of students complained about instructors' lack of consideration they had witnessed.

Several students describe what they are seeking for in an instructor, but they are not seeing in reality. Here is a student from the Arts department describing an 'ideal' example of the affective-based caring instructor who shows personal care for individual students:

*"She would be one of my favourite teachers... she puts herself in our shoes... she always imagines as if she was the one who is married with kids just like me.. and that she has other responsibilities at home.. so she considers me... she talks with me about what concerns me... to the extent that I feel like she really cares about me." FG5-S3*

Similarly, Psychology major students complained about the lack of instructors'

understanding, as many Saudi girls have heavy responsibilities. Students believe that instructors are expected to understand, and make an effort to deal with students' problems with empathy and patience. Here is a Psychology student's response when the group was asked about important qualities they look to in instructors:

*"first thing... and the most important thing is that she should be considerate and understanding of our circumstances... we are not boys... some of us are married... some of us have kids... sometimes we get sick or tired... sometimes I get sick but I don't go to the hospital... so she (the instructor) shouldn't ask me for a medical report to excuse me... I get confiscated from taking the course or lose marks for attendance or something like that... [...] ...so the most important thing that should be in our instructors is that to be understanding... I wish they could apply the prophet hadith which says that: "facilitate and don't obstruct.""* FG3-S5

In addition, 'trust' seemed to play a major role in altering how the student weighs up the instructor. Several students reported the importance of feeling trusted by instructors. A student from the Business major explained an incident when she missed an exam, because she was accompanying her father to the hospital. This is what her instructor said when she talked with her 'individually':

*"on the contrary... she said "don't bring any report... and any time you need to be absent or cannot come... I am sure its because of your father... I believe you" ...I felt so happy because I am trusted... amazing feeling... I saw the trust.. while that other lecturer... I didn't see any trust in her eyes... she didn't believe me... she is cruel... I hope I never take any course with her again."* FG2-S6

Another student from Child Studies describes a trusting instructor, when her caring reaction in a one-to-one meeting made the student view her as a mother:

*"When I told Dr. [name] that I couldn't attend the lecture last week because there was a death in the family... she didn't ask me for any report... and she counted me as not absent...as if I attended the class... she knows from my face expressions that someone close to me passed away... so she didn't need to look at*

*any certificate...because she trusted me... it felt like she was my mother at that moment.”FG1-S5*

In several instances, students from all faculties reported the inflexibility of instructors, especially over issues like extending assignment deadlines. Some students explain the consequences of submitting their work late, despite their efforts to explain their circumstances to their instructors. A student from Arts explains:

*“I deliberately miss the class so that I don’t have to face the instructor... she would say: what do you want me to do? I can’t help you... and then I lose marks because I couldn’t bring the painting on the date... she could have helped...I asked her to give me two days to find somebody from my family who lives in another city to come and get me the requirements from the bookstore... she refused...she always does.” FG5-S3*

A number of Business students were also threatened by their less caring instructors with losing grades:

*“we asked to extend the deadline by email... she just ignored it... she never commented on it... the next morning she said the submission is today and whoever doesn’t submit will lose marks.” FG2-S2*

Overall, almost all students felt that instructors caring for them is an important quality. Students addressed the need for understanding from their instructors, both personally and academically, such as understanding difficult circumstances, the flexibility in extending assignment deadlines, and showing care by trusting students. These concepts were regarded as important features of a positive instructor-student relationship. Examining students’ comments, it could be argued that mutual understanding appears to exist in one-to-one private conversations, while showing this level of understanding in class appears to be limited between instructors and students. Thus, although a few students’ anecdotes about the caring and understanding of instructors surfaced, the majority of students painted a less empathic picture of the Saudi instructor.

### ***Sub-theme: Encouragement***

One of the concepts that can support instructor-student relationships, and was stressed by students across faculties, is instructors' enthusiasm, motivation, and encouragement of students in the forms of receiving praise in class, recalling of a student's name, and increasing students' self-esteem through praising their work. While several Business students suggest that there is a lack of motivation and encouragement from the faculty's instructors, the majority of students from Art, Psychology and Child Studies articulated positive episodes of instructors, who motivated them to attend lectures, learn and achieve high grades. Here is a student from Child Studies describing an enthusiastic instructor and how her different motivational approaches paid off, making students like her course:

*"there is this instructor who is very positive... for example... she used to say... I know you are excellent students... and the class was an hour and a half.. when half the time passes... she would say... lets stand up and do something active... move it... I know you can't sit down for long.. and when we finish a concept... she would say let's review together this idea... you feel like she makes you love the subject... even if you weren't really into it... you try to review with the girls... I feel embarrassed if I did come to class and didn't study... she deserves my full attention and energy... because she does a lot for us... and she does what we want."*

*FG1-S2*

Instructors' motivational personality traits appear to contribute to students' motivation. Here are two Psychology students talking about an encouraging instructor who constructs difficult exam questions:

*"S1: but the exams are hard... [laughs]*

*S4: No problem with me... as long as she is nice with me... I actually love to study for her exams even though I don't get very good grades... but she keeps encouraging me to do better every time I talk with her."* *FG3-S4 and S1*

Some Psychology students describe how the instructor's "situation-specific motivation" made their day when she mentioned their names in class. These encouragement incidents appear to leave positive imprints that may shape a fruitful

relationship. Similarly, An Art student explains how the instructor's praise and encouraging words became a relational turning point for her that changed the student's conception about the relationship and the course:

*"... Dr. [name]... who really did change my feelings about the class... actually... my relationship with her has changed since that incident in class...she once said you are already teachers of your work of art.. she used to call me teacher [student name] ...[laughs]... it really cheers me up... I mean just thinking about the idea... I used to feel that I am here a student who doesn't know much about the course... but she makes me feel that I am much more than that... which was a very positive thing in her." FG5-S3*

On the other hand, in several instances, Business students commented on instructors' lack of motivation, interpreted by students to be seen when the instructor lectures while sitting, which in turn influences students' feelings about the course. In other words, it appears that students used a 'sitting in the lecture' attitude as a signal of discouragement. A Business student explains:

*"I hate it when the instructor sits down while lecturing... almost 1 in 5 instructors do sit down in our college... it doesn't make me feel engaged or that she is motivated to teach us... on the contrary." FG2-S4*

In summary, a reciprocal association is evident between instructor and student behaviour when it comes to encouragement and motivation. Instructor involvement and sense of encouragement fostered students' engagement with the course, and that engagement, in turn, led students to perceive a more positive instructor-student relationship. Effortless forms of instructor encouragement perceived favourably by students are receiving praise in class, instructor's recall of a student's name, and increasing students' self-esteem through praising their work. Other students' views portray less encouraging instructors and this discouragement stemming from instructors' teaching approaches (i.e. sitting).



### ***Sub-theme: Communication Style***

Instructors' communication styles in class was one of the recurrent concepts that most students referred to when describing their instructor-student relationship. The most reported instructors' communication styles mentioned by some students from across different faculties, were being displeased, neutral, and having a convivial or friendly quality. Less friendly communication styles were more commonly reported by students, but some Psychology and Child Studies students highlighted episodes of instructors' friendliness and conviviality.

Business students highlighted a more negative picture of instructors' styles compared to students from the other faculties. Here is a Business student describing how the instructor's negative mood and style of communication influenced their focus and feelings:

*"It really irritates me when the instructor comes very angry to class... because it really affects the class and our concentration... it's not my fault... she yells at us with no reason... it happens a lot here..." FG2-S3*

Here is another Business student who commented on the irritation that their instructors bring to the classroom:

*"I believe that instructors could leave home problems at home... and try to absorb the anger... so if she is dissatisfied she could try to control that and not to show it in class because we didn't do anything wrong..." FG4-S4*

Instances of a negative communication style appeared in Art students' comments when the researcher asked them to describe the best or 'ideal' class or lecture from their perspectives:

*"S2: first thing is the instructor...she shouldn't be dissatisfied or displeased..*

*All: [laugh]*

*S2: seriously, most of our faculty's instructors are like that and this is influencing us negatively... we become stressed most of the time. And now I am not fond of most of them." FG5-S2*

It is evident from the above-mentioned instances that instructors' communication

styles contribute to students' perceptions of instructors, which in turn may influence the quality of instructor-student relationships. Also, the significance of instructors' communication styles appears clearly in Psychology students' discussions, where a number of positive episodes arose. Here is an example from a Psychology student:

*“Dr. [name]... she is amazing... do you know the feeling when you see somebody and you feel happiness... literally...[....] I never saw her annoyed or not in the mood... I learned from her how to be optimistic... she always says that she is cheerful.. and she IS very cheerful...when she talks to me... I feel like there is a touch of care and kindness... I like her very much...” FG3-S5*

A friendly or convivial instructor attitude towards students made students “like” her, which in turn helps maintain a positive relationship. To conclude, this sub-theme suggests that an instructor's communication style is an essential quality that supports a positive instructor-student relationship from the students' perspective. In highlighting their views, the majority of students complained about the displeased style of their instructors, while some students articulated fewer complaints, as they illustrated positive examples of affable instructors within their faculty. It could be argued that the formality and pressure of limited class time, as described by instructors in Section 4.3.1.4.1, may necessitate seriousness from instructors in the classroom, which is perceived by most students as less friendly. In the following section, the second major theme describing instructor-student relationships from the students' viewpoints is discussed.

#### ***4.4.2.2.2 Theme 2: The Support Dimension***

This theme illustrates students' perspectives on the extent to which instructors offer the support, assistance and guidance for students' positive achievement through instructor-student relationships. According to students' perceptions, this theme can be understood through highlighting the following sub-themes: Approachability, Exercising Authority, and Formality.

##### ***Sub-theme: Approachability***

This sub-theme is one of the most prevalent across all student focus groups. It describes the characteristics of the approachable Saudi instructor and preference for

communication from the students' perspective. The characteristics of the approachable instructor include being responsive to students' questions and concerns, accessible by offering working communication channels, and showing a welcoming attitude. All students from the different faculties indicate that communication channels offered by their instructors include only face-to-face visits during office hours, and email. As reported by students, the majority of instructors do not give students their phone numbers.

Students from Child studies reported several episodes about remote instructors, explaining that the majority of instructors either do not reply to emails or they reply late. Other students describe that the most important quality when it comes to being an ideal instructor is responsiveness. While a few instances from Business students report instructors' prompt replies to their emails, Child studies' students complain most about instructor's inaccessibility and remoteness:

*"S1: most of our instructors...they would give you their emails...but they probably don't check them..*

*S2: Yes... I think they just put an email there just like that.. so she could say I gave them a way of contact...but she doesn't actually check it." FG1-S1 and S2*

A Child studies student explains her struggle when attempting with no luck to access her instructor through email:

*"I didn't have the instructor's phone number... and I was home... in desperate need to ask her some questions about the assignment I have to submit in less than a week... so I sent an email... but she never replied... I was frustrated." FG1-S2*

When students were asked about their preference when it comes to contacting the instructor, even though they are struggling with email as a communication channel, the majority of students prefer to use communication technologies and they prefer emails rather than face-to-face visits. A Psychology student explains:

*"if instructors were fast in replying to emails... I don't think I would need to ask them anything in office hours... that would be great actually." FG3- S4*

Although some students in Business and Art prefer to communicate with instructors during office hours, approaching an instructor is not described as a spontaneous

event. They explained that they prefer a face-to-face meeting, because they fear that instructors provide short answers via emails, or instructors might not understand clearly their questions in text. In addition, students agree that they would approach an instructor for help-seeking purposes in office hours if they knew that she would be welcoming. A student from Child Studies states:

*“it depends on her... some instructors are very welcoming and easy to approach... you know... smiling and stuff... others are intimidating...” FG1- S5*

Similarly, Psychology students also echoed the importance of an instructor’s welcoming attitude and positive in-class behaviour:

*“it depends on the instructor's personality... if she is very stiff in class... no way I go and ask her... but if she was kind and welcoming... I would go...” FG3-S6*

Several Business students prefer to seek help by asking their friends instead of asking the instructor in office hours, because they are either culturally shy, do not want to appear “stupid”, or fear that they might be “bothering instructors”. A Business student explains:

*“I always go ask my friends first... because I feel relaxed talking with them.. I can freely ask.. but I feel shy when I ask the instructor to explain something again that I didn’t get or something... but my friend would accept and repeat the explanation over and over again and I don’t feel embarrassed... but I never think to go to instructors who didn’t encourage us to come and ask.” FG4-S6*

While the majority of students perceive Saudi instructors to be less approachable, Saudi instructors may not necessarily be unapproachable in reality. Rather, it may be the lack of offered communication channels that portrays them as unapproachable. In addition, it could be argued that students’ form perspectives of instructors in relation to their accessibility, and are based on instructors’ in-class behaviour. To conclude, instructors are described as approachable when they support students progression in their studies by answering students’ questions promptly, offering working communication channels, and displaying a warm and welcoming attitude. Although the majority of students prefer a mediated communication channel, such as email over face-to-face contact, their instructors offer limited communication channels,

and they appear to be less approachable via email. Thus, proper adoption of forms of mediated communication by instructors might fill the gap of instructor-student communication.

***Sub-theme: Exercising Authority***

This sub-theme illustrates the level of control employed by Saudi instructors and how students perceive the existence of control in relation to their instructor-student relationship. This concept is prevalent in descriptions by students from all faculties, where they report different forms of power exercised by instructors, such as displaying no regard for students' opinions, formal ways of addressing instructors, and obedience-oriented approaches. The majority of students perceived a high degree of using power in the classroom. Students described the existence of the authoritarian voice in the classroom as the norm, but it can be a 'barrier' to instructor-student communication. A Psychology student illustrates authoritative instructors' ways of voicing their power to students:

*"she treats us as ... I am a doctor and you are a student in my class... and when you want to speak to me... you have to think carefully and articulate precisely what you are going to say to me ... and even before you actually approach me... you know... some instructors are just like that... she treats us from a higher level... you know..." FG3-S3*

One of the features of the authoritarian instructors that students complain about the most is excluding their voices in learning matters. According to students, their opinions are rarely considered in relation to several aspects of their learning, such as class structure, project ideas, grades and deadlines. Here is the experience of a Business student when she thought about discussing her grade with the instructor:

*"even when I want to ask about my grade or to have a look at my exam paper.. you feel like it's impossible that you can do that.. I actually heard from a group of students who did go and ask the instructor about their grades.. she said this is your grade.. whether you like it or not.. there is no negotiation... it's your final grade... you like it or not." FG2-S1*

A Business student described her experience in a previous course where the instructor voiced the 'no-negotiation policy' in her classroom rules:

*"[..]... "and my say is the final word here... you do what I say"..  
and there are several rules and there is no way we could  
negotiate anything with her." FG4-S4*

Addressing instructors formally was also highlighted by students from all the faculties as a necessary and respectful act they should maintain. The following are part of Psychology students' comments about an incident of an instructor reprimanding a student for not addressing her appropriately:

*"S3: the instructor shouted at a student saying: "you should  
address me with 'your honour'.. not just 'you'.  
S2: I think that's just too much...but she (the instructor) has the  
right to be addressed properly ... Dr. or Mrs... but maybe the  
student was disrespectful somehow..." FG3-S3*

Although several instances reveal that a respectful way of addressing instructors is culturally required from students, adding the control factor to it illustrates how culture and power work to define instructor-student relationships. The previous exchanges between the student and the instructor are certainly promoting a more formal instructor-student interaction and in turn building a high power differential in the instructor-student relationship. Although the majority of students appear to be habituated to such a form of interaction, based on their reaction to the incidents, some students voiced their dissatisfaction, especially in terms of having a 'say' in their learning. It could be argued that instances of exerting power and authority appear to decrease opportunities for more relaxed instructor-student interaction to occur. The obedience-oriented approaches, which are exercised in Saudi primary and secondary schools, seem also to exist in Saudi higher education according to several students' comments. Here is a Child Studies student describing one form of the orders an instructor demanded:

*"there is this instructor who doesn't let us leave class after the  
lecture even if we finish early... because... she claims that these  
are the rules... are we in a school? what is this supposed to  
mean?" FG1-S6*

At first glance, the instructors' authoritarian style reflects the norm of the Saudi

instructor's style, exercised for many years within the Saudi educational system, where students appear to have acted in accordance with it for decades. While students appear to be used to respecting their instructors in terms of using formal address, and conforming to their orders, the majority of students express annoyance about forms of this authority, especially when it excludes their opinions on their learning. If most instructor interactions with students are of the authoritarian type, the result will be a classroom with virtually no interaction, as instructors are 'boss managers' and the students find it difficult to participate. This authoritarian style establishes no expectations for students to come into a learning space to argue and make their voices heard. However, exercising authority and showing care must go hand in hand if there is to be a positive teacher-student relationship. In the following sub-theme, Saudi students describe instructors who knew how to exercise acceptable authority properly.

### ***Sub-theme: Formality***

The features that constitute a positive instructor-student relationship may differ from one cultural context to another. In some learning environments it can entail being somewhat relaxed and informal. In other environments it can mean just the opposite. The preferred style may inevitably affect how both instructors and students define their relationships with one another. This sub-theme was frequently echoed by students from all focus groups, where they discussed how they perceive the formality in the instructor-student interactions that eventually shape their relationships. Concepts negotiated in this sub-theme are: closeness, or too much informality as 'inappropriate'; relationship as a balancing act; and keeping boundaries for a culturally proper instructor-student relationship.

All students perceived instructors' formality as a necessary feature in instructor-student relationships. Here is a Psychology student who was surprised by an intimate interaction between a Teaching Assistant (TA) and a student. She explains:

*"when it comes to (TAs) relationship with students... they take out the formality in interaction... which I think is something not really good... once I saw a student talking with a TA and I didn't recognise that she was a TA because they were talking in a very*

*intimate ways outside her office...laughing and stuff like that... ”*

*FG3-S3*

In a number of instances, it could be inferred that Saudi students believe that it is not an appropriate cultural image of the instructor to be too informal with and ‘close’ to students. Another Psychology student explains how addressing the instructor informally is not appropriate:

*“S1: yes... once my classmate called the TA’s with her short name !!!.. this is not right... sorry...”*

*S2: yeah... I feel like this is wrong...” FG3-S1 and S2*

It appears that the Saudi classroom teaching practices coupled with the culture of communication adopted have already established the image the students have of their instructor. Consequently, it appears that this image guides the students’ communications with their instructors. The majority of students are in favour of the ‘balancing act’ when it comes to instructors’ degree of formality. For example, a Business student describes her preference when it comes to an instructor’s personality, and suggests that instructors should act according to the image instilled in students’ mindsets:

*“I like the instructor who enforces her personality... and I like the balanced personality.. not too informal and not too formal... she has to impose herself over students... this is her right... when she stands in the classroom... I do respect such presence.. a few instructors pretend to be close to students... I don’t like that... I feel like the instructor loses her prestige and the way we view her...” FG4- S4*

It could be argued that the cultural image of instructors that students nurture, along with Saudi students’ claimed traits such as shyness, and showing respect to older individuals and more knowledgeable people, make it a challenge for students to communicate with an “informal instructor”. Here is an Art student illustrating her preference when it comes to her relationship with the instructor:

*“I like the relationship to be like... a student and her instructor... nothing more... I like a formal relationship where there are boundaries... I can't imagine to have a more... you know.. talking more with her..? I am a very shy student... I can't interact much with the instructor...” FG5-S3*



The researcher asked students about everyday conversations in class and whether it is possible to comment on an instructor's appearance. Interestingly, most students believe that they should keep a formal relationship with the instructor. Here are comments from Psychology students:

*"S3: I feel shy to say something like 'you look nice today'.. I would tell my classmate or my friend sitting next to me [laughs]*

*S6: I think we are not close enough to be able to say that to her... she is MY INSTRUCTOR after all..*

*S5: from my experience... I feel like the more you are formal with the instructor the more she appreciates you..." FG3- S3, S6 and S5*

The issue of boundaries and balance was stressed in several instances by students, as they believe that being a 'friend' or showing too much informality is a strange or weird act. It can be inferred from students' reactions that they might be anxious of an instructor's reaction to such informality, because they are not used to this 'closeness'.

Overall, this sub-theme indicates that instructor-student relationships in Saudi higher education, particularly regarding 'closeness' or 'informality', can be perceived by students as a balancing act. Students suggest that both instructors and students should be mindful of boundaries in order to maintain a positive and culturally proper instructor-student relationship. It could be argued that the image of the formal authoritarian instructor instilled in students' minds is not easy to change. It appears that students' uncertainty avoidance can make having to interact with an 'informal' instructor intimidating. It could be argued that students may have found interacting with an 'informal' instructor strange, because they have rarely been exposed to such an instructor. Having said that, this does not imply that Saudi instructors are unfriendly; however, opportunities for students and instructors to act outside of their formal roles appears to have rarely happened. Thus, students feel comfortable exercising a balanced formality in their relationships with instructors. An important theme, Instructor-Student Interaction and Contextual Constraints is discussed in the following section.

#### **4.4.2.2.3 Theme 3: Instructor-Student Interaction and Contextual Constraints**

This theme highlights an important characteristic of instructor-student relationships: ‘context-dependency’. Interestingly, it appears from students’ comments that the form of instructor-student interaction varies not only between contexts but also within the same instructor in different contexts. According to students, instructors’ communication styles and teaching approaches with small groups of students are immensely different compared to a large group in a lecture hall. In addition, it appears that instructors communicate differently with students as a group compared to their interaction style with individual students. From students’ perspective, within this theme interactions in two different contexts are discussed in relation to the relationship: Classroom Interaction and Outside-the-Classroom Interactions.

##### ***Sub-theme: Classroom Interactions***

This sub-theme describes students’ perceptions of instructor-student interaction in a classroom context. The majority of students indicate that their interaction with instructors appears to be shaped or constrained by group size, instructor’s teaching approach, uncertainty to participate, and instructor interpersonal behaviour. In terms of the frequency of those interactions, all students are in agreement on the lack of interaction opportunities with instructors as they deliver a lecture to a large group of students. Here is a Business student who describes the difference of the instructor’s interaction style with a smaller group, compared to a large group of students:

*“I noticed something in her class... because I was in a small class and I saw how she gives us time to ask and she responded to us... I asked her that day if I could do the test with the other group of students doing the test in the early morning because I had to leave early that day... she said ok... so I went to her other class... it was a much larger group of students... I noticed something very strange... the instructor was a bit different with them... she didn’t interact with the students... there were no communication of any kind...it was like she was another person...” FG4-S3*

In addition, students discuss the instructor teaching approach and how it controls their chances to interact. A Psychology student explains how the group size contributes to an instructor's teaching practice and in turn, opportunities for communication:

*"I think the communication becomes better based on the number of people in the class... when we specialise... classes decrease in numbers.. in the first couple of years... one class is about 70... 80 students... so she just says what she has to deliver and leaves... because it would be so much pressure for the instructor to be there with every students' needs in such a large class like this... so there is not enough time to do so..." FG3-S3*

This illustrates the idea that teaching a large group of students entails knowledge transmission, and hardly any interaction with the audience, while small groups of students enable some sort of interaction to occur. It is noteworthy that students attend classes with smaller group of students in the third year and above in this institution. Furthermore, many students express their dissatisfaction when it comes to instructors' teacher-centred practices, which leave no room for active participation. Saudi didactic instructors who are unintentionally denying opportunities for interaction, appear to exist across students' faculties. A Business student explains how the instructor's teaching style promotes demotivation :

*"because the instructor uses ...narratives... she just sounded very boring... even when she tells stories... she tells them with a very cold style... makes me want to sleep... I don't feel like I am living the story... she doesn't change the tone... every lecture it's the same... she doesn't ask questions... it doesn't engage me..." FG4-S3*

Here a Psychology student describes their passive role in a teacher-centred class:

*"there is something I don't really like in some instructors' teaching style... which is the narratives... for example she tells the whole time... so I would definitely daydream and get distracted... and some students may not understand what she is saying... so they get lost by the end.. so I feel there should be something that catches my attention and really focus on what she*

*is saying... the other thing that might help me focus... is using YouTube videos... pictures... for example... something new... so she encourages us to be with her... not just lecture us... we should think not just listen.” FG3-S1*

Students’ comments are painting a picture of the teaching ecology adopted by their instructors, which is mainly focused on delivering textbook knowledge in classes. There are no hints about any formal expectation for students to gather in a space, such as weekly small group seminars, to argue and discuss. The only communication opportunity available is represented by meeting in formal classes, where the most commonly used teacher-centred approach minimizes occurrences of instructor-student interaction. In other words, the frequency of interactions is important, as it might be difficult to establish positive relationships when interactions rarely occur. Students are eager to engage in class with more student-centred approaches and they are calling for using technology to draw them to classes.

On the other hand, a few examples are reported by Business and Psychology students about instructors who are apparently seeking to change traditional teaching practices. According to students, these instructors use a number of active learning methods that support interaction in the classroom (e.g., discussions, group work) and it is very well received by students. Business students comment:

*“S4: yes... so she asks us to watch the video so that we could discuss it at the next class..*

*S2: it was a great activity... I liked it very much because I felt I was doing something other than what we usually do in class... sleep [laughs].” FG4-S4 and S2*

When the researcher asked students about whether they would be able to ask questions or voice conflicting opinions as a way of participating in class, students reported different perceptions. Some students acknowledge the fact that there are some instructors who encourage them to participate and are very receptive and welcoming. However, the majority of students leaned towards the opinion to “not participate”, either because of apprehensiveness about making mistakes, being intimidated by the instructor, or for cultural reservedness. Several students from all faculties agree that they use specific communication strategies if they choose to communicate with the instructor in class. These strategies are employed by students

to avoid challenging the instructor and stimulating her anger and out of respect for the role of instructor. Psychology and Art students' comments illustrate this idea:

*"I would ask... but with conditions... I try to be polite... and I try to choose the words carefully... to save her face as an instructor... in front of the other students..." FG3-S1*

*"Yes... so she doesn't get mad thinking I'm disrespectful... I think because there is this ancient idea that a student takes his education from the instructor..." FG3-S5*

In addition, instructor's interpersonal behaviour appears to play a role when it comes to Saudi students' tendency to interact. An Art student echoed this reluctance and the difficult decision of asking the instructor in class:

*'no... it depends on the question... I don't ask any question that comes to my mind...and not every instructor... her style... how she treats students... sometimes the instructor thinks that I am challenging her knowledge or I have other intentions other than just wanting an answer...' FG5-S4*

Some students articulated that they usually attempt to seek help from friends to avoid asking an instructor. The culturally instilled notion of the instructor as a role model, who should be fully respected by students, still exists. As a result, students comply, and according to several comments, this is one of the factors influencing their decision of whether to participate or voice their opinions in class.

Furthermore, students had conflicting opinions about whether they would be able to interact with the instructor socially in class by making a joke for example.

Although a few students reported that they could make a joke in class if they believe the instructor is receptive of social conversations, the majority of students indicate that it is generally inappropriate. A Business student explains:

*"I think class time is class time... anyone who tries to make jokes is not smart enough... because its not right to be funny during class." FG4-S3*

The majority of students reported that making a joke in class is not a straightforward act and it depends on two factors: the instructor's interpersonal behaviour, and the time of the act (during lecturing, at the end of class).

*"it depends on the instructor...I think some accept the joke depending on the situation.. if she was lecturing... she would*

*shout at the student... but if it was a break or the end of class... I think it would be fine...” FG2-S4*

It appears that a social conversation or telling a joke can only take place outside the lecturing time. According to their comments, the majority of students have not experienced telling a funny story or making a sarcastic joke in class, which signals a formality that is usually kept and respected.

In summary, several contextual constraints to classroom interactions surfaced from students' reporting, such as the group size, teaching practices, and students' uncertainty about participation, or instructor's interpersonal behaviour. It could be argued that the traditional educational system in Saudi, with its long history of applying knowledge transmission in class, as well as obedience oriented approaches used by instructors, appears to be the underlying reason for the lack of instructor-student classroom interaction. The formal class time does not facilitate interaction on a one-to-one basis, or allow relaxed conversations, where both instructors and students can converse, not from within instructor or student formal roles, but at a social level.

### ***Sub-theme: Outside-the-Classroom Interactions***

This sub-theme demonstrates students' perceptions of the extent of their interactions with instructors outside-the-classroom. The majority of students from all faculties indicate that their outside-the-classroom interaction is not frequent and their tendency to interact with instructors outside-the-classroom is shaped or constrained by the following factors: instructors' interpersonal behaviour in class and whether students like the instructor, students' uncertainty over whether instructors were welcoming in forming relationships with them; whether the instructor knows a student's name; and perceived availability of an instructor's time. This sub-theme also describes how students perceive instructors' interpersonal behaviour in different contexts such as with groups of students or individually.

When the researcher asked students about their reaction on seeing their instructor in an outside-the-classroom context, the majority of students reported that they would approach and interact positively under the condition that the instructor

exhibits positive interpersonal behaviour in class, and vice versa. A student from Child Studies states:

*“if she is usually a dissatisfied instructor in class... I tend to ignore that I saw her... I pretend that I didn’t see her...” FG1-S6*

The instructor’s positive interpersonal behaviour in class appears to contribute to more outside-the-classroom interactions:

*“it depends on the instructor’s way of communication with us in the class.. if she is kind and understanding... I would approach her and greet her if we met outside campus...maybe chitchat as well” FG1-S4*

Several students reported their concern about the instructor’s possible reaction. More specifically, they are uncertain whether the instructor is willing to form a relationship with them, or at least to react positively to them in return by a smile or wave. Other students would only approach and interact with instructors who know their names. A Business student explains:

*“some of the instructors don’t even recognise our faces that we are their students... if she looked at me in a way that she seemed to have recognised me... I’ll greet her... if she doesn’t know who am I... I’ll just ignore that I saw her... she should know my name at least...” FG4-S1*

A few Art students reported they did not have the courage to ‘waste the instructor’s time’, as they looked ‘too busy’. An Art student illustrates:

*“we avoid asking the instructor when she just finishes the class... because we know she wouldn’t be so welcoming... she might be in a hurry... even in her office hours... maybe she is busy... and I don’t like to waste her time” FG5-S5*

According to students’ reported incidents of interaction, it appears that the most reported outside-the-classroom interaction type is academic, which is usually short, formal and on course-related issues, and unintentional interactions included polite greetings and salutations in the corridor. Furthermore, Saudi students reported few interactions that go beyond course-related issues and that could be identified as turning point interactions, as they appear to have influenced students' future interaction practices and potentially their relationships. Students enthusiastically described incidents with their instructors that appear to alter the way they perceive

their instructors. A Business student was thrilled when the instructor noticed that she was absent last class:

*“I missed one of Dr. [name] classes and she saw me the next day entering the building while she was passing by... she stopped and said...” hey you... how are you doing? we missed you yesterday”... I couldn’t believe my ears... [laughs] I was so excited !” FG4-S5*

Likewise, a previous incident of praise in class from the instructor encouraged a shy student to have a small talk with the instructor about a certificate of honour the student earned:

*“She is a very nice instructor... and... because the week before she said in the lecture hall that “[student name] existence in the class is a moral boost to all of us” ...so I had to go and show her the certificate I have recently obtained... [laughs]” FG3-S4*

Thus, it appears that students who reported more interaction with instructors outside-the-classroom perceive their relationships with their instructor as more ‘interpersonal-like’ than those who do not encounter those interactions.

Another observation suggests that the instructor-student relationship varies with the same instructor in different contexts. Evidently, it was prevalent in the majority of students reporting that instructors’ communication style with students in the classroom are immensely different, and more formal, compared to other contexts. Students highlighted the fact that even the language used by instructors changed in outside-the-classroom interactions to a more interpersonal level. Students reported that some instructors address them by ‘darling’ or ‘sweetheart’ outside-the-classroom instead of a collective ‘girls’ or ‘students’ in the classroom context. This is one example of students’ several comments where a student describes an outside-the-classroom incident with a formal instructor in class:

*“one instructor... I didn’t recognise her from far away and she was waving at me... until she approached and I heard her saying Heyyyy...how are you?... I was so surprised because she is VERY formal in class. And never spoke to me before. I honestly*



*thought that she meant someone behind me or something...”*

*FG4- S5*

Based on students' reporting, it could be argued that this phenomenon of a more interpersonal interaction from instructors outside-the-classroom appears to be the norm in instructor-student interaction on a one-to-one basis, but it was news to most students. Occasional “small talk” or unintentional incidents with students can extend instructor-student interaction, which may potentially develop a more positive relationship. It is clear how small gestures from instructors, such as greeting, waving, remembering a student's name, attendance, or articulating a praise left a remarkable influence on students.

To conclude, there are a number of contextual constraints that may hamper students' tendencies to interact with instructors outside-the-classroom. The lack of interaction may be caused by students' uncertainty, their perception of an instructor's personality in class, whether the instructor knows a student's name, and perceived availability of instructor's time. While in reality, instructors appear to interact much more positively on a one-to-one basis outside-the-classroom. It could be argued that the limited arena for instructor-student interaction does not provide opportunities for the relaxed side of instructors to be practiced. Thus, forms of communication in other than the classroom contexts can be seen as fruitful opportunities for more instructor-student interaction, which may strengthen the instructor-student relationship. The following section demonstrates a discussion and synthesis of the findings of this study.

#### **4.5 Discussion: Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data by Research Questions**

This study focuses on investigating the classroom climate and the interpersonal perspective on teaching within the Saudi cultural context in a female only campus. This was examined by measuring and describing perceptions of the classroom climate and the Saudi university instructor behaviours in terms of the instructor-student relationship. In order to build a more holistic understanding, this discussion details how the qualitative analysis from instructor interviews and student focus

groups illuminates the quantitative analysis of the QTI and CUCEI surveys. More specifically, the quantitative results outline a picture of what sort of instructor-student interaction is maintained, and what kind of classroom climate students are experiencing in the university. The report of the qualitative findings not only clarifies, but also colours in and interprets the picture of the quantitative results. Quantitative and qualitative results are discussed with respect to each of the Study 1 four research questions.

#### **4.5.1 RQ1: Students' perceptions of the interpersonal relationship with their instructors at KAU**

Students' QTI and focus groups are used to explore this research question. The quantitative data provided an average profile of the interpersonal behavior of Saudi female instructors from students' perspectives. In general, students perceived their instructors to be exercising higher degrees of cooperative behaviours, such as Steering, Friendly, and Understanding compared to the oppositional behaviours, like Dissatisfied, Reprimanding and Enforcing. In addition, as shown in Table 4-16, there are notable differences in relation to the eight QTI scales, when Saudi student ratings are compared with US, Dutch (Wubbels & Levy, 1991), and Turkish (Telli et al., 2007) students in previous research. Saudi students perceive their instructors to be less Friendly, less Understanding and less Accommodating compared to the other countries.

QTI Scale		Students' Perceptions			
		US (1991) (n=1606)	Dutch (1991) (n=1105)	Turkey (2007) (n=2342)	Saudi Arabia (2015) (n=468)
DC	Steering	.69	.61	.79	.66
CD	Friendly	.75	.65	.78	.58*
CS	Understanding	.71	.69	.78	.63*
SC	Accommodating	.44	.45	.60	.42*
SO	Uncertain	.21	.24	.39	.28
OS	Dissatisfied	.23	.18	.46	.35
OD	Reprimanding	.28	.28	.50	.40
DO	Enforcing	.43	.32	.61	.52

Table 4-16 Mean QTI Scores for the present study and previous US, Dutch and Turkish sample.

*\* different scores compared to other countries.*

Qualitative results from focus groups for these behaviours align with the quantitative findings. Qualitative themes reflect these findings where the majority of students painted a picture of formal, less affable, less considerate, inflexible, and not easily approached instructors. Students frequently articulated the instructors' displeased communication style in the classroom under the Communication Style sub-theme in Section 4.4.2.2.1. Students reported that the most prevalent communication styles of instructors inside the classroom were either displeased or neutral. Students indicate that such behaviours influence their learning motivation, and emphasize a formal and distant picture of the instructor, which in turn may influence their relationship. Another explanation for students' low ratings of the Friendly scale on QTI is illuminated by the sub-theme Formality in Section 4.4.2.2.1. Students describe a formal relationship that is being nurtured, emphasizing that it is the 'norm'. This instilled picture of a formal relationship is shaped by the formal side of instructors' interpersonal behaviour while lecturing in class. Therefore, it may not mean that instructors are not actually friendly individuals; however, this means that instructors' latent friendliness is not articulated in class, thus they 'appear' to be not friendly. As a result, students are not provided with other physical opportunities to experience the other, relaxed and friendly, side of instructors in other contexts. Therefore, students perceive less friendliness from their instructors.

This notion of formal Saudi instructors in the classroom was also one of the factors that was echoed by students when seeking to interact with instructors outside-the-classroom and is included under the sub-theme Outside-the-Classroom Interaction in Section 4.4.2.2.3. A key finding of this study suggests that instructors' in class verbal and non-verbal immediacy, such as friendliness, being understanding, and having a welcoming attitude, consistently signals to students the instructors' receptiveness for communication, and specifically, receptiveness to outside-the-classroom interaction. Students from all faculties mentioned that they would be encouraged to intentionally interact with the instructor if the instructor displayed an amiable attitude and a genuine interest in their welfare. Cox and colleagues' (2010) study show a consistent finding, where they argue that the extent of outside-the-classroom interaction is dependent on the instructor's in class behaviour that signals their 'psychosocial accessibility' to students.

In addition, according to the quantitative data in relation to the less Friendly ratings, it is reasonable to associate 'Approachability', a student sub-theme in Section 4.4.2.2.2 with being a 'friendly' instructor. Students report that approachable instructors usually show a receptive, welcoming and friendly attitude, while an 'unapproachable' instructor is described as not showing interest in interaction. It can be argued that students rated instructors to be less friendly because the majority of them perceive instructors as less approachable. This is also in agreement with the literature on instructors' approachability, where Feldman (1992) included the following survey items in assessing a faculty's approachability: 'friendliness of the teacher' and 'availability and helpfulness'. Furthermore, Marsh's (1984) student evaluation survey contains a scale for assessing the approachability of an instructor using a scale called 'individual rapport' that contains items like: 'friendly towards students' and 'welcomed seeking help/advice'. Hence, students' perceptions of instructors to be less accessible based on their in-class behaviour may explain the low ratings of the Friendly scale on the survey.

To illuminate the low ratings of the Understanding scale, although some students reported a few episodes where instructors showed care, empathy and understanding, the majority of students corroborate the general view of less caring instructors.

Students perceive a caring instructor as someone who verbally articulates understanding of students' difficult circumstances, communicates trusting of students, and is flexible in negotiating issues, such as extending assignment deadlines. Saudi students' views of a caring instructor appear to be more anchored than previous research (Gasiewaski et al., 2012; Kezar & Maxey, 2014) where flexibility in understanding students' difficult circumstances and feeling trusted were stressed and highlighted as important qualities of a caring instructor. These concepts stem from students reporting under the sub-theme 'Care' in Section 4.4.2.2.1. From the majority of students' perspectives, the inflexibility of instructors in negotiating deadlines when students face difficult circumstances, translates as them being less caring and understanding instructors. Students under this sub-theme offer a set of aspirations and idealised examples of caring instructors that they are not seeing in reality.

Similarly, the low ratings on the 'Accommodating' scale could be explained by both the above-mentioned 'Care' sub-theme, as well as students' comments within the sub-theme 'Exercising Authority' in Section 4.4.2.2.2. It could be argued that students viewed their instructors as less accommodating due to the perceived instructors' authoritarian approach that displays no regard for students' opinions and which Saudi instructors habitually employ in the classroom. Students describe the forms of the authoritarian approach exercised, where their views on class structure, project ideas, grades and deadlines are usually not considered. Thus, such perceptions of instructors may contribute to students' uncertainty about engaging in communication with instructors, and in turn, shape more formal and distant relationships.

#### **4.5.2 RQ 2: Students' perceptions of the classroom environment at KAU**

Students' CUCEI survey and focus groups are used to examine this research question. When examining students' evaluation of the classroom environment, there is high variation among students' perceptions. Generally, students perceive their classroom environment to be moderately high in personalisation, involvement, task orientation, and satisfaction scales compared to cohesiveness, innovation and individualisation. However, when students' perceptions of their learning

environment in this study are compared with those of Australia (Nair & Fisher, 1999), and the US (Strayer, 2007) from prior research, differences can be seen for Personalisation, Innovation, and Individualisation scales. As can be seen in Table 4-17, it appears that the Saudi classroom environment at KAU is characterized by less personalisation, less innovation, but more individualisation. First, the low ratings of personalisation compared to US and Australia's could be explained by students' reporting of the several contextual constraints of classroom interaction. In particular, in Classroom Interaction sub-theme in Section 4.4.2.2.3, group size in a class, instructor's authoritarian teaching approach, and students' cultural apprehensiveness are perceived by students as the main reasons for the lack of interaction in classrooms.

CUCEI Scale	Students' Perceptions		
	Australia (1999) (n=504)	US (2007) (n=55)	Saudi Arabia (2015) (n=313)
Personalisation	3.56	3.74	3.25*
Involvement	**	**	3.25
Student Cohesiveness	3.37	2.69	2.92
Satisfaction	**	**	3.18
Task Orientation	3.95	4.00	3.38
Innovation	3.29	2.74	2.61*
Individualisation	2.11	2.38	2.75*

Table 4-17 Mean CUCEI scores for the present study and previous US, and Australian samples.

\* *different scores compared to other countries.*

\*\* *Involvement and satisfaction scales were not included in US and Australia's studies as they used an earlier version of CUCEI.*

As for the Personalisation scale, the majority of students paint an authoritarian didactic picture of the teaching ecology adopted by instructors. This tradition of teaching is described as mainly focusing on delivering textbook knowledge in classes. These incidents of reported classroom interaction were limited to the possibility of asking the instructor questions about the class, or answering students' questions related to the lecture as a class. However, there were no reported

experiences of cooperative or collaborative learning activities, small group discussions or seminars, or one-to-one interaction with the instructors. This evidence from the qualitative data suggests minimal chances for students to interact, and that instructors' first priority is to transmit the knowledge given the limited class time, and a usual large group size. This finding is in agreement with the literature, which suggests that both the school and university sectors in Saudi Arabia reflect rote learning and didactic teaching approaches (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Such a traditional educational system does not provide space for one-to-one opportunities of interaction with the instructor. Thus, it could be argued that there is an absence of small group seminars, a powerful form of teaching that exists in western traditions, where there is a formal expectation for students to argue, discuss and make their voices heard. This finding signals a low frequency of instructor-student interaction in KAU classrooms.

As for the low Innovation scale mean score compared to other countries, evidence from the qualitative findings is consistent as it suggests that students prefer a more interactive learning environment. Several instances under the Classroom Interaction sub-theme in Section 4.4.2.2.3 described a traditional approach to teaching, where students complained about the passivity, boredom and disconnection they experience in these teacher-centred classrooms. Students were calling for more discussions, interactive activities, and technology integration to engage them in classes.

Surprisingly, Saudi students rated the learning environment to be higher on an individualization scale compared to the other countries. However, as this scale extracted students' perceptions of learning autonomy in the classroom, the qualitative findings contradict the quantitative results. As previously mentioned in this section, students declared under the Classroom Interaction sub-theme that their opinions are not considered in course related matters. The teaching approach that students highlight in the qualitative themes does not entail allowing room for students' independence. On the contrary, the picture that students frequently portray of themselves is being listeners in classes and having to conform to instructors' requests. This is consistent with the discussion of a previous study that Saudi students are traditionally not allowed much learning dependency (Mahrous & Ahmed, 2010).

#### ***4.5.2.1 Instructors' Views of the Classroom Environment***

Although CUCEI was not administered for instructors, the qualitative themes provide evidence for instructors' views on the classroom environment in terms of the educational system, teaching, and interaction in Saudi classrooms. Although there exists evidence of traditional teaching in Conceptions of Teaching sub-theme in Section 4.4.2.1.2, as well as students' view of a more traditional teaching environment, several instructors shared a liberal teaching tradition which suggests a different trend. It could be argued that evidence of instructors' use of technology with their students, such as social media under the sub-theme Approachability, indicates a liberal attitude to teaching and receptiveness to students' interest. In terms of students' autonomy, some instructors articulate being restrained by the educational system's policies, as they wanted to include students' voices and provide students with the opportunity to share power in the classroom. Similarly, in terms of classroom interaction, instructors identify constraints such as students' cultural reservedness as described in the sub themes Conceptions of Students in Section 4.4.2.1.2 and 'Classroom Interaction' in Section 4.4.2.1.3. Zhang (2006) found that students' immediacy can be influenced by cultural factors. Zhang argued that students are likely to have high levels of immediacy if they come from an open culture where views and opinions are freely and comfortably voiced. However, this is not the case in a conservative culture like Saudi Arabia. This is a direct result of the Saudi educational system's long history of focusing on teacher-centred approaches to teaching, rote learning, and summative norm-referenced assessment without engaging learners in an active learning process (Alkeaid, 2004; Smith & Abouammoh, 2013).

Furthermore, a number of instructors voiced their dissatisfaction with the rigidity of the Saudi traditional educational system and their fight against the traditional teaching, learning and assessment approaches. Half of the participating instructors have been exposed to student-centred approaches during their postgraduate studies overseas. They bring back a positive attitude towards student-centered traditions of teaching. Specifically, those instructors expressed their annoyance about central control, where the institutional systemic decision-making is preventing them from being innovative instructors such as the physical infrastructure and the curriculum



design. However, there is evidence from the literature suggesting that the majority of Saudi instructors have never been exposed to other teaching approaches and they are content that transmitting factual information is the appropriate method for teaching students (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Thus, it should be acknowledged that instructors in this study are selectively sampled; as a result, they are atypical of Saudi traditional instructors, with instructors in this study articulating the desire for change, and the majority of them acting towards accomplishing that change in terms of moving away from traditional teaching and learning.

#### **4.5.3 RQ 3: Instructors' perceptions towards their interpersonal relationships with their students**

Instructors' QTI survey and interviews are used to explore this research question. QTI produced an average profile of instructors, indicating that instructors perceive their interpersonal behaviour as displaying high levels of cooperative behaviours and low levels of oppositional attitudes. More specifically, they evaluated their own behaviours more favourably on all scales with a positive connotation (Steering, Friendly, and Understanding) and lower scores on scales with a negative connotation (Uncertain, Dissatisfied, and Reprimanding). When Saudi instructors' perceptions in this study are compared with those of US and Dutch instructors from prior research in school settings, as shown in Table 4-18 (Wubbels & Levy, 1991), mean scores do not appear strongly different for the scales Understanding, Uncertain, Dissatisfied, and Reprimanding.

QTI Scale		Instructors' Perceptions		
		US (1991) (n=66)	Dutch (1991) (n=66)	Saudi Arabia (2015) (n=103)
DC	<b>Steering</b>	.75	.58	.70
CD	<b>Friendly</b>	.81	.62	.70
CS	<b>Understanding</b>	.76	.72	.66*
SC	<b>Accommodating</b>	.38	.45	.41
SO	<b>Uncertain</b>	.16	.23	.30*
OS	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	.24	.18	.26*
OD	<b>Reprimanding</b>	.24	.25	.33*
DO	<b>Enforcing</b>	.48	.33	.48

Table 4-18 Instructors Mean QTI scores for the present study and previous US, Dutch samples.

*\* Higher and lower scores compared to US and Dutch samples.*

Although the majority of instructors' comments under the sub-theme Care in Section 4.4.2.1.1 portray a high level of caring and considerate behaviours towards students needs, Saudi instructors are just humans and like all instructors from other cultures. They tend to view their interpersonal behaviour in an idealised way as being highly caring, understanding, and empathic. However, evidence from the Care sub-theme indicates that these views of optimum caring behaviours are not translated into real life examples. This is will be further be discussed in corroboration with students' views in the following section.

Regarding the Uncertain scale as shown in Table 4-18, the slightly higher perceptions of instructors' own behaviour as being uncertain of their actions can be explained by Wubbels and Levy's (1991) discussion, where the least experienced instructors tend to evaluate themselves as exhibiting more uncertainty compared to the more experienced instructors. It could be argued that the 60% of this study's sample are less experienced instructors, as indicated in Table 4-6 in Section 4.3.5.1, which may have accounted for the slightly higher score in uncertain behaviours compared to other countries. However, explanations of uncertain behaviour did not surface within the qualitative themes. It can be argued that Saudi instructors may have difficulty in discussing their less acceptable behaviours, due to uncertainty avoidance, a culturally determined dimension (Hofstede, 1991). In many Asian

countries it is important not to lose face, and most certainly, Saudi Arabia is one of those countries (Luo, 1997).

In addition, instructors' conceptions of students may provide a useful explanation for instructors' scores on Dissatisfactions and Reprimanding statements on QTI. Their Conceptions of Students in Section 4.4.2.1.2, as being reserved, unconfident, less committed, and less motivated to learn may have led instructors to score highly on items such as '*I think that students can't do things well*' and reprimanding statements such as '*I am too quick to correct students when they break a rule.*'. The inherently authoritarian instructors may have found it normal to correct students when classroom rules are being breached, and evidence of similar acts surfaced under the Control sub-theme in Section 4.4.2.1.1. Thus, although Saudi instructors did not directly state that they are dissatisfied or reprimanding within the qualitative themes, these inherent conceptions and beliefs may explain the somewhat different scores of Dissatisfaction and Reprimanding compared to western instructors.

#### **4.5.4 RQ 4: Differences in the perception of instructor-student relationships between instructors and students**

Instructor self-perceptions and student perceptions of the relationships differed both in the quantitative and qualitative results. The quantitative findings show that instructors and students differ significantly in their perceptions of Steering, Friendly, Uncertain, Dissatisfied, and Reprimanding behaviours. These differences suggest that students perceive their instructors as less steering, friendly, uncertain and more dissatisfied, and reprimanding. This is in agreement with previous studies on QTI comparing instructors' and students' perceptions in school contexts in other countries (Rickards & Fisher, 2000; Fisher, Fraser & Cresswell, 1995). Qualitative results from students' and instructors' narratives for those behaviours align with the quantitative findings. Instructors give a different and more positive picture about their interpersonal behaviour compared to students' views.

Regarding the Friendly, Dissatisfied and Reprimanding scales, students perceive instructors to be more dissatisfied and reprimanding and less friendly compared to how instructors report they are. The qualitative data are in line with the quantitative

data. This is evident in students' comments, where the most reported instructors' style is 'displeased' in the classroom under in Section 4.4.2.2.1. Several instances suggest that students were subject to a stressful atmosphere, where instructors' dissatisfaction in the classroom appears to influence the ways students perceive their relationship with that instructor. On the other hand, instructors' comments, which clearly communicate their friendliness in interacting with students, did not surface. However, as previously mentioned, instructors describe themselves as highly caring and that they should be understanding of students' difficult circumstances. However, students paint a less empathic picture of their instructors by providing examples of inflexibility and less consideration to their circumstances. It could be argued that those instructors' idealised beliefs and ambitious goals of being caring and understanding with students are not as frequently exercised as they think they are. Evidence within the Care sub-theme in Section 4.4.2.1.1 suggests that the few episodes of caring interaction were exercised on a one-to-one basis outside the classroom with students. Thus, the majority of students do not frequently witness the warmth of their instructors as they described. This is also reflected in the lack of instructor-student interaction incidents both in Classroom Interaction and outside-the-classroom interaction discussed in Sections 4.4.2.2.3.

Another explanation for the discrepancy between instructors' intentions and practice can be further explained by Samuelowicz and Bain's study (1992), where they argue that instructors might have both 'ideal' conceptions and 'working' conceptions of teaching. Murray and Macdonald (1997) comparably recognized contradictions between revealed instructors' conceptions of teaching and their reported teaching practices. It would seem apparent that this lack of consistency is more common in instructor participants whose conceptions embraced supporting students or their learning. A potential interpretation for this case was suggested by Murray and Macdonald (1997) and seemed relevant to this study. Instructors might be frustrated in their real goals by contextual constraints. In this study, these contextual constraints may include the traditional educational system. Therefore, it can be argued that cultural and contextual constraints, such as, power distance beliefs, and uncertainty avoidance of the university leadership, make it difficult for instructors to operationalize their beliefs and working conceptions in their real practice.

Another explanation that gives more weight to students' perceptions of their instructors is that instructors generally portrayed a more formal classroom environment under the Classroom Interaction theme in Section 4.4.2.1.3, where social conversations that may entail jokes or other relaxed exchanges were not generally encouraged as class time does not allow it. This is supported by the qualitative data of students, where they suggest that instructors' 'in class' behaviour is not as affable as outside-the-classroom. All students witness the more formal interpersonal behaviour in class, but do not frequently observe or experience these friendly acts from their instructors due to scarcity of instructor-student interaction outside-the-class. In addition, although students' perceived instructors to be characterised by less friendliness and fewer understanding behaviours compared to what instructors believe they displayed, several students mentioned instances of encouragement and praise that they were thrilled to receive from their instructors under the sub-theme Encouragement in Section 4.4.2.2.1. These incidents of praise and encouragement seem to have accounted for the high degree of 'Communion' students scored for their instructors compared to the level of 'Agency' within QTI survey ratings.

In their qualitative comments, students translate the Steering characteristic, as ways in which their authoritarian instructors display no room for students' views, and require conformation of requests. On the other hand, when aggregating instructors' comments, it can be argued that instructors viewed articulating power in the classroom differently, where both typical Saudi authoritarian and less authoritarian instructors' perspectives emerge. Concepts, such as reminding students of their status as 'instructors who should be respected', sharing control, and acknowledging students voices, were negotiated. As for the Steering behaviour, instructors rated themselves higher than their students' evaluation of them. It could be argued that students may not see their authoritarian instructors as high on leadership in terms of this scales' statements, such as '*The instructor holds our attention.*' and '*the instructor talks enthusiastically about her subject*' due to the transmissive teaching approach that according to students' sub-theme Classroom Interaction in Section 4.4.2.2.3, is adopted by most instructors.

The following section summarises the resulting form of instructor-student relationship based on the study findings.

#### **4.5.5 Instructor-Student Interaction and the Formal Relationship**

The findings of this study shed light on the quality of the instructor-student relationship through the quality and frequency of instructor-student interaction inside and outside-the-classroom. The claims and discussion of this thesis are valid in particular for female Saudi instructors and their students. Overall, findings of this study suggest a formal instructor-student relationship due to the lack of instructor-student interaction both inside and outside the classroom caused by the cultural traditional educational system. Both instructors and students identified several interrelated factors that may hinder promoting a more frequent and relaxed instructor-student interaction. Firstly, students emphasised the existence of the didactic teaching approach, which is limited to delivering textbook information leaving little space for students' interaction to occur. Secondly, although there are small group classes of students in this Saudi institution, large group classes in a country like Saudi Arabia and other developing countries tend to be typical rather than unusual. On many instances, instructors blamed their large group classes for not being able to 'get to know' students, or initiate interaction with students.

Similarly, students point out that it is 'impossible' to get the instructor's attention when they attend a large group class. This finding was supported by the literature where Weaver and Qi (2005) found that large group size hinders effective interaction between students and instructors. The country's long history of applying teacher-centred approaches, where students are passive listeners along with their cultural reservedness, complicates the mission of the more liberal instructors to encourage more class interaction. Thus, it can be argued that the system inclination to didactic tradition of teaching and learning, along with valued cultural norms in relation to students' reservedness may create a distant and formal instructor-student relationship. The ingredients of this type of relationship were emphasised by both students and instructors in this study, which in turn supports little contact between the two parties. Other interaction windows that are usually available within higher education in other cultures, such as small group discussions and weekly seminars,

are absent within the Saudi system, although they are a very powerful form of teaching that offers opportunities to speak and ‘teaches’ students to argue, discuss and make their voices heard. Thirdly, it can be argued that both instructors and students place high regard on the formality of the class. Thus, they associate the ‘place’ of interaction with ‘the content’ of the interaction. For example, several instructors and the majority of students found it inappropriate to be humorous in class. This shows a lack of informal signals during instructors’ pedagogical practice in class, which in turn contributes to shape a formal and distant instructor-student relationship.

Fourth, this study found that instructors and students appear to have relatively low interaction with each other outside-the-classroom. This finding is well established in decades of previous literature (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Cox et al., 2010). Western higher education considers instructor-student interaction outside-the-classroom to be important, and is believed to be of high educational value (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Kuh & Hu, 2001). In contrast, this psychological level of interaction is not among institutional priorities in Saudi higher education. This notion is emphasized by this study's finding. The majority of Saudi students who participated in this study reported that they rarely seek intentional interactions with instructors outside-the-classroom. Relatively few students experienced more than occasional, or superficial conversations with their instructors. Likewise, instructors mentioned that they are rarely visited by students in office hours as suggested by the sub-theme Approachability in Section 4.4.2.1.1.

In addition, it can be argued that students who reported engaging in outside-of-classroom interactions view their relationship with the instructor more positively compared to those who did not. Dobransky and Frymier (2004) arrived at the same conclusion that argues that students engaging in outside-the-classroom communication perceive a more interpersonal-like relationship with the instructor. Although outside-the-classroom reported interactions were minimal, they tended to be casual and relaxed contacts. These interactions can fit into a number of types: unintentional or personal interactions and academic interactions. The two types of interaction found in this study can be compared to Cox and Orehovec’s (2007) five types of interaction, described as a topology of faculty-student interaction. The

findings of this study suggest that outside-the-classroom interaction appeared to be of paramount importance in shaping students' perception of their instructors' behaviours. A few verbal immediacy gestures like remembering student's names and welcoming students in friendly and informal language left a considerable positive perception of the instructor on students. Thus, this is in alignment with McCroskey and Richmond (1992) argument which suggests that instructor immediacy behaviours set a more favourable stage for building a positive relationship. Also, this clearly shows that instructors exhibit little or no informal signals inside the class, which gives the impression of a formal classroom and a formal relationship.

Technology and social media are potential contexts where instructor-student outside-the-classroom interactions can be increased and loosened, and in turn, support their relationships especially within the Saudi context. All participating students and many instructors are receptive to use new forms of communication technologies as evident in the sub-theme Approachability in Section 4.4.2.1.1. This shift towards other means of communication may be occurring due to students' preference of new communication channels or/and instructors' openness to the advent of new technologies. The majority of Saudi students feel more encouraged to seek help from instructors using email or social media tools, such as WhatsApp and Twitter rather than approaching them in face-to face contexts. Thus, Saudi institutions need to encourage instructors to engage in technological interaction with students. According to Chickering and Ehrmann (1996, p. 1):

*“communication technologies that increase access to faculty members, help them share useful resources, and provide for joint problem solving and shared learning, can usefully augment face-to-face contact in and outside of class meetings..... such technologies can strengthen faculty interactions with all students, but especially with shy students who are reluctant to ask questions or challenge the teacher directly. It is often easier to discuss values and personal concerns in writing than orally, since inadvertent or ambiguous nonverbal signals are not so dominant. As the number of commuting part-time students and adult learners increases, technologies provide opportunities for*



*interaction not possible when students come to class and leave soon afterward to meet work or family responsibilities. (p. 1).*

The following section summarises this chapter.

#### **4.6 Discussion Summary**

Study 1 is one of the first studies that investigates the Saudi university classroom environment from a relational viewpoint. The findings support recent research suggesting that the instructor-student relationship is a complex multidimensional construct (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). However, a study on instructor-student relationships that focuses on a context such as that of Saudi Arabia reveals several factors that contribute to the quality of instructor-student interaction. As can be seen in Figure 4-10, institutional factors, which include the university's decisions about group and class size and opening up other arenas for interaction, such as small group seminars, contribute to form the relationship. Furthermore, the central control in the university and the systematic decision making they practise is hindering change, both in the traditional teaching approaches towards more interactive methods and in promoting instructor-student interactions in and outside-the-classroom, which in turn, shape a the instructor-student relationship.

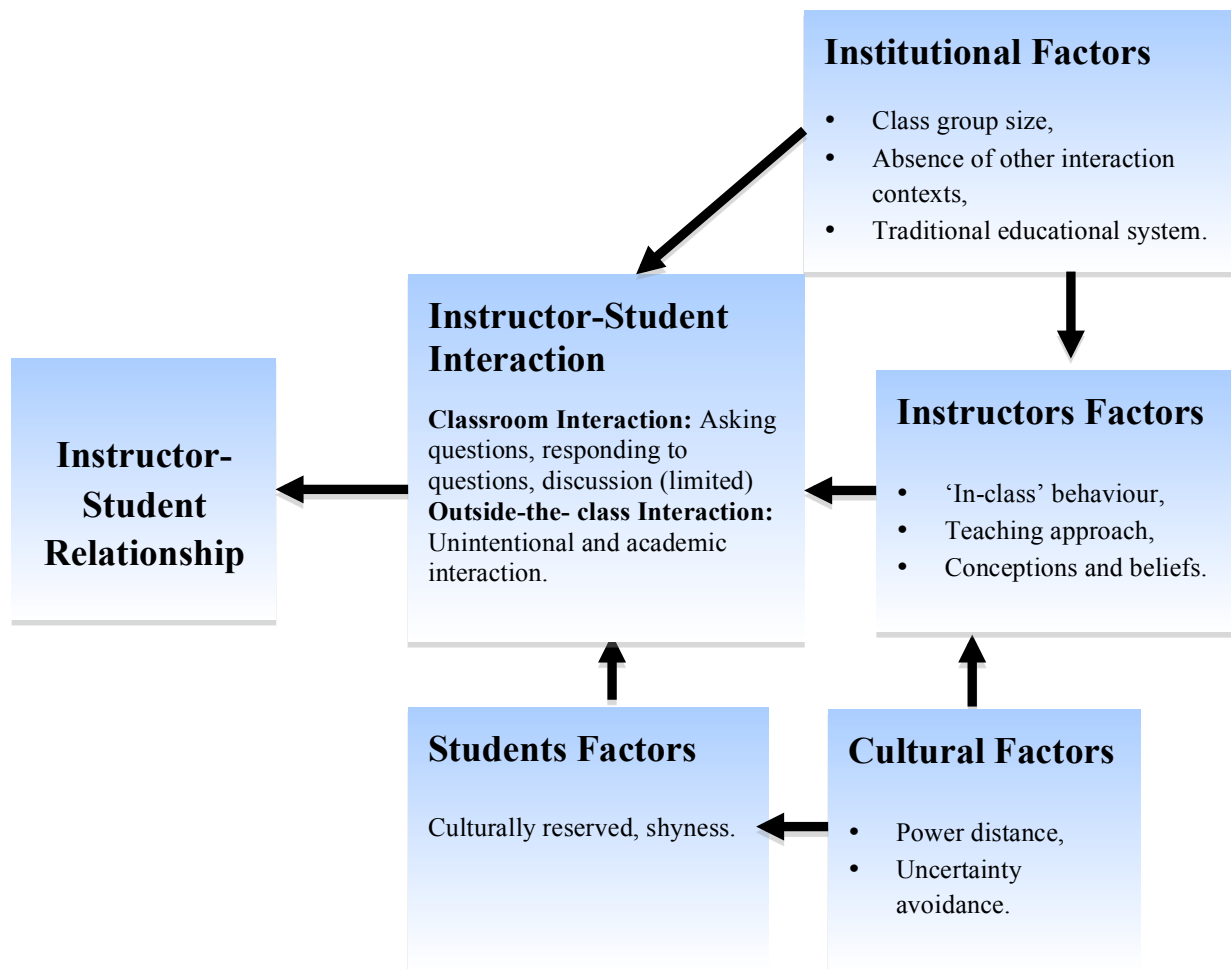


Figure 4-10 The contributing factors to the Saudi instructor-student relationship

Cultural factors, including the formal culture of communication in the classroom, stemming from instructors' high status and the power distance that are strongly entrenched in both instructors' and students' mind-sets, are evident concepts in the findings. Both instructors and students bring their own beliefs into play. Instructors' interpersonal behaviour appears to play an important role in promoting or hindering a positive instructor-student relationship. Instructor's verbal and non-verbal immediacy inside the classroom has the dual effect of encouraging students in both inside and outside-the-classroom contact. In addition, technology appears to be a promising venue for increasing instructor-student interaction. Both students and many instructors are receptive of change and willing to use technological tools for interaction purposes. The question arises as to whether a new online outside of classroom context would retain formality or require informal instructor-student

interactions. Other questions remain as to whether pattern and frequency of interaction in online contexts would be different compared to episodes of classroom and out-of class interactions reported here. Thus, it is intriguing to explore whether formality of interaction will continue when exchanged or practised in the highly social context of social media tools. Study 2 tackles this endeavour in the following chapter.

## **5. Study 2: Interaction Practices in Social Media Contexts**

### **5.1 Overview**

The overarching aim of Study 2, as proposed in Chapter 1, is to investigate how current pedagogical and interaction practices, well established within a specific culture, might react to new communication technologies, such as social media. Before exploring Study 2 research questions presented in Chapter 1 Section 1.2, a review of the current literature on communication via technologies is first presented in the following section, Section 5.2. In Section 5.3, Study 2 methodology is described in details. Section 5.4 presents the results and discussion of this study.

### **5.2 Literature Review**

This review brings together a range of theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to clarify this research aim. Section 5.2.1 begins with an overview of the role of digital tools in the human experience. Section 5.2.2 introduces the theoretical perspective underpinning Study 2 which describes how digital technology may mediate communicators' behaviours through language, tools, and context. Section 5.2.3 introduces an example of these mediated environments, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), defines the concept of interpersonal communication used in this thesis, and establish mediated environments as social spaces. Section 5.2.4 moves into explaining the linguistic strategies established within the CMC literature and informing the analysis and discussion of Study 2. To put these concepts into context, a discussion in Section 5.2.5 considers how technology affects higher education in terms of teaching and learning, and instructor and student roles. Technology development does not stop at CMC tools, rather, the emergence of social media affects the ways in which people communicate, both in educational and entertainment contexts. Therefore, Section 5.2.6 provides an overview of social media emergence and its implications on peoples' communication practices. Section 5.2.7 situates social media within a higher education context and discusses the literature on institutions' adoptions of these popular tools. All these developments of technology and their associated impacts are experienced within different cultural

contexts. Section 5.2.8 demonstrates how the traditional educational system in Saudi Arabia's culture has reacted to the emergent of social media tools. The review concludes with a summary re-stating the literature and theoretical underpinning framing Study 2 of this thesis.

### **5.2.1 The Role of Digital Technology in Communication**

Humans share a fundamental drive to communicate. Communication can be defined as '*the process through which people use messages to generate meanings within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and media.*' (National Communication Association, 2002). Several features of human communication can be drawn from this definition. First, it is noted that communication is a process and not a static notion, which involves continuous alteration of communicators' thinking and behaviours. Secondly, the definition points out that communication is contextually situated and can take place across various channels (e.g., verbal and nonverbal cues). Finally, engaging in a communication process can occur via a broad range of media types. One of these is new communication media that includes asynchronous and synchronous text-based modes of communication.

Developments in digital technologies over the last decade have reached beyond predictions of the past. As technology continues to develop, the ways in which humans communicate and respond to each other and to the technology change in accordance. Through computer technologies and cell phone applications, social activities have moved from face-to-face interaction to *mediated* communication, such as instant messaging or Skype that do not require in-person interaction with others. Such technologies have always been linked to altering how we think, perceive and interpret our social activities (Friedberg, 2006; Olson, 1994). This shift towards embracing digital forms of activities forges our engagement and communication with both material artefacts and our social experiences. These effects present a challenging task for researchers to understand the ways in which the medium reconfigures human cultural practices within experiences. For the purpose of framing Study 2 of this thesis, the following section introduces a useful theoretical concept which addresses the role of technology in human experience.

### **5.2.2 Mediation as theoretical perspective**

Useful insights can be drawn from the mediational perspective of digital technology, providing important and helpful theoretical framing for Study 2 of this thesis. A variety of theoretical approaches in philosophy, education, psychology and social sciences literature, particularly the socio-cultural theory of learning developed by Vygotsky, took mediation into consideration in order to understand its impact on the nature of human identities, cognition, perception and action (e.g. Dewey, 1925; Vygotsky, 1984; Engestrom, 1987; Wertsch, 1991; Cole & Engestrom, 1993). These theoretical accounts of mediation suggest that the concepts of “tool” and “mediation” are key. They all maintain that peoples’ lifeworld is primarily mediated by tools and signs that facilitate or restrain human behaviour. These mediators are not just seen as instruments that transport activities, they are perceived as significant connections between people, their culture and society (Kaptelinin, 2013). Thus, devices, sign systems and technological applications have become the prevailing mediators between people and knowledge or entertainment.

The mediational perspective can be helpful in understanding the role of technologies as mediational means where they act in concert with the communicator and the context to make actions possible and make sense of them. From a sociocultural standpoint, the context is actively constructed by the communicators and not only the ‘situation’. This is essential in understanding the dynamics that surround digital technologies and their influence on communicators and their activities. Technologies should not be seen as the single determinants of transformation, rather, they should be seen as part of a complex set of dialectical relations which include communicators, language, physical tools and settings. Thus, what is significant about these ‘tools’ being computers or language itself is not their abstract features, rather, it is the question of how they radically transform communicators’ action. As a result, the incorporating of mediational means does not only facilitate action but they could also change the entire flow of behavior, and structure of mental functions (Vygotsky, 1984). Therefore, the concept of mediation brought in here as it will help me as a researcher to interpret the significance of particular ‘tools’ and ‘signs’ (i.e. new communication technologies) in the written discourse.

In addition, new communication technologies in societies are being diffused from the managed organization to the sphere of social and personal relationships (O'Sullivan, 2000). Thus, socialization and interpersonal communication has become one of the main purposes of using mediated tools, and a topic of special interest in this thesis. While digital tools are adopted to support or depose intimate communication (Brown & Duguid, 2000), research on interpersonal communication and relationship development within these media is not abundant (Crook, 2013). In order to understand how these tools support intimate or informal communication, it is helpful to now examine one example of these 'mediated tools' and a key component of the emerging technology of computer networks that is perceived to be rich in achieving socially oriented communication: namely, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) which is introduced in the next section.

### **5.2.3 CMC and Interpersonal Communication**

In this section, a definition of interpersonal communication as used in this thesis as well as CMC and its main features are introduced. Then, a discussion of classical perspectives of CMC as social spaces is presented to show how the different theoretical perspectives perceive CMC environments as media that are successfully used for socially-oriented communication.

Herring (1996) defines CMC as "*communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers*" (p. 1). Although CMC includes a wide range of tools that enable audio and video, the focus in this review is on the text-based form of communication. CMC represents a context for human communication and can be a process of one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many communicative messages using a digital communication channel. CMC offers a variety of communication services, which includes, e-mail, bulletin discussion boards, instant messaging and 'chat' rooms. Engaging in a communication activity in such a medium is different in several aspects compared to a face-to-face interaction (Rice & Gattiker, 2001). Although it is intrinsically difficult to define CMC in terms of a set of definite features when compared to face-to-face communication, as CMC should often be considered as a *pattern* of affordances that involve speaking turn, verbal and non-verbal cues, synchronous or asynchronus communication and others.

An interpersonal communication in CMC can be defined as the verbal and nonverbal messages consisting of interpersonal, informal or intimate markers or texts between two or more interdependent people. As mentioned in the previous section, one purpose of using CMC among people and particularly among university students is maintaining social connectedness and supporting interpersonal communication (Kindred & Roper, 2004). Many scholars in the current literature identify CMC as a fruitful space for fostering socialization (Walther, 1996; Crook, 2013), as well as influencing communication patterns and social networks (Fulk & Collins-Jarvis, 2001).

Walther (1992, 1996) argues that people are creative enough in adjusting their communication style to defeat media constraints or the missing non-verbal cues. Walther (2011) and his Social Information Processing Theory (SIP) and Social Identity/Deindividuation (SIDE) theory (Walther & Parks, 2002) examined CMC and found that these environments are as effective as traditional face-to-face communication. In addition, Walther's perspective considers the social effects as products of social and technological influences and interactions between the technology and the social context. Walther's (1992, 1994) SIP Theory suggests that participants' adaptation to the medium is a way to form a relationship through their communication style. He argues that the text based environment and the very lack of non-verbal cues increases opportunities for communicators to foster interpersonal relationships (Walther, 1996). SIP presumes that whether the purpose of CMC activity is task-oriented, or relational development, social relationships will develop when interacting over time (Walther, 1992). In fact, there is evidence indicating that users were able to achieve interpersonal communication levels that are equal to or parallel face-to-face communication (Walther & Burgoon, 1992; Walther, 1997).

Although there is an emerging agreement that mediated spaces are suitable for conveying social and relational messages, there is less understanding of this capacity, and through which mechanisms it is achieved. In a text-based mode of communication, it is assumed that achieving interpersonal communication, and eventually a social relationship, requires exchanging certain patterns of 'discourse'. In other words, there are existing linguistic practices that make an interpersonal



nature of communication visible. Thus, in order to understand how interpersonal communication is cultivated in the mediated spaces, popular linguistic practices and discourse patterns documented in the literature are discussed in the following section.

#### **5.2.4 CMC discourse and interpersonal linguistic strategies**

This section reviews the linguistic strategies used in mediated environments, such as that of CMC. The discussion starts with general practices that have received more attention in past research and are going to be employed for Study 2 of this thesis, such as politeness, emoticons and paralinguistic devices. The section concludes with a discussion of how the literature has explored the informality or intimacy of practices in CMC discourse in Section 5.2.4.4.

CMC discourse or digital discourse (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011) can be defined by any communication that occurs via a digital medium such as email, instant messaging, discussion boards, and any chat system (Herring, 2001; 2004). The study of CMC discourse is mainly concerned with language and how it is being used in mediated communication. Thus, for the purpose of this study, CMC discourse, or text are *written* communications produced by either synchronous or asynchronous CMC. Research has emphasized the important role of various participants' linguistic behaviour in the way that they construct the discourse and potentially their relationship (Herring, 2001; Dorta, 2008). In addition, there are various linguistic strategies that have received particular attention in CMC discourse literature. To limit the scope of this review, this section discusses different approaches to the relational aspect of language use and the linguistic behaviours particularly linked to an informal code of practice. The selected list of strategies in this section is far from exhaustive as it can only outline particular concepts that are going to be used for the purpose of analysing the discourse in Study 2. These linguistic strategies are: Politeness strategies, Emoticons and Paralinguistic cues, and spoken style or informality.

#### ***5.2.4.1 Politeness***

Politeness is one of the linguistic strategies that participants use to maintain social relationship in CMC environments. Maintaining politeness in language has been long considered a facilitator of smooth social interaction (Leech, 1983). Politeness theory, established by Brown and Levinson (1987), refers to the rules and strategies that should be followed to secure harmony and interpersonal relationships.

According to the theory, it is inevitable to find speech acts such as disagreement, requests, orders, agreement, criticism, and posing threats to the public self-image in every social interaction. In order to maintain a considerate manner and support a positive atmosphere, politeness discursive strategies that save ‘face’ are encouraged. The concept of ‘face’ (as in losing or saving face) (Goffman, 1967) is considered a positive social manner that should be maintained during interaction. To express positive face, participants show similarities among the others, or by expressing appreciation of the interlocutor’s perceived identity. However, negative politeness involves showing respect by mitigating face-threatening acts (FTAs) (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2013).

It was observed that polite and indirect linguistic devices increase with more threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Politeness is often described as a relational practice (Holmes, Schnurr, & Stephanie, 2005), and politeness strategy is often situated across a broad range of social behaviours including small talk (Hernandez-Flores, 2004; Mullany, 2006) or phatic communication, which usually involves greetings, salutations and closing. Hossjer (2013) argues that small talk may not necessarily be tied to FTAs; on the contrary, small talk could act as ‘face-boosting acts’, where people construct solidarity and a positive atmosphere through responding to social content and sharing stories. Thus, such a politeness strategy of small talk satisfies rather than threatens the face of the speaker.

#### ***5.2.4.2 Emoticons and paralinguistic cues***

The second cluster of linguistic strategies that appear in CMC discourse studies include non-verbal devices, such as emoticons and paralinguistic cues. Researchers in CMC discourse recognize people’s creativity in compensating for the non verbal

missing cues existing in face-to-face conversations by using emoticons and inventing various paralinguistic devices in online communication (Carter, 2003). Their importance prevails in showing interest, mutual understanding, or confusion, which enhances the stream of CMC conversations. Emoticons are also known as ‘smileys’ or ‘smiley faces’, which are graphical icons used to express feelings and emotions via several human face representations (Crystal, 2001; Danet & Herring, 2007). Recently, some emoticon collections do not represent facial expressions (Dresner & Herring, 2010), but they are representations through numerous symbols, such as (👍, ❤️, 💰, 🙌). Research indicates that interpreting a message is influenced by the emoticon inserted within that message (Walther & D’Addario, 2001; Derks, Bos, & von Grumbkow, 2007), and they ‘*indicate the illocutionary force of the text to which they are attached*’ (Dresner & Herring, 2010).

Abbreviations, such as OMG, Oh my god; LOL, laughing out loud; c u, see you, (Danet & Herring, 2007) are used deliberately in CMC for multiple functions including to speed up typing (Nishimura, 2007), and to show familiarity and intimacy among interlocutors (Lee, 2007). Capitalisation is mostly used for attention, while error repair is often used to correct misunderstanding (Kurhila, 2001). One of the earliest studies of these cues showed that the slightest change in relation to cues of the message had a considerable impact on the perceptions formed by the communicator (Lea & Spears, 1992). The same authors conducted a second study and found a strong positive correlation between the use of cues and measures, such as warmth, dominance, liking and responsibility (Lea & Spears, 1992). In the same vein, Riordan and Kreuz (2010) found that these cues could untangle the message, manage the interaction, intensify the message content, and express emotions.

#### ***5.2.4.3 Spoken or informal style***

Although there exist variations in how researchers examined informality/formality of language use in CMC, the majority of studies concur on the informal style to constitute a conversational, loose, and shortened representation of language (Pe rez-Sabater, Turney, & Montero-Fleta, 2008; Bilal, Mubashra, Akram, & Shahzada, 2013). Researchers noted that the simplistic syntactical structures of messages, the

dialectic form of languages, spelling mistakes, and repetitions reflect the form and characteristics of spoken style conversations. This shift towards the spoken style and informality in written styles is prevalent in mediated discourse, especially in chat transcripts and logs (Herring, 1996; Paolillo & Zelenkauskaitė, 2013), and are associated with the participants' desire to establish solidarity and close interpersonal connection (Westbrook, 2007; Park, 2008). A more detailed discussion of the shift towards informality is presented in Section 5.2.5.2.

These three clusters of linguistic strategies discussed in the previous sections, politeness, emoticons and paralinguistic cues, and spoken or informal style, are representing the literature on linguistic strategies that is going to inform the analysis of discourse in Study 2 which is framed by a mediational theoretical perspective.

#### ***5.2.4.4 Research on CMC linguistic strategies of informal communication***

While there are a handful of research studies on discourse and conversation analytic tradition available, this section is particularly focused on reviewing research tackling linguistic markers related to the interpersonal, informality or intimacy in communication.

Several researchers have adopted politeness theory as a framework for analysing CMC discourse (from email, synchronous chat, and discussion boards) in terms of the interpersonal or (in)formality features (Dorta, 2008; Park, 2008; Westbrook, 2007). Most of these researchers found differences and similarities in participants' use of linguistic and non-linguistic politeness devices in these media, compared to face-to-face conversations. Studies examining synchronous chat found a decreased use of politeness linguistic devices compared to face-to-face conversations (Dorta, 2008; Park, 2008). Dorta (2008), for instance, explained that this could not be considered 'impolite' as participants' need to adapt to the stream and speed of the synchronous mode of communication. In an institutional context, Westbrook (2007) examined the role of formality markers on the nature of the relationship between librarians and users in 402 chat reference sessions at a public university for one academic year. Westbrook (2007) argues that there was a slight elevation of formality level from the side of librarians, where the level of formality was increased

or decreased by employing differing levels of the use of brevity, abbreviations, chat acronyms, contractions, and slang, with rare occasions of apology, self-disclosure, expressions of need, and use of emoticons (Westbrook, 2007).

Most recently, Hössjer (2013) reviewed research on the use of politeness strategies and small talk in email communication in the workplace. The review discussed several studies that show how individuals used indirectness, greetings, closings, and inclusive forms of address such as ‘we’ and ‘our’ for the purpose of establishing solidarity in the work place (Kaul & Kulkarni, 2005; Waldvogel, 2007). Several researchers addressed the connection between emoticon use and the CMC mode and language adopted, and they argue that there are significant variations across modes and languages (Bieswanger, 2013). For instance, Lee (2007) reports that emoticons are highly popular in Hong Kong CMC, and frequently used in instant messaging, while Baron (2008) found the devices making up less than 1% in a study of American college students' use of language in instant messaging. Therefore, the use of emoticons appears to differ based on the language used and mode of CMC employed.

Based on the notion of boundary crossing, Kumpulainen and Mikkola (2014) examined pupils' discourses inside and outside school during chat interaction. The authors investigate the ways in which students establish and manage boundaries between schooling discourse and everyday discourse. Their findings highlight socio-emotional features that mediate the formal/informal boundaries, such as negotiating common ground, establishing mutual inspiration, and building a sense of trust and belonging. Furthermore, McKeown and Zhang (2015) statistically examined a large number of emails of groups of UK professionals to understand the variations of informality in the opening salutation and closing valediction. The authors found that informality of the opening and closing was driven by the use of politeness markers as the conversation progressed, while the formality was driven by the external communication and the social distance between interlocutors. The authors, however, call for qualitative research into the purposes and perceptions of such salutation forms. Timmis (2012) argues for the importance of longitudinal exchanges in enacting more empathetic peer support among undergraduate students in an institutional context, and through instant messaging conversations. This raises the

question of what kind of interpersonal and informal texts would be generated from a mediated interaction between instructor and students who hold a different position to the student over time.

As discussed above, there is a modest array of studies that relate to the management of formality, but hardly any that do so in educational contexts in general, and higher education settings in particular. The shortage of research in this area is not unexpected when taking into consideration the demanding and time consuming methodologies required for examining the discourse, which entail careful reading of messages, classification of linguistic devices, and individual interpretation of device meaning (Crystal, 2001). This area of research is the concern in this thesis, where several assortments of linguistic expressive devices can carry a tone, and define an informal 'online' climate.

As CMC influences the ways in which people interact online in different situations, these mediated communication tools have also reached the hands of educators and students in higher education and influenced how instructors and students interact with each other. Thus, the next section highlights the changing pedagogy, and roles of instructors and students when adopting CMC tools within educational contexts.

### **5.2.5 CMC in Higher Education**

This section provides an overview of the impact of technology and CMC on the educational pedagogy and communication practices between instructors and students in higher education. Also, the role of the instructor in fostering a supportive atmosphere in online spaces is discussed in this section.

Communicating in mediated spaces imposes new roles on both the instructor and the learner. The role of the instructor has shifted from one who communicates knowledge and provides support to independent students, to someone who facilitates interaction and dialogue in online spaces. That is, an instructor using these media are expected to become a 'guide on the side' to support a more learner-centred environment as a facilitator, instead of their traditional role of a 'sage on the stage' (King, 1993) in a traditional lecture. The online instructor role involves encouraging

students' participation and offering timely feedback in the learning space (Swan, 2002). As the focus is away from the instructor, students are transformed into active learners who lead the process of their knowledge gain, by initiating topics, changing the direction of the dialogue and supporting their peers (Mason, 1998). At the same time, the instructor is still expected to be actively 'present' in the online environment by participating, facilitating, and providing substantive feedback on students' contributions (Kearsley, 2010).

In addition, an emphasis on fostering an interpersonal social dynamic is congruent with the constructivist approach central to online pedagogy (Palloff & Pratt, 1999). Instructor immediacy, which is a central concept of the face-to-face classroom instructor-student communication, discussed in Section 4.2.5.1.1 in Chapter 4, can promote social interaction and support an interpersonal relationship between the instructor and student. In a digital setting, instructor immediacy is communicated differently due to the associated physical and psychosocial separation between the instructor and student. Verbal and non-verbal immediacy has been re-discussed and contextualised by many researchers in online settings. O'Sullivan, Hunt, and Lippert (2004) announced 'mediated immediacy' to explain their concept of '*communicative cues in mediated channels that can shape perceptions of psychological closeness*' (471).

Also, the concept 'e-immediacy' was coined by Al-Ghamdi, Samarji, and Watt (2016) in their study of the impact of teacher immediacy on students' participation. As verbal immediacy can be communicated through textual messages, such as jokes, sarcasm, calling or addressing students using first names, encouraging and acknowledging students' contributions and disclosing personal life experiences, online nonverbal immediacy can be delivered through emoticons, capitalisation, repetition and animated moves, as discussed in Section 5.2.4. High e-immediacy strategies are found to create a sense of 'closeness' and increase students' participation and communication satisfaction (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2016). Besides linguistic strategies discussed in Section 5.2.4, immediacy in online context is another valuable concept that will inform the analysis of discourse in Study 2 of the thesis.

While universities around the world were busy coping with the transformation in pedagogy, teaching and learning approaches, and the changing roles of instructor and students due to the emergence of CMC, adaption to LMSs and their associated online learning tools, Web 2.0 and social media developments have become central to the lives of many university students. Thus, institutions worldwide are starting to keep pace with their students' use of social media and attempt to incorporate these social tools to serve different purposes within educational contexts. Before tracing institutions' efforts to keep pace with their students, it is reasonable now to understand what social media, as online spaces, offer that attracts people, and the associated implications of engaging in these media. In the next section, these topics are unpacked in the light of the immersion of the 'Net generation' in a world of opened up communication avenues.

#### **5.2.6 Social Media: An Overview**

This section starts with describing the potential influence of social media in peoples' everyday experiences. In the next section, a particular implication of engaging in a social media dialogue is discussed, namely Informality in the discourse.

In essence, several researchers placed social media under the larger umbrella of CMC technologies where they were considered as a subset of the broad category of CMC (Ellison & Boyd, 2013; Ou, Sia & Hui, 2013). This distinction appears to be reasonable, as many of the features central to CMC tools have been integrated into social media. The ability to engage and communicate textually both synchronously and asynchronously with two, or a group of users, is a major aspect of what social media users encounter today (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). Thus, this thesis embraces this distinction where social media are considered a CMC genre that interleaves with the broader CMC, and referred to as 'Web 2.0' - and the term Web 2.0 is defined in the glossary of this thesis. The emergence of social media has reshaped people's thinking about relationships, and connections with others. Its rapid penetration into people's norms of social communication and the pervasive online connectivity cannot be ignored (Davis III et al., 2012). Unlike the functions and features of other



technologies, within social media, people are connected in a way that corresponds to traditional feelings of belonging, exchanging emotions, and reporting experiences. Social media such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, among others, have become a widely utilized technology with various definitions and usage. The social media definition adopted here was given in the glossary.

Smart phones and portable devices are also equipped with social media application versions of the above mentioned media besides applications, such as WhatsApp, Instagram<sup>7</sup>, and Snap Chat<sup>8</sup>. These media are also known as social Web 2.0, which enables social behaviour, sharing content, collaboration through dialogue and discussions among involved parties (Crook & Harrison, 2008). With the availability of social media, there is a blurring of boundaries between online communities and real-world society, as university students have been adopting such technologies until they have become an integral part of their everyday lives. For this generation of students, social media has become the means of communication and a significant part of their identity (Lin, 2008).

It could be argued that, for students, choosing to engage in a dialogue within social media is an ideal venue for spontaneous exchange with an apparently agreeable audience. Within a social media dialogue, a sense of connectedness is usually fostered to the extent that the conversation often appears to be casual gossip more than a formal written discussion (Lidsky & Friedel, 2013). Thus, informality and spontaneity are important features of social media communication and often play positive roles in enabling a healthy interpersonal discourse. This healthy discourse often involves the communicators, such as the instructor and their students, negotiating shared meanings with each other (Wertsch, 1985). Mediated spaces contribute to reshaping social practices through discourse; this influence includes identity processes, constructing shared understanding and relationship maintenance existing within the space. However, the informal nature of social media discourse is a topic of interest here and is introduced in the following section.

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<sup>7</sup> Is a free online photo sharing and social network platform that allows members users to upload, edit and share photos with other members through the Instagram website or app, email, and social media sites.

<sup>8</sup> Is a mobile app that allows users to send and receive "self-destructing" photos and videos.

### 5.2.6.1 Informality

The literature contains well-documented research suggesting a shift towards informality in online written styles in the English language (Biber & Finegan, 1989; Perez-Sabater, 2012; Zappavigna, 2012; McKeown & Zhang, 2015). Fairclough (1995) described the ways in which such styles exist in discourse as an outcome of the use of technologies. He argued that in modern communication practices, there is a blurring of styles and more “*mixtures of formal and informal styles, technical and non-technical vocabularies, markers of authority and familiarity, more typically written and more typically spoken syntactic forms*” (p. 75). In addition, there are various studies that connect social media with casual, interpersonal and informal discourse, but little empirical evidence could be elicited from the body of literature (Zappavigna, 2012; Perez-Sabater, 2012). Linguistic texts of solidarity, affinity, humour and sarcasm considerably used in the 100 million-word corpus of Twitter corpus (Zappavigna, 2012). Perez-Sabater (2012) found important stylistic variations in relation to the degree of formality/informality across comments contributed by participants from native and non-native speakers of English language in the social networking site Facebook. Most importantly, the author concluded by stressing the assumption that “*it is not technology which determines the form and content of CMC, but the set of cultural/literacy practices which the users bring to the medium*” (Yates, 2000, p. 241).

Although there have been several research studies connecting technology with informal styles globally (Yates, 2000; Perez-Sabater, et al., 2008; Zappavigna, 2012), very little is known about the styles of social media discourse generated by instructors teaching in highly formal education systems. Moreover, Hobsbawm (1994) underlines the tendency towards informalization of discourse and its influence on English-speaking countries, as they became early adopters of social media in various contexts. Therefore, the question arises as to whether the discourse exchanged by people from non-English speaking countries through new technologies will elicit practices of informality.

In summary, this section describes the impact of social media use on people and particularly students’ behaviour and overall experiences. These social spaces

establish a convivial spirit and encourage informal social conversations. There is clear evidence of a shift towards an informal discourse generated within social media. However, this evidence stems from somewhat flexible educational programmes and the gap in the literature lies in the question of whether social media exchanges generated by instructors belonging to a more formal educational system will evoke levels of informality in the space. The following section discusses higher education adoption of social media and its implications for communication and relationship development between instructors and their students and the associated tensions and risks of this integration.

### 5.2.7 Social Media Adoption in Higher Education

This section overviews the literature documenting higher education's efforts towards employing social media, and the potential benefits of using these tools, mainly increasing and enhancing instructor-student communication, as well as encouraging increased student participation. The section ends with a discussion of the potential tensions and risks associated with integrating social media in educational practices.

Besides many cases of institutional-level presence in social media (Tucciarone, 2009; Violino, 2009), there is evidence suggesting that integrating social media tool into traditional learning contexts or online courses is effective (Rovai, 2003; DeSchryver, Mishra, Koehler, & Francis, 2009). This positive evidence continues to appear in more recent studies which generally explored the potential significance of integrating different social media tools in educational practice and students' perceptions of such use. Table 5-1 summaries these recent studies.

Aim of Research	Social Media used	Methods	Key Findings	Reference
Reported on students' experienced of using a designed social site for the purpose of offering social support prior to their arrival on	Spartan Connect	Quantitative: pre and post survey before and after using the social site.	The designed site usage increased students' perceptions that they would have a diverse social support network during their first	DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore (2011)

campus.			semester at college.	
Examined how students perceived Twitter as a classroom tool	Twitter	Qualitative: Tweets content and counts as well as student self-reports on usage and interest.	Students enjoyed being consumers of tweets but seldom retweeted or replied.	Lin, Hoffman, & Borengasser (2013)
Identified the factors that motivate undergraduates to adopt and use social network tools for educational purposes.	Facebook	Quantitative: survey administered to undergraduates about their patterns of Facebook usage.	Social influence is the most important factor in predicting the adoption of Facebook and social relations is perceived as the most important factor among all of the purposes collected.	Sánchez, Cortijo, & Javed (2014)
Explored undergraduates' perceptions about using Twitter as a pedagogical tool.	Twitter	Qualitative: students' written assignments and tweets collected from the course Twitter page over 15-week period	Twitter provided space and opportunities to engage in academic activities.	Bista (2015)
Examined the motivations instructors have for using Facebook with students.	Facebook	Quantitative: surveyed instructors about their experience and expectations of students' views on out-of-classroom socializing with them and their self-disclosure acts on Facebook	Instructors perceived that their interaction with students via Facebook would affect their relationships with students positively in terms of professionalism, credibility, approachability, and mutual connectedness	Sarapin & Morris (2015)

Table 5-1 Recent studies on using social media in educational practice in higher education.

Furthermore, researchers around the world recognize the positive supporting features of social media in promoting students' engagement, autonomy, and faculty-student interaction (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009; Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010; Hrastinski & Aghaee, 2012). More specifically, there are a number of studies which found that social media use increased interaction between instructors and students. For instance, the main purpose of Junco, Heiberger and Loken's (2010) study is to examine the impact of the social media tool, Twitter, on student learning and engagement. Among several positive findings, the authors demonstrated how the use of Twitter encouraged more students to opt in and participate online: "*students feel more comfortable asking questions they may not be comfortable with asking in class*" (Junco et al., 2010, p. 9). Similarly, Greenhow and Gleason (2012) examined Twitter and tweeting practices through the lens of new literacy with one of their aims being to understand how students use the medium in formal and informal settings and with what results. The authors argue that Twitter use supports increased student engagement with course materials and increased opportunities for instructor-student interaction, which potentially motivate a positive relationship.

Despite the promising evidence that stems from the literature discussing positive outcomes associated with social media integration in educational practice, it should be clearly acknowledged that using social media in educational practice is a complex enterprise that involves negotiations, tensions and risks. For instance, Bonderup Dohn (2009) declares that there are potential conflicts between the goals of Educational practices and that of Web 2.0. In Education, educational goals and outcomes are driving activities while participation is only a means to an end. However, the goal of Web 2.0 practices is simple participation. In addition, studies are calling academics to maintain a critical stance on social media use, and to weigh up and balance a number of competing tensions, demands, objectives and expectations (Kirkup, 2010; Veletsianos, 2013). Although openness and opportunities for engagement are among the most valuable features of social media, they can, at the same time be the most challenging attributes for instructors. Digitized academics are faced with issues about maintaining the boundaries between their personal and professional personas, what content one should post, which platforms should be used for which purposes, as well as time pressures (Lupton,

2014). While technology can offer opportunities for informal knowledge construction, interaction and collaboration, it can also destabilize educational activities (Timmis, Joubert, Manuel, & Barnes, 2010).

Having established the level of adoption of, and extent of research on social media within higher education institutions operating within less formal educational systems, it is helpful to understand the extent of research into social media use in teaching and learning within cultures with a more traditional education system, such as that of Saudi Arabia. The following section presents this topic.

### **5.2.8 Social Media in Saudi Higher Education**

As explained in Chapter 2, Section 2.7, citizens in this country are becoming among the most ‘online’ individuals in the world when it comes to social media use. WhatsApp (91%) and Facebook (80%) are the most used social media channels (The Arab Social Media Report, 2015; The Statistics Portal, 2015). Despite this interest in social media, there is no clear indication of a wide adoption of these tools in educational contexts, rather social media use in higher education can be described by individual efforts and case studies. Thus, in this section, although infrequent and fragmented, the available research studies that explore the use of these tools in an educational context, are discussed.

At the Saudi universities’ level of adoption, although Al-Khalifa and Garcia (2013) declared that 80% of Saudi universities have accounts on Facebook (80%), Twitter (72%), and YouTube (31%), the engagement with these media is superficial. The purpose of Facebook and Twitter adoption is for saving the universities' brand names, and sending updates of university announcements and information to staff and students, while YouTube is being used to broadcast recordings of lectures, events, and other related learning materials for students’ reference (Al-Khalifa & Garcia, 2013). In terms of Saudi students’ perceptions and use of social media, Alshareef (2013) surveyed 100 students about their level of satisfaction with the ‘blog’ medium, used as a supplement in a traditional communication course in KAU university. Students’ satisfaction was significant in terms of ease of use, flexibility for extra curricular engagement, and that using social networking made the course

more interesting (Alshareef, 2013). Al-Sharqi and her colleagues (2015) dig deeper into the Saudi students' perceptions of using social media on their social behaviour, surveying 2605 full-time undergraduate students from different schools at KAU. The authors found that Saudi students tend to use the tools for a mixture of academic and entertainment purposes. Also, students perceived that through their use of social media they are able to practise respecting others' opinions and expressing views freely without social and personal obligation (Al-Sharqi et. al, 2015). It could be argued that social media is seen as a liberating tool for Saudi students, where social boundaries can be pushed further and their communication and discussion skills can be enhanced.

At the pedagogical level, little research is conducted to corroborate the inquiry into the extent to which Saudi instructors incorporate social media tools into their practices (Chaurasia, Asma & Ahmed, 2011; Alqahtani, 2016). While there exist several studies in the field of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), which experimented with integrating Facebook (Mahdi & El-Naim, 2012) and blogs (Aljumah, 2012), the studies were limited to students' perspectives, the advantages and disadvantages of medium use, and only sparse studies investigated the pedagogical methods Saudi teachers adopted in technology equipped classrooms (Alabbad, Gitsaki & White, 2010). The majority of Saudi research studies into technology integration into teaching and learning are restricted to eLearning tools and institutional LMSs (Al Saggaf, 2004; Alenezi, Abdul Karim & Veloo, 2010; Almalki, 2011).

At the communication and discourse level, to the best of our knowledge, there are no studies that have researched the nature of Saudi instructors' or students' discourse in a social media context. However, a few studies on discourse and Saudi's voice provide useful insights. For instance, there is a study that examined Saudi female's negotiation of identity and expression in blogs through qualitative interviews (Guta & Karolak, 2015), where women reflected on the cultural and societal role in shaping their online identities. However, the analysis was limited to interview data and the communication was among female friends for recreational purpose. Thus, unfortunately, studies that investigated the 'educational' discourse and

communication practices between instructors and students in a social media context barely exist (Alamri, 2015).

While this section presents studies that produced useful insights into social media being utilized and harnessed in recreational and educational contexts, research addressing practices within Saudi Arabia, where the traditional educational system, social and cultural dynamics are configured by religious and moral beliefs that guide Saudi's everyday practices, is relatively scarce. In addition, the available Saudi-based studies are mostly quantitative, and limited to students' perspectives of social media, their satisfaction, and the benefits and barriers. Yet, the instructor side of this equation, particularly their communication practices in a social media space are still under researched. Thus, this gap is of interest to this thesis.

### **5.2.9 Review Summary**

Section 5.2 developed a literature review involving useful studies for the purpose of framing Study 2 of this thesis. In particular, Study 2 is mainly informed by mediation as the theoretical underpinning, the informal and spontaneous nature of social media, a useful literature describing a set of well-documented linguistic strategies, as well as mediated or e-immediacy concept used in mediated spaces. Section 5.2.2 establishes the mediational perspective of digital technologies and the way in which these tools affect individuals' interaction experience via language, settings and artefacts. Thus, given the formal well-established instructor-student relationship resulting from Study 1, the question is to enquire into the 'social' or 'informal' discourse that instructors' text to their students in an educational mediated space. These mediated spaces are characterised by spontaneity and informality in writing styles, as discussed in Section 5.2.6.1. Hence, the challenging task now is attempting to understand how the instructors' current traditional interaction practices react to such informality and sense of connectedness promoted within these environments. If social media cultivate sociability in educational exchanges, then it might be expected to see this occurrence increasingly emerge over time (Walther, 1992, 1994) as discussed in Section 5.2.3. Thus, a significant concern here is to trace any such trends as indicated in the second research challenge. As previously mentioned in Chapter 1 Section 1.2, Study 2 proposes two sub-research challenges



and has the significant purpose of extracting any exchanged informal texts from instructors to their students, taking into consideration the back up story of those instructors' traditional and cultural interaction practices in classroom contexts as revealed in Study 1. Thus, by capturing communication practices between instructors and students in informal, outside-the-classroom contexts, this study might uncover a different dynamic to female instructor-student interactions.

## **5.3 Methodology**

### **5.3.1 Research questions and methods overview**

The overarching aim of Study 2 is to explore how the intersection of social media and culture might shape or disturb female instructor and student communication within the highly formal Saudi educational system. This aim is an implication of Study 1 results, where it is proved that instructor-student interaction practices are formal, scarce, and opportunities for this interaction to occur are limited due to several contextual factors. This in turn shapes the formal instructor-student relationship in a face-to-face context. Thus, Study 2 is triggered to look at communication practices within a social media context. In particular, this mixed method case study explores a social contemporary phenomenon, and one which is being investigated in a Saudi higher educational context. Hence, this case study sought to optimise understanding of the circumstances of female Saudi instructors' communication practices on social media, rather than making generalisations. This investigation is carried out in its natural context, grounded in the Saudi KAU- female campus at a specific time during the academic year 2014. The primary purpose of this study is to provide intensive description, analyses, and interpretations of Saudi instructors' interpersonal and informal communication practices. For the purposes of answering the study research questions, an online corpus of instructor and student messages exchanged within social networking applications, namely WhatsApp and MessageMe, was collected. Table 5-2 is an "evaluation crosswalk" that maps out which method(s) will be used to answer each research question and the rationale behind the selection. Figure 5-1 shows the case study research design and data sources. In this figure, the design is illustrated by blocks used to demonstrate the

research stages starting from the data collection, the sampling from corpora, and the multiple data analysis conducted.

Research Question	Qualitative Methods		Necessity and Analysis Method
	Instructors' Social Media Messages	Students' Social Media Messages	
<b>RQ1:</b> What are the informality and intimacy markers that exist in Saudi instructors' communication practices with their students in social media contexts?	$\chi$		<p>To unveil the ways in which instructors articulate their closeness and the particular discursive acts used to deliver their informality.</p> <p>Mixed method content analysis approach is conducted to determine most and least prominent informal markers in terms of count/percentage occurrences for instructors and interpret them within its context.</p>
<b>RQ2:</b> To what extent is there a growth in instructors' emerging informality markers over time via the medium?	$\chi$		<p>To discover the patterns in which instructors' informality markers grow (or not) over an eight-week period.</p> <p>A linear trend analysis is conducted to identify any growth in informality for each instructor over time.</p>

Table 5-2. Research questions mapped to methods, and necessity of use.

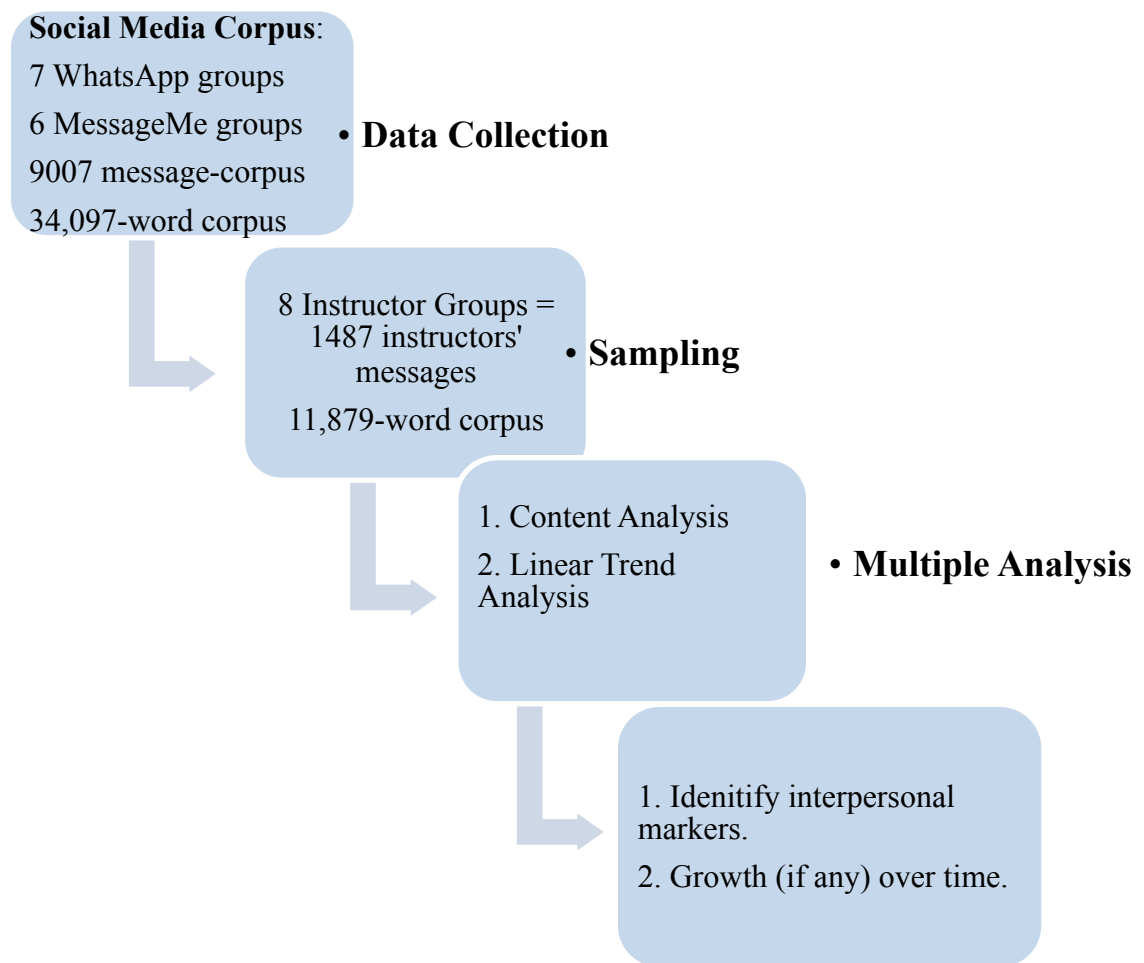


Figure 5-1 Study 2 research design and procedure.

### **5.3.2 Methods Choice: Social Media Corpora**

The online corpora as an instrument is significant for achieving the aims of this study in two ways. First, the online corpora enable the researcher to examine any existing informality and interpersonal markers within textual communication practices of female Saudi instructors who have been perceived by their students in Study 1 of this thesis as generally authoritarian, formal, less affable and driven by traditional teaching. As previously mentioned in Section 5.2.6, such playful egalitarian online spaces as used by social media promote sociability (Walther, 1996) and informality (Zappavigna, 2012). Thus, the scrutiny of Saudi instructors' discourse in these environments is essential to understanding the potential of social media in shaping instructors' formal practices, which generally may be leaking into higher education through the patterns of communication. Secondly, the extended episodes of instructor-student interaction within the online spaces offer the researcher an opportunity to observe the interaction experience as it occurs over time in terms of instructors' interpersonal and informal adaptation to the medium. This aim is driven by the assumption that social relationships will develop when interacting over time (Walther, 1992, 1994). All in all, the online conversations produced from female Saudi instructors and students will provide a significant source to observe any reconstructed practices from hitherto normal practices as described in Study 1.

### **5.3.4 Participants and Sampling**

#### ***5.3.4.1 Instructors***

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 3.3, a total of 13 female instructors from different disciplines at KAU volunteered and were willing to explore the experience of interacting with students via social media as shown in Table 5-3. Further details on the process of technology decision making and the two mobile applications are presented in Section 5.3.4.2.

	<b>Instructor N=13</b>	<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Technology Experience in Educational Contexts</b>
1	Nadia	Art	Lecturer	none
2	Ghadah		Lecturer	One semester used WhatsApp as a course communication channel
3	Maryam		Lecturer	none
4	Ruby	Home Economics	Lecturer	none
5	Hala		Assistant Professor	none
6	Maya		Assistant Professor	none
7	Amira	Science	Lecturer	One semester used WhatsApp as a course communication channel
8	Hana		Lecturer	none
9	Raya	English Language Institute	Lecturer	Uses Edmodo, LMS on regular basis
10	Galiah		Lecturer	One semester used WhatsApp as a course communication channel
11	Khadija		Assistant Professor	none
12	Ash	Administration and Economics	Lecturer	none
13	Hind		Lecturer	none

Table 5-3 Total instructors participating in social media experience before sampling.

Instructor participants selected their classes of students for the interaction activity. On a mutually agreed date and time, the researcher introduced the research in 10-minute session to the classes of students and gave them the opportunity to opt out at any time without penalty. All in all, online corpora were collected from 13



instructors. Before introducing the characteristics of the corpora collected from instructors, the instructors' decision making process regarding which social media applications were to be used in the experience, is presented next.

#### ***5.3.4.2 Instructors' selection of technology***

The researcher searched for easy-to-use social media tools that would offer a chat or interaction service between groups of students and their instructor for the purpose of exploring the study's research questions. The researcher was also keen to include popular culturally-familiar tools (the Arab Social Media Report, 2015) to facilitate instructors and students participation, such as WhatsApp. In addition, MessageMe application was a very similar alternative to WhatsApp, offering the same simple interface and including the same features. Including this application as an alternative option to WhatsApp was driven by the researcher's experience in knowing that some instructors at KAU are very cautious when it comes to distributing their private mobile numbers to students. Therefore, MessageMe would be a very good alternative to Whatsapp if the instructor does not want her phone number to be known. As previously mentioned above, eventually, instructor participants were given the option to choose between four social media technologies including: WhatsApp, MessageMe, TodaysMeet, and TitanPad. While some of these social media tools were different in interface and functionality, the four tools were chosen by the researcher for two main reasons.

One reason is in order to cover all instructors' technological appetites, as well as facilitate the choice of technology that is a good fit with the course objectives, or purpose of the educational task it supports. The second reason is that all these tools offer a textual communication environment to serve the purpose of this study and are fairly easy to use, and require as minimum technological experience as typing. This factor was essential to ensure that technological factors do not hinder or skew the findings of the study. In addition, the researcher role was only to introduce options of technology, and examples of adoption in an educational context to facilitate the decisions process for the instructors, the majority of whom had little experience in using the tools in educational contexts. These technology options and scenarios were 'optional' and the researcher acknowledged that they were welcome to suggest any

other types of text-based technology and educational scenarios that they were interested in using and experiencing. Table 5-4 shows the technology options, their functionalities and affordances, reasons for the choice and examples of educational scenarios given to instructors.

Social Media Tool	Functionality and Affordances	Rationale for Offering	Examples offered for an educational scenarios
WhatsApp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free mobile messaging application using <i>phone numbers</i></li> <li>- Can be used on all smart phone types</li> <li>- Affords group creation so one-to-one and one-to-many exchanges are available</li> <li>- Affords synchronous or asynchronous communication.</li> <li>- Sharing photos, links, videos, and voice notes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Popular</li> <li>- Familiarity- so that technology factors do not interfere with the findings</li> <li>- No accounts or passwords, no log in and log out of accounts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discuss assignments and projects on mutually agreed upon date and time.</li> <li>- Create and send activities related to the lecture topics to support students' learning.</li> </ul>
Message Me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free mobile messaging application <i>user names</i></li> <li>- Can be used on all smartphone types</li> <li>- Affords group creation so one-to-one and one-to-many exchanges are available</li> <li>- Affords synchronous or asynchronous communication.</li> <li>- Sharing photos, links, videos, and voice notes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Phone numbers privacy</li> <li>- Similar interface to WhatsApp</li> <li>- Can be accessed from phones, desktop or laptops.</li> <li>- No accounts or passwords, no log in and log out of accounts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use small group discussions for each topic/question, at first each student could post the most relevant comments being circulated in the group.</li> <li>- Create and send activities related to the lecture topics to support students learning.</li> <li>- Offer online office hours using MessageMe, set hours and let students know. Students merely need to enter</li> </ul>



			MessageMe, contact you, and ask their questions.
<p>Today's Meet  <a href="http://todaysmeet.com">http://todaysmeet.com</a></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A website acting as a microblogging backchannel to be used for classroom activities.</li> <li>- Featuring 140-character limit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easy-to-use interface</li> <li>- Can be accessed from phones, desktop or laptops.</li> <li>- No accounts or passwords, no log in and log out of accounts</li> <li>- A different tool with possible different educational scenarios.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discuss assignments and projects on mutually agreed upon date and time.</li> <li>- Use TodaysMeet in class discussion by projecting it onto the large screen in the classroom so students can watch the stream of comments.</li> <li>- Create a room for online office hours and send students the link.</li> </ul>
<p>Titan Pad  <a href="http://titanpad.com">http://titanpad.com</a></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A free web 2.0 tool that enables group of people to work collaboratively in a single document.</li> <li>- Affords working asynchronously and synchronously on the document and chatting while working on the document.</li> <li>- Import and export documents to and from TitanPad.</li> <li>- A time slider to view changes on previous versions of the document.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easy-to-use interface</li> <li>- It serves different purposes beside chatting or communication, so it may cover different educational objectives.</li> <li>- No accounts or passwords, no log in and log out of accounts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To review student course work by uploading the document into the pad and chatting about it in the chat box.</li> <li>- To keep you aware of groups progress on assigned tasks.</li> <li>- Offer group online office hours using TitanPad when you need to upload and explain course concepts to students.</li> </ul>

Table 5-4 Social Media options, affordances, and suggested educational scenarios.



After introducing these options, instructors were given time to think and decide which technology to use with students, what type of activity to facilitate, and on which course they were currently teaching to use it. Eventually, seven instructors used WhatsApp, and six used MessageMe. Familiarity, ease of use, and being mobile applications were the main reasons for favouring WhatsApp and MessageMe over the other suggested technology options. More specifically, Whatsapp, as discussed in Chapter 2, is the most popular mobile application in Saudi, so instructors and students already know how to use it, no training is required, there is no need to teach students, and they don't have to install it, as it is already installed in their phones.

WhatsApp application has a friendly and easy to use interface. People can join using their phone numbers. The screen of each group shows all the messages sent, which are listed by the date of posting, with the latest messages last. Each message listed includes the name that the sender chooses for herself. To send a message, participants type the message in the box at the bottom of the screen and click on “Send”. Figure 5-2 shows examples of WhatsApp and MessageMe group screens. Students could access the application from their own mobile phones with any internet access either on or off campus. As shown in Table 5-4, The MessageMe mobile application is very similar to the look and functionality of WhatsApp, to the extent that people call its service a “Whatsapp-like service”, offering the same simple interface and including the same features. The only difference is that users can join by user names instead of phone numbers.



Figure 5-2 snapshots of WhatsApp and MessageMe interface.

#### 5.3.4.3 Sampling from instructors' corpora

During the period between January 2014 and May 2014, 9007 messages were generated from 13 WhatsApp and MessageMe groups created by instructors from different disciplines. For the purpose of content analysis and the linear trend analysis, I decided on a sample size of ( $N=8$ ) instructors to make the analysis more manageable. First, I chose instructors' groups with the most similar faculties (Merriam, 1998); this means that only the Science faculty was excluded. Secondly, instructors were separated into four strata, or groups based on the four disciplines they belong to. After arranging each instructor group alphabetically by their real names, every first two instructors were selected from four discipline groups. Then, in order to keep the analysis manageable, only messages initiated during eight successive weeks of the semester were analyzed. Thus, they would facilitate capturing patterns of practices, or linguistic features used by instructors at different times during the semester. Five of these groups were asynchronous course-related

communication, and three were synchronous discussion sessions. Ultimately 5093 messages, constituting 1487 instructors' messages, were selected to be analyzed. Figure 5-3 shows a visual timeline representation of the eight instructors' practice.

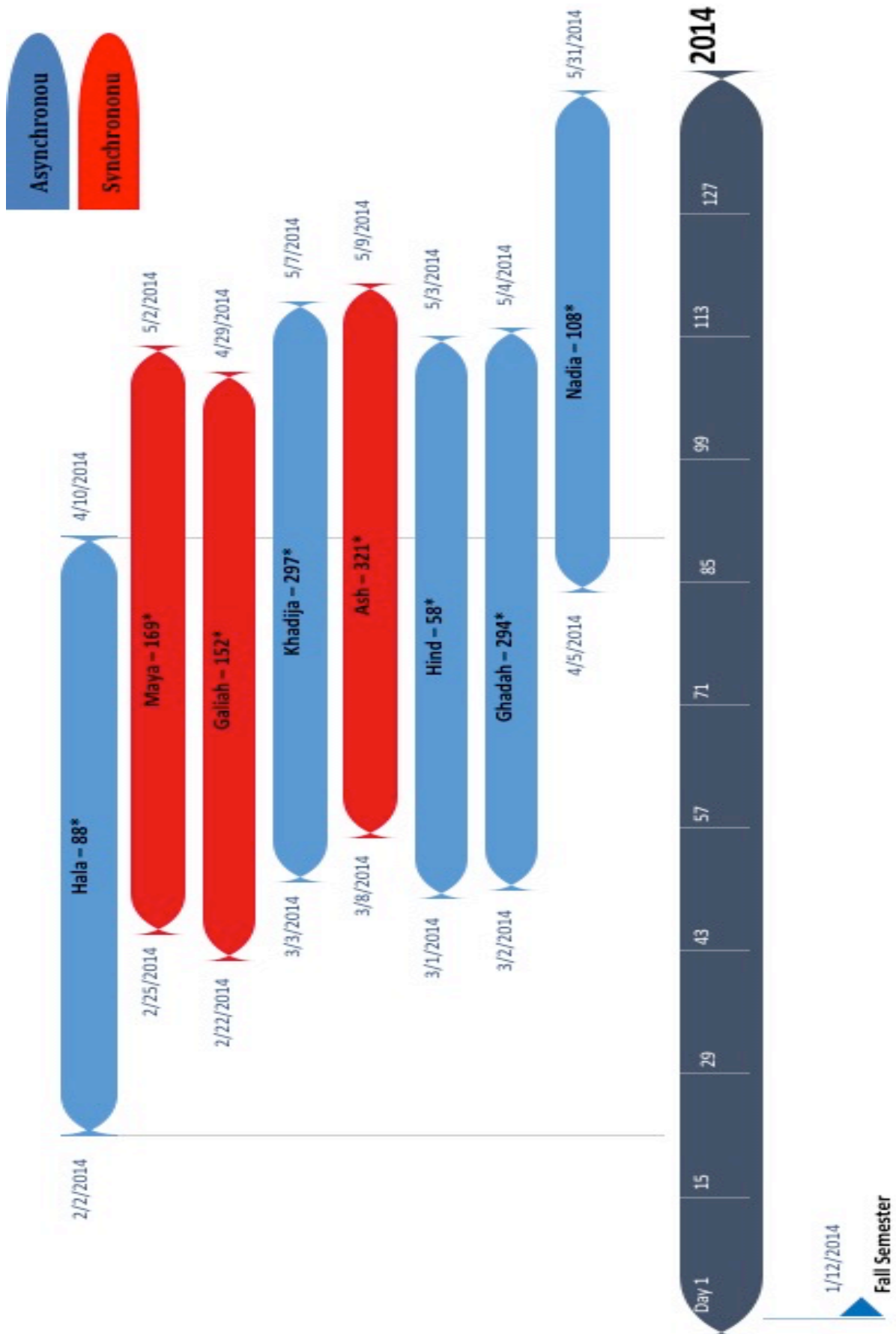


Figure 5-3 A time line of instructors use of WhatsApp and MessageMe during the fall semester of 2014. \* Indicates individual instructor number of messages in the online group.

#### ***5.3.4.4 Characteristics of the Instructors' Groups***

Table 5-5 illustrates the characteristics of each instructor's corpus in the eight-week period. Art groups have the smallest number of students ( $n=10, 12$ , respectively), while Administration and Economics hold the highest number of students per group ( $n=50, 32$ ). This difference in student numbers is due to the fact that the two Art instructors are teaching specialized students, and usually student numbers in specialized classes are smaller compared to required, or general courses like general Administration and Economics courses. The nature of participation in the groups differed based on each instructor's goal of creating the group, as well as the nature of the course. More specifically, five instructors (Hala, Nadia, Ghadah, Khadija, and Hind) used the medium asynchronously as an out-of-class channel of communication, where questions and answers about course related matters could be texted anytime during the semester. This provided an open window for anytime communication, where instructors could answer students' questions, and students could initiate questions and discussions, or contribute to discussions initiated by others.

However, three instructors (Maya, Galiah, and Ash) preferred to meet synchronously at a specific, mutually arranged time for course discussions with their students via the medium. In other words, three instructors created real time discussion groups, and five instructors created asynchronous course-related communication groups. Instructors moderating both types of groups in both applications announced their group purpose either verbally in class, or via the online group. Two instructors, Maya and Ash, assigned extra grades for participation as they believe that grades would add some "seriousness" to the activity. Table 5-5 shows the online groups characteristics.

Instructor		Course Group		Communication Mode	No. of students	No. of students Msg.	No. of Instructors Msg.	Total Msg.
1	Ghadah	Art	Creative Coloring	Asynchronous	10	194	294	488
2	Nadia		Ceramic decoration and Coatings	Asynchronous	12	248	108	365
3	Hala	Home Economics	Learning Difficulties	Asynchronous	33	181	88	269
4	Maya		Gifted Children	Synchronous	22	303	169	472
5	Galiah	European Languages	Introduction to English as a Second Language	Synchronous	23	219	152	371
6	Khadija			Asynchronous	30	741	297	1038
7	Ash	Administration and Economics	Basics in Accounting	Synchronous	50	1452	321	1773
8	Hind		Introduction to Business	Asynchronous	32	318	58	376
	Total					3656	1487	5134

Table 5-5 online groups characteristics according to faculty

### 5.3.5 Research Procedure

The study was conducted at KAU in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia over the period from January 2014 to May 2014, which is the Fall semester. As previously mentioned, instructor participants were invited to participate and were approached with the aim to integrate social media into a course they would be teaching that semester. Each instructor participant was invited to attend a one-hour research presentation and orientation session at a previously, mutually agreed time. Instructor participants were given the option to choose between four social media technologies or choose any other text-based communication technology of their interest. Furthermore, instructors were given educational examples and scenarios to facilitate the use of technology. In addition, instructor participants were given the choice of using any other text-based

tool besides the four selected online environments. Each instructor participant was given a period of time in which to decide which technology option she was going to use with her students for educational purposes. When the instructors established their WhatsApp and MessageMe online groups, they had added their students and encouraged them to participate, the instructors added the researcher as a member of the online groups for observation. This was done after notifying students in class about the research by both the researcher and the instructor of each class. During instructors' and students' online activities, the researcher observed and recorded conversations and noted areas where clarification and understanding was needed. Each week, the researcher undertook regular reviews of the online activity in each WhatsApp group and noted developments and signs of 'change'. By the end of the semester, the researcher collected instructors' transcriptions by using the applications feature 'Email Chat'. This affordance produced electronic versions of each instructor's group as a pdf file and sent it to a specified email address used by the researcher.

### **5.3.6 Data Analysis Methods**

In order to explore Study 2 research questions, multiple data analysis methods were used to secure an in-depth analysis of the social media corpora. For the purpose of examining instructors' corpora for any existing interpersonal, informal and intimate markers (RQ1), content analysis was used (Krippendorff, 2004, 2012). Secondly, to investigate any growth in these markers in instructors' corpora over the eight weeks (RQ2), statistical trend analysis tests were used.

The analysis consists of a number of phases:

- Simple descriptive analysis is to further explore the volume of interaction in terms of students' participation levels. Section 5.4.1 reports this phase.
- Content analysis to elicit the informality markers in instructors' corpora.
- Mann-Kendall and linear trend analysis to examine any growth in informal features over time.

#### **5.3.6.1 Content Analysis: the interpersonal markers**

Content analysis is defined as ‘*a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use*’ (Krippendorff, 2012, p. 24). Although it is often considered that content analysis is primarily a qualitative method, research suggests that it fits well into the structure of mixed methods (Weber, 1985). The objective of this study is to examine the ways in which instructors’ written messages are re-shaped in social media environments when they immerse in routine forms of communication. Therefore, to explore the study’s first research question, any interpersonal features, or the tendency towards informality in instructors’ communication practices with their students in the online corpora was examined. Thus, a content analysis set of mixed method procedures here is a good fit that allows the researcher to describe the ‘social’ content of instructors’ practices and to make inferences about the ‘stylistic linguistic structures’, ‘characteristics’, ‘meaning’ and ‘interpretation’ of their messages in the space. Thus, the use of the term ‘linguistic marker’, ‘interpersonal marker’ or ‘informality marker’ in this thesis involves both the linguistic structure and the communicator’s circumstances, interpretations of intention and meaning of exchanges. It should be noted that the analysis did not distinguish between the two modes of communication (asynchronous and synchronous) used by instructors. The next set of steps explains the procedure of content analysis used for the purpose of answering the study’s research question.

#### **Step 1: Defining the Context**

As previously mentioned, the purpose of scrutinising instructors’ textual conversations is to characterise their messages and shed light on the meaning of messages that serve a social function. However, within a meditational perspective framing this study, the context where the communication take place, cannot be ignored in this analysis. From a sociocultural standpoint, the context is actively constructed by the communicators and not only the ‘situation’. Thus, in order to understand the dynamics and the mediational means of technology, the change or transformation in behavior is examined by considering communicators, language, and the context. In addition, the mediated space that lacks cues, and the Saudi



cultural context that brings its values, traditions, uncertainty avoidance, and many more aspects into the space serve as a ‘conceptual justification’ (Krippendorff, 2013) for the researcher’ interpretations. Thus, instructors’ corpora are considered and examined within the Saudi mediated educational context.

## **Step 2: Unitizing**

There are two kinds of unit of analysis that need to be defined at this stage: 1) context units, and 2) recording units (Krippendorff, 2004). The importance of units of analysis is that they determine how the overall corpora are to be broken down into manageable pieces in preparation for the coding stage. First, context units are portions of the written text that may overlap and contain many recording units. Therefore, unlike recording units, context units “*need not be independent of each other, can overlap, and may be consulted in the description of several recording units*” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 101), and are defined here as the instructor’s complete message, entry or educational contribution. Secondly, in identifying recording units the researcher questions what may be the best choice when concentrating on interpersonal and informal features? When reading the instructors’ corpora repeatedly, the researcher observed both long messages, which could constitute several sentences, and also short forms of messages, which is the nature of chat exchanges. Sometimes such messages could be a smiley face (☺), or a short agreement response, ‘Yup’. Therefore, the researcher decided that the most objective identification of a unit of analysis is the complete message or the entry. Thus, context unit can be as long as the recording unit (Chelmsky, 1989). For example, this complete message (i.e. context unit) ‘*Good evening girls. I know its very late but I had to tell you...there won’t be a lecture tomorrow ... I apologize girls.. it’s just that I’m verry sick :☺*’ could be coded in three recording units, with each idea belonging to only one category (Krippendorff, 2004). This decision is in agreement with several scholars who opt for complete messages (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001), because it is the unit which has been defined by the author of the message (Anderson et al., 2001), in this case, the instructor.

### Step 3: Developing Coding Categories

First, an inductive approach was used to categorise the context unit or the entire message as a certain predominant type of educational contribution. For instance, the message: ‘*ladies.. I forgot to mention.. there is no test on Sunday because I wont be in town.. attending a conference... but there will be a lecture on Monday... so enjoy your weekend (smiley face)*’ was coded as an ‘announcement’ contribution regardless of the recording units it contained.

Secondly, in relation to the theoretical perspective framing this study, and in order to understand the dynamics and the mediational means of technology, the change or transformation in behavior is examined by considering communicators, language, and the context. Thus, an initial deductive category development was an adequate content analysis procedure to adopt, based on this study’s concerns of extracting interpersonal structure from the texts and the available relevant literature. Therefore, in order to derive categories, which should be based and informed by previous literature discussed in Section 5.2.4 and 5.2.5, the researcher revisited and was re-immersed in the research of CMC discourse and interpersonal communication (Walther, 1994, 1996; Herring et al., 2013). The researcher notes the linguistic behaviours and cues that foster an interpersonal and informal discourse, such as politeness strategies (Goffman, 1967), Emoticons (Walther & D’Addario, 2001), paralinguistic cues (Lea & Spears, 1992), spoken style (Pe rez-Sabater, 2012), e-immediacy (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2016), and many others, so began to formulate an initial coding guideline table or codebook table. This coding guideline assists and guides the process of developing categories by involving three stages:

- **Definition of categories:** operationalizing the research question into categories that produce research aspects. These are defined based on the literature to illustrate which recording unit should be assigned to a given category.
- **Anchor samples:** citing real examples for each defined category to further demonstrate the nature of these categories.

- **Coding rules:** formulating rules for the purpose of distinguishing between descriptions of categories. These rules help the researcher by removing any ambiguity when assigning texts to a particular category.

This stage of analysis results in a coding guideline table that could be checked against instructors' corpora. Table 5-6 is a segment example of an initial code guideline based on the relevant literature. The final codebook is in Appendix 4.

	Category	Definition	Anchor example	Coding rule
1	Paralinguistic cues (Lea & Spears, 1992)	Devices like contractions forms, abbreviations, capitalisation for attention, spelling errors.	<i>OMG: Oh my god, LOL: laughing out loud, c u: see you</i>	Often abbreviated and short versions of original form of words.
2	Verbal Immediacy or e-immediacy (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2016)	Refers to calling the students by name, encouraging students, complementing, and acknowledging contributions.	<i>Good job girls!</i>	Giving a sense of involvement in the communication. No articulation of emotions here.
3	Emoticons (Walther & D'Addario, 2001)	Relational icons or a sequence of ordinary characters found on computer keyboard.	☺ ☹ ☺ ;) Human face representations	Can stand alone or accompanied by texts.
4	Phatics (Hossjer, 2013)	Greetings, openings, closing, social conversations.	Hi everyone, good morning, bye, it's a very hot day.. how's everyone?	Conversations not related to educational activity or course related matters. Serves social function.
5	Affective expression (Park, Lee, Yun, & Kim, 2009)	Using humour, sharing emotions and disclosing personal information.	I am so happy today, I've never felt so annoyed before.	Sharing emotional feelings, or private information that students usually don't get to know about instructors.

Table 5-6 Part of code guidelines for the interpersonal categories based on the literature.

#### Step 4. Coding Corpora

Upon compiling a complete coding guideline, the researcher went into an iterative process of immersion in each instructor corpora to test and check whether the categories are applicable to the material. Also, this trial ensures whether the definitions of categories, examples, and the encoding rules support assigning categories into text extracts or defining new categories. This trial run-through was operated in two stages. First, all text portions in the corpora that addressed a certain category were marked as ‘points of discovery’ (cf. Hausser, Mayring & Strehmel, 1982, cited from Mayring, 2014) by the category number indicated in the preliminary coding guidelines. The second step involved the marked text to be extracted and processed according to the category system developed. Each instructor corpora results in a revision and reformulation of the coding scheme, refining its definitions and adding supportive examples. Some text passages were considered prototypical for a category and were added to the coding guideline as an example. These repeated trials further re-shaped the codebook, where categories were further subdivided, being resolved, split up into individual features or, adding new subcategories as they surfaced from the corpora, and discarding others.

For instance, the coding guideline table was repeatedly revised after running three instructor’s corpora. Verbal immediacy category was subdivided into concrete separate subcategories such as encouraging, and expressing agreement. This subdividing of categories was necessary so that a recording unit such as ‘*I know how brave you are*’ should be assigned to a subcategory called ‘encouraging and praising’ rather than the more general category, verbal immediacy, that incorporates several linguistic behaviours. In addition, a category such as Phatics was redefined, and its boundaries or rules refined to incorporate cultural remarks and ritual expressions found in data. These expressions usually have a social politeness characteristic, such as ‘*May Allah give you luck*’ and ‘*May you see no harm*’. Thus, anchor examples of these cultural expressions were added to the table as well as a coding rule to ensure consistency. The Affective Expression category was split up into individual subcategories, such as self-disclosure, and using humour, with a new subcategory, apologizing, that surfaced from the corpora. Capitalisation and abbreviations were some of the subcategories that were discarded, as no text appeared to match such

themes, while other patterns where the participant shifts language use to the delicates (informal version of language) did not fit any category or subcategory. Thus, Code Switching was a category defined, anchored by examples, and added to the coding scheme.

During this systematic coding of the remaining instructors' corpora, some categories were renamed to clearly reflect function, or were grouped to larger categories, and the coding scheme table was edited to include the category column, subcategory, definition, and examples. After revisions, all categories were checked to be exhaustive, mutually exclusive, and independent of each other (Chelimsky, 1989). To ensure these characteristics of categories, I worked through the texts to list all categories and subcategories linked to the recording units. Thus, a table showing the coding scheme of interpersonal features was finalized based on both the raw data and relevant literature. Coding all eight participant corpora was aided by Atlas.ti software.

### **Step 5: Quantification Levels**

As a quantitative step, two quantification approaches were conducted:

1. Frequency of units of analysis belonging to the categories
2. Density of interpersonal markers

Conducting the first level of quantification, which is the frequency of messages or units belonging to categories, could be considered a valid indication of the value of a certain informal category, or the level of its importance across corpora. Thus, frequencies and percentages were calculated. The second level of quantification was essential to achieve in order to compare the eight participant corpora, as they differ in the number of words. The density function is defined as the number of instances in a given category (from the 14 subcategories that are going to be presented in Section 5.4.2) divided by the total number of words, then multiplied by 1000. This density, or normalisation function, is based partly on the work of Mason (1991) and used in previous social presence research (Anderson et al., 2001) and found to be useful in understanding differences and comparing transcripts of conversations, as

well as facilitating comparisons across other studies. This part of the findings is reported in Section 5.4.3.

### **Step 6: Checking Reliability: Inter-rater**

In order to verify the reliability of the coding, another coder is asked to code 50% of the data (718 instructors' messages) according to the coding scheme. The researcher first trained the coder to assist in coding the corpora, which involved the researcher describing and demonstrating how to use and apply the coding scheme generated to the messages. In addition, coding rules and recording units were described to the coder. Training the coder lasted 4 hours. The coder analyzed each message by classifying the recording unit(s) to categories belonging to the coding scheme. Upon the coder finalising the coding of all assigned messages, the coded messages, as well as the recording units in each message, were compared to those of the researcher and Cohen's Kappa was calculated. Reliability of a categorical coding scheme and unit of analysis is typically evaluated using Kappa statistics (Cohen, 1960) that measure the amount of agreement there is between two codes of the same data, controlling for agreement by chance. Based on 50% sample of all the messages coded by the two coders, a Cohen's Kappa of 0.88 was established for the coding scheme and 0.83 for the unit reliability of the message. The reliability results indicate a strong level of agreement (.80-.90) (Cohen, 1960).

### **Step 7: Reporting and interpreting the findings**

This stage involves making sense of the identified interpersonal categories and their subcategories. These emergent categories explain how instructors are being 'social' or 'interpersonal' in interaction. A process of describing and interpreting the content within its various contexts then started and was documented. I strived to present my reconstruction of meanings derived from analysing the corpora and making reasonable inferences considering the real contexts. My inferences involved interpreting meaning and intent of both conscious and unconscious choices of instructors' linguistic structures and strategies. Quotations, graphs and charts were incorporated to justify the study conclusions. The description and interpretation of

the findings were presented by constantly highlighting the context and background in order to help the reader understand the basis for the interpretation.

#### ***5.3.6.2 Trend Analysis: interpersonal markers change (if any) over time***

In this phase, the extent of informality or interpersonal markers growth over time for instructors is explored to answer the second research question of Study 2. Two statistical tests were computed for this purpose. First, the non-parametric Mann-Kendall test is used to test for trend and whether informality tended to increase or decrease with time. Hence, the test allowed for testing the null hypothesis of no change in informality over time by examining whether Kendall's S is different from zero. In addition, a simple linear regression statistical test is conducted to make stronger assumptions about whether there is a linear trend and distribution of informality over time. This also tests the null hypothesis and whether the slope coefficient is zero.

### **5.4 Results**

This section is divided into two main parts. Part one includes Sections 5.4.2 and 5.4.5, which demonstrate the findings of the content analysis conducted to reveal the interpersonal markers found in instructors' online conversations. Part two includes Section 5.4.4 which presents the results of the statistical analysis and a discussion of its implications as the patterns of informality markers change over time. The following Section 5.4.1 presents the characteristics of the online groups and students' participation.

#### **5.4.1 Students' Participation Level**

Although student exchanges in this study are not examined, their level of participation in instructors' groups is examined in order to explore the volume of interaction. The students' participation rate is calculated in each group through the number of messages texted to the group. To achieve this, the concept of "Participation Percentage" is used (Uden, Yang, Tao & Ting, 2014). Participation percentage depends on the number of students who posted at least one message to the group during the eight weeks. Table 5-7 shows the percentage of participation in each instructor's group. As shown in Table 5-7, the group with the highest

participation rate is instructor Khadija's, followed by the groups of instructors Ghadah and Ash. It is shown that 87% of students participated in Khadija's group by sending at least one message, and 13% were inactive and did not send any messages. The groups of students with the least participation were Hind's, then Maya's and Hala's, with 34% of students in Hind's group participating by sending at least one message to the group.

Instructors	Type of Group	No. of Students	No. of messages	Average posts per student	Median	No. of students posted at least once	Participation %
<b>Nadia</b>	Asynchronous	10	194	19.4	10.5	6	60
<b>Ghadah</b>		12	248	20.7	14.5	10	83
<b>Hala</b>		33	181	5.5	0	13	39
<b>Khadija</b>		30	741	24.7	21	26	87
<b>Hind</b>		32	318	10	0	11	34
<b>Maya</b>	Synchronous	22	303	13.8	0	8	36
<b>Galiah</b>		23	219	9.52	6	15	56
<b>Ash</b>		50	1452	29.04	22	41	82


Table 5-7 Students' participation according to groups.

Both Khadija and Hind's groups contain asynchronous course related exchanges. Although both groups had a similar total number of students, the difference in participation level is evident. This could partially be explained by the instructors' participation levels in these groups, where 40% of the overall group messages were initiated by instructor Khadija, while only 18% of the total messages were initiated by Hind. In addition, two of the synchronous discussion groups showed a relatively high participation rate (Ash= 82%, Galiah= 56%), while one showed a low participation rate (Maya =36%) in comparison to these two. The role of the instructors' messages in these groups might play an important role in students' participation. Thus, a possible explanation might be the number of interpersonal markers shared by those instructors, as described later in Section 5.4.3.



### 5.4.2 Interpersonal markers in instructors' messages

The findings of this section demonstrate a mixture of linguistic markers used that mark the social texture of instructors' messages in a social media context. In other words, the primary focus is on the interpersonal elements, both in structure and by interpretation of intent, as a way to understand the informal texture of instructors' communication practices. The content analysis procedure identifies four main categories: Spoken Style of Communication, Emotional Expression, Interactive and Interpersonal, and Addressivity. Each category constitutes a number of subcategories. Table 5-8 illustrates the resulting coding scheme.

Category	Subcategory and example	Definition	Proportion to total categories	Proportion to corpus
<b>Spoken Style of Communication</b>	<b>Code switching (CS)</b>	Instances when an instructor switched from the Standard Arabic (SA) to the Dialectal Arabic (DA).	5.7%	3%
	<b>Repair</b> E.g.: Ok. Can you empty the sculpture from the middle? empty*	Instances when an instructor stops the on-going trajectory of exchanges to fix mistakes in their own typing.	1.4%	0.74%
	<b>Repetition</b> E.g.: remind meee please please, please please please.	Repeating words, letters, or vowels within words.	5.8%	3.03%
<b>Emotional Expression</b>	<b>Self-disclosure</b> E.g.: I should have told you what to do for next class but I was very sick.	Presenting private or life details occurring outside of class.	5.4%	2.8%
	<b>Using Humour</b> E.g.: Ok Oprah!	Joking, teasing, and using sarcasm or irony.	5%	2.6%
	<b>Using Emoticons</b> 	Using the emoticons and emotional images afforded by the applications.	18.4%	9.6%
	<b>Apologising</b>	Expressing an apology,	3%	1.6%

	E.g.: Forgive me girls I forgot to write the appointment down in my diary	regret, request for forgiveness, or promise of forbearance.		
<b>Interactive and Interpersonal</b>	<b>Openings</b> E.g.: Good morning, Salam, Salam Alikum	Greetings, salutations which serve as politeness devices.	7.6%	4%
	<b>Phatics</b> E.g.: all the best of luck, get well soon, may you be happy, may Allah be with you, how are you doing?	Small talk and exchanges that serve a totally social function. These instances may be associated with polite religious and cultural expressions.	15.2%	7.9%
	<b>Praising and Encouraging</b> E.g.:wow ..you have a special taste, very well said.	Expressing admiration, approval and appreciation. Giving positive support and confidence.	7.3%	3.8%
	<b>Reassuring</b> E.g.: just speak your mind and don't be afraid to make mistakes, don't worry, insha Allah things will be fine.	Clearing doubts and fear of students and assuring them. These instances may be associated with polite religious and cultural expressions.	1.6%	0.81%
	<b>Expressing Like-mindedness</b> E.g.: Exactly, Okay, that's what I meant.	Expressing like-mindedness with students' or their contributions.	2.6%	1.35%
<b>Addressivity</b>	<b>Addressing an individual or by name</b>	Referring to students by their names, or other informal, intimate vocatives.	9.6%	5%
	<b>Addressing the group of students</b> E.g.: girls, my students, my beautiful students	Referring to the group of students as a whole, or with inclusive forms of address such as we, us, or our.	11.5%	6%

Table 5-8 Coding scheme of interpersonal and informal features used by instructors in social media messages.

The interpersonal markers surfaced in 52% (51.9%) of the overall eight instructors' messages. These linguistic strategies are embedded within a real context of six traditional communication or educational exchanges that usually occur in face-to-face classrooms. These traditional communication categories are shown in Table 5-9.

	<b>Traditional communication categories</b>	<b>Proportion to Corpus</b>
1	Responding or giving feedback	21.45%
2	Asking questions	10.5%
3	Requests	7%
4	Announcements	6.5%
5	Clarifying Meaning	3.6%
6	Information Exchange	3.8%

Table 5-9 Categories of traditional communication of instructors' social media messages.

Most Saudi instructors' Interpersonal and Interactive features used are Phatics (f=117 instances), while the most used social feature under the Emotional Expression category is the use of Emoticons (f= 142 instances). In addition, Addressivity constitutes 21% of instructors' messages, while 13% of instructors' messages are in a Spoken Style of Communication. Repetition (f= 45 instances) is the most prevalent part of speech followed by Code Switching (CS) (f= 44 instances) among the three subcategories of this category. Before discussing these linguistic features in more detail in Section 5.4.4, the density of these markers among instructors is introduced next.

### 5.4.3 Density of interpersonal markers

Because of the varying participation levels (i.e. length or number of words in a single transcript), in order to correctly compare the distribution of the interpersonal markers across instructors' corpora during equivalent time frames (eight weeks), and to avoid a skewed number of instances, because of differences in the number of words per message or per transcript, all instances or frequencies of the interpersonal markers

categories were normed to occurrence per 1,000 words of text. More specifically, this is accomplished by dividing the number of instances in a given category (from the 14 subcategories) by the total number of words, and then multiplying by 1000. This yields instances per 1000 words.

Instructor	Interpersonal Categories								Total	
	Spoken Style		Emotional		Interactive		Addressivity			
	<i>Raw Count (RC)*</i>	<i>Density</i>	<i>RC</i>	<i>Density</i>	<i>RC</i>	<i>Density</i>	<i>RC</i>	<i>Density</i>	<i>RC</i>	<i>Density</i>
Nadia	2	1.6	9	7.2	19	15.2	28	22.5	58	46.5
Ghadah	11	4.3	65	25.4	45	17.6	16	6.2	137	53.5
Hala	11	8.8	7	5.6	5	4	21	16.8	44	35.2
Maya	7	6.9	8	7.9	18	17.8	10	9.9	43	42.5
Khadija	14	7.9	58	32.5	66	37	31	17.4	169	94.8
Galiah	19	12.8	39	26.3	39	26.3	22	14.8	119	80.2
Ash	30	15.3	52	26.5	61	31.1	25	12.7	168	85.6
Hind	6	10.3	7	12.06	11	19	10	17.2	34	58.6
Total										64.9

Table 5-10 Total density and percentage of social markers in instructor participants messages.

*\*Raw count: is the number of category or subcategory occurrences in the instructor messages over eight-weeks.*

As can be seen in Table 5-10, the aggregate of interpersonal marker density for overall instructors' corpora is (64.9). This means that interpersonal and informal elements frequently occurred more than 64 times per 1000 words. The existence of these markers illustrates the extent to which there is an informal texture in instructors' social media interaction practices. A high density of interpersonal markers, such as instructor Khadija's (94.8), Ash's (85.6), and Galiah's (80.2), shows that the environment is interpersonal and instructors and students share a level of understanding, while a low density, such as Hala's (35.2) and Maya's (42.4), signals a tendency towards a more impersonal environment.

As shown in Figure 5-4, instructors with a high density of social markers, such as Khadija and Ash, use a higher frequency of Interactive and Interpersonal markers compared to instructor Hala, who has a low density of 4 in interactivity category per 1000 words. However, it is noteworthy to mention that what accounts for instructor Hala's density use of markers (35.2) is the high frequency of using vocatives compared to instructor Khadija and Ash. This could be explained by the fact that instructor Hala used addressing as a turn taking strategy, where it is embedded in every communication act she directed to students.

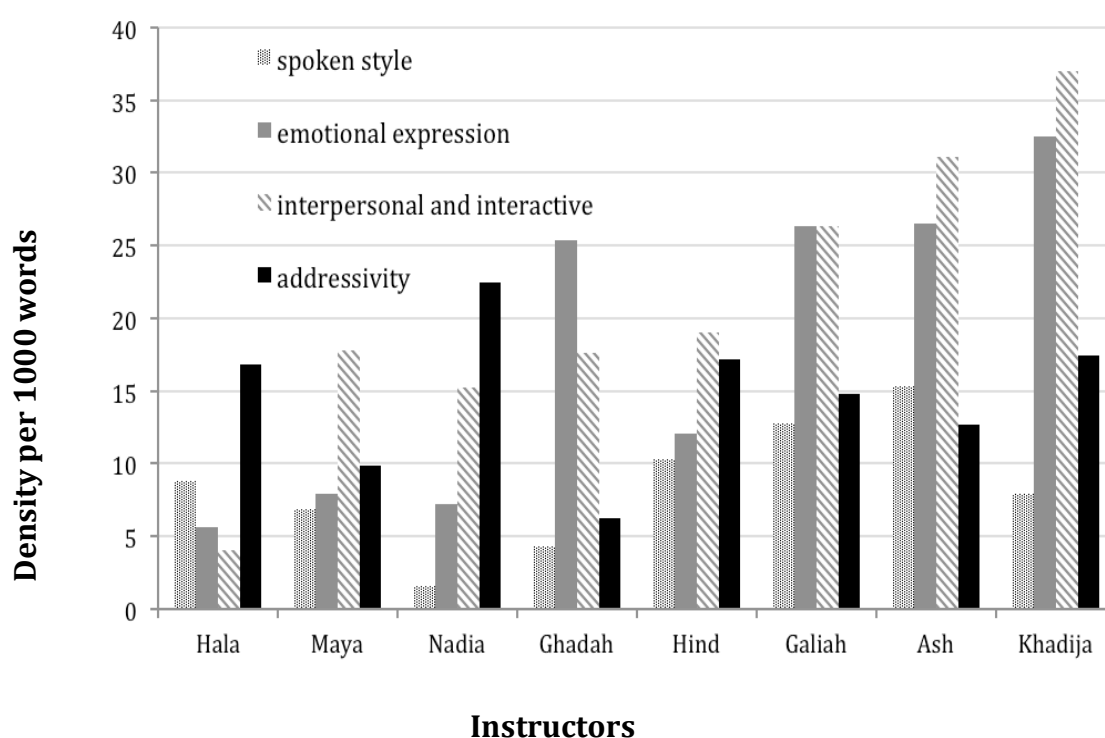


Figure 5-4 Instructors in rank order of total density markers.

Her online group constitutes vocatives in announcements (19.3%), requests (12.5%), and directing questions to individual students, asking (4%), while lacking in the density of expressing emotions (5.6).

As for instructor Maya, the most prevalent marker in her interaction practice was the use of Interpersonal and Interactive features (17.8), where praise devices (10.8) accounted for the high density of the category. This could be explained by the fact that Maya engaged in a synchronous discussion with her students about previously

arranged topics, which involved the instructor in directing questions to students to elicit their real-time answers. Hence, it appears that Maya used praise devices such as “*Excellent!! That’s what I was looking for! How about the level of IQ?*”, “*Good job, [student name], tell me more about..?*” as a scaffolding strategy to keep the discussion going. As shown in Figure 5-4, instructor Khadija used a high frequency of emotional expression features represented by a high density of self-disclosure patterns (11.22), a high density of Emoticons and entertaining pictures afforded by the application (13), and instances of Apologising (8 per 1000 words). Similar patterns of employing Emotional Expression markers were found in instructor Ash’s practice. Her messages constitute an extensive use of Emoticons (14.8), and Humour (7.64). Although they exist, Apologising and Self-disclosure were not the dominating markers in her messages. The following section illustrates how instructors’ use of linguistic markers differs or changes over the eight-week period.

#### **5.4.4 Interpersonal markers change (if any) over time**

One of the Study 2 research questions is to investigate whether there is any trend in instructors' interpersonal interaction over time. Two statistical tests are used to explore the existence of any trend in informality, and change in interpersonal markers over time for all instructors. The Mann-Kendall test describes whether any trend exists, while linear regression makes stronger assumptions about the direction and strength of the linear trend.

##### **5.4.4.1 Mann-Kendall Test**

This test is used to examine whether an overall informality trend exists in instructors’ total interpersonal interaction practices for the eight-week period, and whether this trend is increasing or decreasing over time. Thus, the following hypothesis is investigated:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no trend in the use of informality markers over eight weeks.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive trend in the use of informality markers over eight weeks.

Variable	Observations	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Informality	64	1.000	31.000	12.063	8.167

Kendall's tau	0.787
S'	165.000
p-value (one tailed)	< 0.0001
Sen's slope (period=8)	1.317

Table 5-11 Mann-Kendall informality trend test.

As shown in Table 5-11, p-value is less than 0.05, and the Kendall's S is significantly different from zero. Therefore, the null hypothesis  $H_0$  of no informality trend is rejected, and the  $H_1$  hypothesis of the existence of informality trend over the eight-week period is accepted. Thus, a conclusion can be made that there is a trend in informality over time. Figure 5-5 gives a snapshot of how interpersonal markers change over time for the eight instructors across an eight-week period.

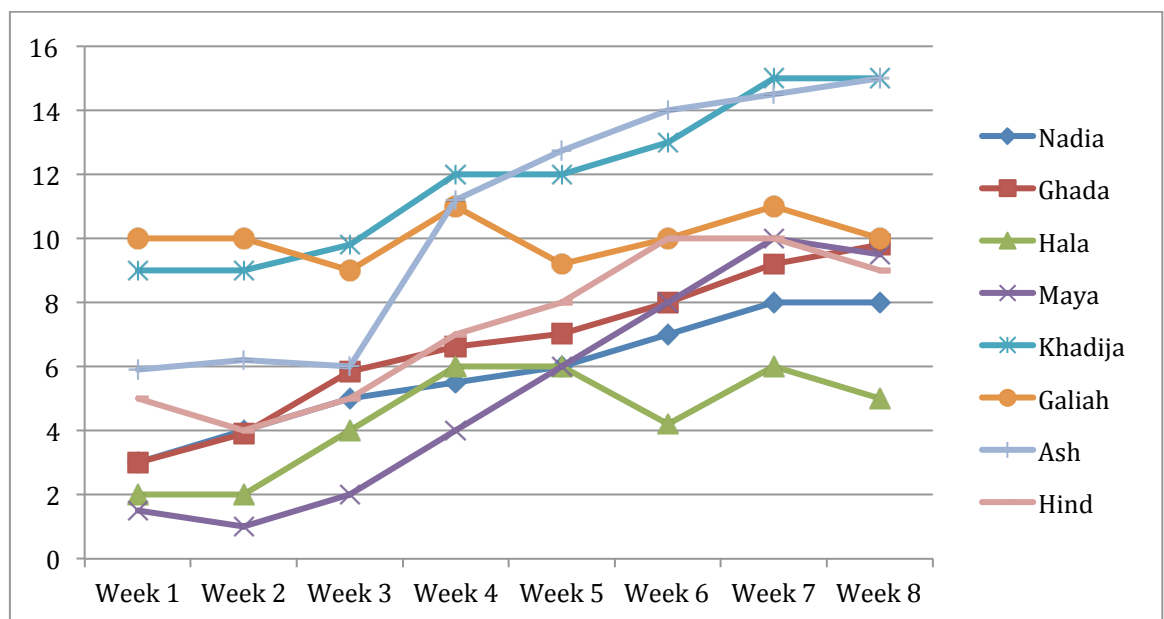


Figure 5-5 Total social marker change over time for eight instructors across an 8-week period.

#### 5.4.4.2 Linear Regression for overall informality

Linear regression takes the finding further and explains how well time can predict an informality trend. As can be seen in Table 5-12, a coefficient of 0.423 suggests that there is a positive relationship between informality or interpersonal markers and time. Also,  $r^2 = .179$  suggests that approximately 18% of the variance in informality can be explained by time. In other words, there might be many factors that can explain this variation, but our model, which includes only time, can explain approximately 18% of it. In addition, Table 5-13 explains that this regression model is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that the regression model results in a significantly better prediction of informality than if the mean value of informality is used.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.423	.179	.166	7.458

Table 5-12 Regression Model Summary

Model	DF	Sum of squares	Mean squares	F	p-value
Regression	1	753.003	753.003	13.537	$p < 0.001$
Residual	62	3448.747	55.625		
Total	63	4201.750			

Table 5-13 Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Table 5-14 gives the values for the regression line. As can be seen, for every passing week, the model predicts an increase of 1.497 in informality markers used by instructors. Also, the t-test in Table 5-14 suggests that time as weeks is making a statistically significant contribution to the predictive model. Overall, the regression model predicts informality significantly well. Figure 5-6 shows a scatterplot of the relationship between informal markers use and the time in weeks.



Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p-value
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.326	2.055		2.592	.012
	Weeks	1.497	.407	.423	3.679	.000

Table 5-14 Correlation Coefficient

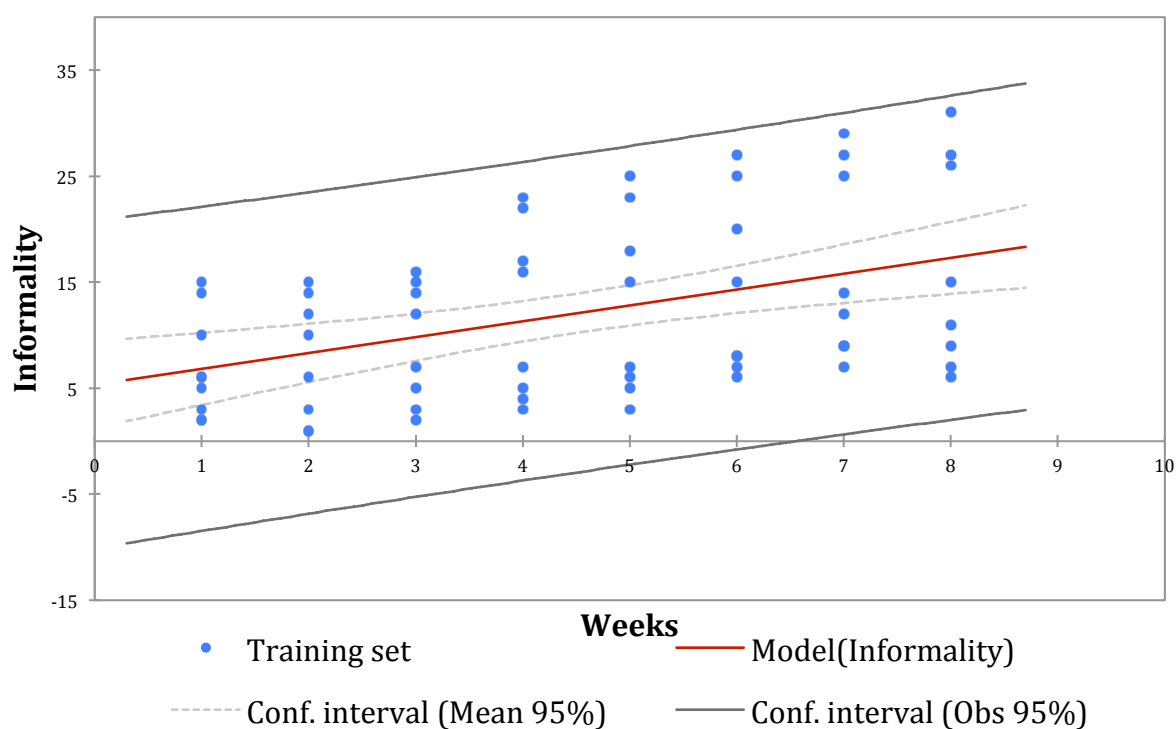


Figure 5-6 Regression of Informality by Weeks ( $R^2$  Linear = 0.179)

#### 5.4.4.3 Linear Regression for individual instructor informality

As it is concluded that there is a positive trend and a significant relationship between overall instructors' informal communication and time, it is of interest to investigate the extent of this relationship for individual instructor's interpersonal interaction over the weeks.

<i>Instructor</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>ANOVA (p-value)</i>
Nadia	.202	.041	.632
<b>Ghadah</b>	<b>.923</b>	<b>.852</b>	<b>.001*</b>
<b>Hala</b>	<b>.904</b>	<b>.817</b>	<b>.002*</b>
<b>Maya</b>	<b>.907</b>	<b>.822</b>	<b>.002*</b>
Khadija	.206	.043	.624
Galiah	.426	.182	.292
<b>Ash</b>	<b>.924</b>	<b>.853</b>	<b>.001*</b>
<b>Hind</b>	<b>.716</b>	<b>.513</b>	<b>.046*</b>

Table 5-15 Regression model for each instructor's informality practice and time.

*\*Significant at 0.05 alpha level.*

As can be seen in Table 5-15, the correlation coefficients of five instructors, indicated in bold, represent a strong positive correlation between their informal practice and time in weeks. The value of  $R^2$  for these five instructors suggests that time can account for 51% to 85% of the variation in their informal communication practices. In particular, it appears that time can account for 85% of the variation in the interpersonal markers Ghadah and Ash used, while time accounted for approximately 82% for Hala and Maya's use of interpersonal markers. The regression analysis also indicates that 51% of Hind's informality is accounted for by time. Therefore, the regression model for these five instructors predicts informality significantly well ( $p < .05$ ). The correlation between informality practices and time for the three instructors, Nadia, Khadija, and Galiah, is not as strong as the other instructors, where time accounts for 4% of Nadia's and Khadija's informal practices, and 18% for Galiah's tendency to be informal.

#### ***5.4.4.4 Informality patterns qualitative interpretation***

When comparing the change in the pattern of using the markers over time, at the extremes of the time period it is clear that there is a growth trend. As shown in Figure 5-5, this trend shows that informal communication styles have gradually increased in week 7 and 8 compared to week 1. In week 1, the extreme cases, Khadija, Ash and Galiah, used a higher frequency of the interpersonal markers,

accounting for the higher informality level their texts show at the semester start. As for the synchronous groups, instructor Ash started her first sessions with a higher frequency of using Spoken Style, including Repetition and Code Switching in her initial communication, which signals a more relaxed exchange. She also frequently used Openings, Phatics (Interpersonal and Interactive), and Emoticons (Emotional Expression). Galiah followed a similar path in the first week, when she created a lively atmosphere by welcoming and encouraging (Interpersonal and Interactive) students to participate, addressing students individually by name, and using Emoticons extensively compared to the rest of the instructors. Although she led an asynchronous group, Khadija's informality was evident from the playful atmosphere she created using Emoticons, how she welcomes her students through Openings, and invites them to ask questions at any time. Interestingly, her intimacy and self-disclosure tendency started to show from the first week, when she introduced herself personally, and mentioned how many children she has.

From week 2 across week 4, while the asynchronous groups' (Nadia, Ghadah, and Hind) conversation started to display more occasions of self disclosure and reassurance, the synchronous groups (Ash, Galiah and Maya) used more Interactive markers, such as expressing agreement, and encouraging during discussions. For some instructors like Hala and Maya, their messages in week 4 also showed a gradual increase compared to the first week; however, the pattern of marker use is different than other instructors. Both instructors used Code Switching more frequently than other instructors. Hala used notable vocatives and started to deploy a limited number of emoticons, accounting for this growth. In her synchronous group, Maya walked a different path to Hala, where she never used emoticons, but exchanged more Openings, while her tendency to praise students and express agreement grew from week 2 to 4. It appears that in week 1 Hala and Maya were choosing their words with greater care, and using SA as a shield, or barrier to avoid weakening the internal power hierarchies. Although their language started to shift gradually to a less formal practice, the tone intent remained impersonal, and that of a lecture.

In addition, while almost all instructors maintained a stable gradual increase in marker use in week 5 and 6, Figure 5-5 shows a declining pattern for instructor

Hala's use of markers in week 6. The only two markers that Hala employed in that week were vocatives. Hala also rarely acknowledged students' exchange of Phatics, or questions, which contributed to her low interactivity marker. Even though it is argued that CMC is inherently egalitarian, it might be that for some resilient instructors it is not easy to adopt an informal language that may develop an interpersonal relationship with their students and might influence or violate their roles as authority figures.

As highlighted above, there is evidence of some individual differences in the ways instructors employed the markers in the groups. For instance, there is a sharp increase in Ash's and Khadija's communication styles per 1000 words, when it reached its highest in week 7 and week 8. Ash's increased use of repetition and repair, humour, emoticons, and a relaxed exchange of small talk contributed to this growth, and transformed the discourse nature from discussion of assignments sessions with the instructor, to conversations about assignments with a caring friend. Likewise, Khadija's "chat" in weeks 7 and 8 contains more culturally personalised small talk and a large number of emoticons compared to her first couple of weeks' messages. Interestingly, Khadija's use of Self-disclosure and Apologising markers were another inducement for this sharp growth. Several episodes across instructors' corpora indicate that communication in the groups started to divert into interpersonal conversations, which by week 8 involved sharing feelings and small talk more than discussing course related matters.

Overall, there is evidence of a gradual increase in interpersonal markers over time for instructor participants. There are also some individual differences, where instructors differed in the ways they used the markers. Instructors with a high frequency of markers (such as Khadija and Ash) tend to disclose personal information, exchange openings/salutations, jokes, and emoticons in their first communication sessions with their students. However, instructors with a less informal style never (Maya) or rarely (Hala) incorporated emotion expression markers into their communication, and used fewer amounts of interactive and interpersonal markers over the eight-week period. Although Galiah's practice remained almost at the same level of informality, with a high frequency use of interpersonal markers across the eight-week period, her informality was increased by

a vastly thoughtful exploitation of emoticons, encouragement, expressions of agreement, humour and openings. However, Galiah used self-disclosure only once as part of a discussion activity, and never used an apology marker in her communication practice.

#### **5.4.5 Interpersonal markers categories**

This section demonstrates the four emergent categories representing the interpersonal linguistic markers used by instructors and containing 14 subcategories. The linguistic markers are discussed through episodes of the eight instructors' communication practices. It should be noted that all episodes of discourse were translated with sampled back translation.

#### **Category 1: Spoken Style of Communication**

Among several linguistic markers or stylistic structures related to spoken styles of communication available in the literature, three features surfaced in Saudi instructors' messages, which are Repetition, Code Switching, and Repair.

***Repetition.*** Letter or word repetition are mostly used for emphasis and they are usually embedded within a real context of several traditional exchanges, including requests like this from Ghadah: *"Please please pleassse don't forget to bring your completed files after the holiday because I need to mark them before we start the next lesson."* And Galiah in response to students' contributions: *"[student name] would like to go to the Maldives... woooooow!"* and Ash in clarifying meaning, *"we mentioned this before... we said it's not correct because equity capital's alwayyyyyysss credit! Remember??"*. The following episode is an example of repetition used by instructor Ash in line (4) for emphasis and direct student attention:

#### **Extract (1)- Ash's group, Week 1**

- (1) Ash: see how you mixed up between the two questions***
- (2) S1: oh.. that's right.. I didn't realize the first one was talking about the loan***
- (3) S2: we rushed it...***
- (4) Ash: See... you have to foocusssss***
- (5) S2: [laughing]***

(6) S3: 🙄

Although instructors tend to use repetition marker for emphasis and capturing students' attention in a space where nonverbal cues are delivered differently compared to a classroom context, it could be inferred from students' playful responses to the instructors' repetition in lines (5) and (6), that this marker most likely infuses a sense of informality. Repetition is a spoken style marker that is often associated with the user's (i.e instructor's) desire to establish solidarity and a close interpersonal relationship (Park, 2008); therefore, the relevant emphasis from repetition comes with implications of informality.

**Code Switching.** It is the instances where instructors chose to switch from the Standard Arabic (SA) to the Dialectic Arabic (DA) that an informal spirit is most likely conveyed in the space. More specifically, SA is used normally for formal, semi-formal and literary functions, whereas DA is used in spoken conversations and other informal exchanges. Although they are structurally connected, DA is generally seen as a simplified version of SA, while SA is a complex and eloquent Arabic (Versteegh, 2001; Suleiman, 2004). It should be noted that 74% of instructors' messages were communicated using DA. It is the instances between messages, when instructors shift to DA, that signal an informal social change in mode and action. The following episode illustrates how instructor Hala shifted the code from SA in line (1) to a relaxed DA in response to a student in lines (3), (4) and (6):

Extract (2)- Hala's group, Week 2

- 1) **Hala:** [S1 name] *Please be aware that you need to resend the email now as well as submitting the CD to my office tomorrow morning.*
- 2) *S1: I just sent you the content of the CD by email... have u received it?* 😊
- 3) **Hala:** *nope.. [S1 name] please call me asap*
- 4) **Hala:** *strange.. are you sure you sent it?*
- 5) *S1: I'll try again*
- 6) **Hala:** *finally! Thanks dear.*

Wardhaugh (1992) suggested that code-switching is quite often a 'subconscious' marker. In several instances, instructors appear to unintentionally shift to DA in

order to assure an anxious student, or their code switch is triggered by students' informal exchanges, like in the episode above. More specifically, it could be argued that the use of the smiley in the student's question in line (2) triggered the instructor's code switch from a serious to a more informal tone. Therefore, there is a likelihood of an enhanced interpersonal atmosphere with code switching to DA, a strategy that marks a shift in tone from serious to relaxed, giving a sense of informality in the space.

**Repair.** Although not a prevalent linguistic device (1.5%), repair seems to play a role in reconstructing instructors' communication practices with their students. Repair occurs in instructors' messages when they stop the on-going conversation to fix troubles in their own typing. Conversational repair does not seem to be tied to any communication exchanges spotted in the messages, as instances of repair surfaced in almost all traditional communication categories, such as asking questions, clarifying meanings, and giving feedback to students. The main instructors' motivation to repair, or to correct spelling seems to be fixing misunderstanding that might occur as a result. For instance, instructor Ash's instance of repair was embedded in a request speech act with a student:

Extract (3)- Ash's group, Week 3

- 1) ***Ash: young ladies.. let's complete this point together before jumping to the next one.***
- 2) ***Ash: look at the equation that I just typed.***
- 3) ***Ash: Look\****
- 4) *S1: which one?*
- 5) *S2: the customer service's?*
- 6) *S3: point #6*

Another instance of conversational repair occurred during 'asking a question' act. Here instructor Maya stops the real-time discussion to fix the mistake in her word as it appears that she wanted to make sure that her question was received by her students correctly.

Extract (4)- Maya's group, Week 4

- 1) *S1: she has a special ability beyond her age*
- 2) ***Maya: What is it that the child observes and compses***
- 3) ***Maya: compares***
- 4) *S2: observes her drawings and compares it to her classmates.*

Most instructors tend to repair using the same basic repair mechanism used for typos or spelling errors in oral conversations in this medium. Either the simple error gets repaired in the next turn by simply retyping the problem word (extraxt 4), or by using another device, such as the use of asterisk (extract 3). Again, students usually continue the flow of the conversation without referring to the repair incident. It is a plausible explanation that repair is linked to an informal and solidarity-based space, where instructors have to correct the mistakes as they interfere with students' understanding (Kurhila, 2001) of the subject matter. Therefore, instructors most likely care about students' understanding and use repair to disambiguate misunderstanding. As repair is found to be an informalization technique for providing typing conventions (Markman, 2010), instructors unintentionally contribute to developing a norm of informality.

To summarise this section, although employed little, it appears that instructors started to discover the online space by adopting spoken styles in various traditional exchanges. Although instructors employed repetition for emphasis, their use of this spoken style of communication comes associated with chat casualness. It could be inferred that the motivational patterns of switching to DA are linked to changing the tone from serious to relaxed. These instances were probably activated by an unconscious desire for mutuality in response to students. Although the instructors' typing errors were usually straightforward, Saudi instructors' examples of the conversational repair feature show the importance of correcting every mistake in writing. This was most likely used to correct understanding, which in turn may contribute to establishing shared understanding and group norms. Another interesting marker, or 'change' in instructors' traditional communication practices is discussed in the following section.



## Category 2: Emotional Expression

One of the most prevalent features across instructors' messages that signals a highly social texture of instructor-student communication is Emotional Expression (31.80%). Saudi instructors used several expressions to disclose personal information, articulating Humour, Using Emoticons, and Apologising.

**Self-Disclosure.** Among the four interpersonal features surfacing in this category is Self-disclosure, where the individual shares private information such as thoughts, feelings and experiences of a personal nature with another person. Saudi instructors tend to disclose for several purposes, such as for interpersonal gain, social support, to assure and direct students' reactions, and availability of the medium. Announcements, information exchange and responses to students were often the vehicle of the Self-disclosure element. For example, among the participants instructor Khadija used self-disclosure most with instances accounting for 11.8% of her messages. The episode below illustrates how Khadija showed vulnerability and disclosed personal information to seek students' social support:

### Extract (5)- Khadija's group, Week 4

- 1) *S1: Does anyone know what slides should we study for the mid term?*
- 2) ***Khadija: Plz girls pray for my mum she's very ill in hospital ...Thanks***
- 3) *S2: May she gets well soon... [Islamic supplications]*
- 4) *S3: May you hear good news about her soon... May Allah protect her.*
- 5) *S1: Ameeeen*

Instructor Khadija in line (2) discloses her mother's illness to her students and asked them to pray for her to get well. This act of self-disclosure enacted support and empathetic behaviour from students to their instructor. This support from students was expressed with religious content, which usually manifests politeness in Arabic social contexts. Another motivation for self-disclosure appears to be for interpersonal gain. In the following episode, instructor Ghadah shares with her students how she chose the Art exam elements, a social act which is not usually verbalised to students by their instructors in a classroom context:

### Extract (6)- Ghadah group, Week 5

- 1) *S1: 🙏*

- 2) **Ghadah:** *I went all the way to Centerloint (shopping centre)*
- 3) **Ghadah:** *centrepint*
- 4) **S1:** *[laughs]*
- 5) **Ghadah:** *and every time I chose an element I feel sorry for you guys lol*
- 6) **Ghadah:** *then I ended up on very cute elements*
- 7) **Ghadah:** *oh I was gonna bring flowers*
- 8) **Ghadah:** *but changed my mind*
- 9) **Ghadah:** 😊😊😊
- 10) **S2:** *I started to worry about the exam* 😞😞😞

This informality marker used by the instructor appears to expand the intersubjective space in which instructors and students operate. In the above episode, students 1 and 2 are engaged, and reciprocate as the instructor is sharing her thinking and decisions in an open manner. Self-disclosure, alongside using emoticons, repair, and the relaxed tone and register used in the above episode portrays a convivial instructor persona, because the affordances of the mediated space enable destabilizing of the usual remote Saudi instructor communication practice, as described in Study 1 in Chapter 4. Another interesting episode is Ash's, where during her social media conversation with students she acknowledges the fact that her mother in law is visiting: "*I can't stay for long here tonight.. my mother in law is probably at the door right now 🙈*").

Another form of self-disclosure was mostly expressed by instructors in responses to assure and direct student's reactions. For instance, in reaction to a student question about whether she was coming to class that day, instructor Ghadah promptly replies: "*I'm on my way!*" A similar instance occurred with instructor Hala when she was asked by a student whether there was a class that day and said: "*Wait in class. I am stuck here coz of an accident.. I'll be there in 15 minutes.*". It can be argued that in the last two examples, both instructors' disclosure directed students' reactions when they assured them that they were coming to class. Although not all instances of self-disclosure receive a reaction or response from students, such as the above two instances, it could be inferred that instructors are modeling an informal space for students and that informal exchanges are acceptable here. Despite the fact that Saudi

students may not be familiar with this interpersonal level of communication being practised by their instructors, such an informal element may eventually re-shape students' formal actions to reciprocal orientation towards instructors in the space.

**Using Humour.** Another social marker that constitutes 5% of instructors' messages was Using Humour. In this study, instructors used different forms of humour including sarcasm, irony, and teasing. Humorous exchanges are usually associated with responding to students and giving praise. Also, instructors' humorous messages were often associated with an insertion of emoticons and laughter responses from students. For example, instructor Ash in the following episode used humour and sarcasm following her praise of a student's idea, as she solved the question in a paper, took a photo of it, and sent it to the group:

Extract (7)- Ash's group, Week 6

- 1) **Ash: I like the paper.. What a brilliant idea** 👍
- 2) S1: *hope we could write it on the board and solve it together next time*
- 3) S1: *and write it clearer*
- 4) **Ash: How about an extra mark?**
- 5) S2: 😍
- 6) S3: *Me ME*
- 7) S4: 😄😄
- 8) **Ash: I was kidding no extra marks for you** 🤪
- 9) S4: *[laughs]*
- 10) S3: *[laughs]*
- 11) S5: 😂😂😂

It is clear how the impression of casual conversation and spontaneity is signalled by the choice of this social teasing element expressing humour, such as, “*I was kidding*” and “*no extra marks for you.*” This informal marker enacted students' laughs, conveying a positive interpersonal atmosphere, as students understood the instructor's act as a humorous note. The humour in instructors' messages acts as an invitation for students to start a conversation with the instructor, and its use signals the aim to eliminate social distance (Gorham & Chrisophel, 1990). This humorous social chat was viewed by most instructors and all students as an inappropriate act in

the classroom context, as concluded in Study 1 Chapter 4 and explained by the fact that limited time in the formal classroom only invites listening respectfully to the lecture. While instructor-student interaction rarely occurs in and outside the classroom, the social level of communication in a lecture-based classroom rarely exists. Chapter 4 discussions in Section 4.5.5 give a clear picture of the formal relationship instructors and students maintain, with little or no space for humour. Another example comes from instructor Nadia who initiated a teasing remark by week 7:

Extract (8)- Nadia's group, Week 8

- (1) **Nadia: no thanks for nothing girls, but if I taught you the next course and you submit the work late I would kill you** 😬
- (2) S1: no no.. it won't happen again 😂
- (3) S2: no we won't... we'll submit on time 😂😂
- (4) S3: 😂

Students' common sense about the situation creates an orientation for them to see and act in coordination with one another and with the instructor. Humour embedded in a real context of instructor-student course related dialogue is found to be '*a pervasive characteristic of casual conversation, in contrast to its infrequent occurrence in formal, pragmatic interactions*' (Eggin & Dlade, 1997, p. 155). Humour used by Saudi instructors seems to define and expand the boundaries of a relaxed intersubjective space. The extent of students' excitement and reciprocation is evident from the above two examples as they exchange laughter in response to instructors' funny notes. Section 4.4.2.2.3 in Chapter 4 illustrated little or no room for other than course related matters to be raised in class time. Thus, engaging in such an informal fun level of communication with instructors is changing the face of the traditional instructor-student interaction instilled into and practised by both parties in the classroom.

**Using Emoticons.** Interestingly, the emoticons marker (18.4%) was the most pervasively used marker by Saudi instructors across the conversations. Although emoticons are not always associated with specific traditional exchanges, Saudi instructors' adoption of emoticons surfaced in two forms: verbal and non verbal. The verbal form was mainly used to express feedback to students, and express like-mindedness. The non-verbal form of emoticon, was mostly used by instructors Ash, Khadija, Galiah, and Ghadah, to express their 'own' feelings or facial expressions, and inject certain moods to sentences. For instance, instructor Ghadah, who usually gave feedback to her students on their Art work photos shared via the online group, always offers feedback in the form of emoticons, or accompanied by a number of emoticons depending on the quality of the student work. The following extract illustrates one of these incidents:

Extract (9)- Ghadah's group, Week 2

- (1) *S1: attaching an image*
- (2) **Ghadah:** 👍
- (3) *S2: attaching an image*
- (4) **Ghadah:** 👍 👍
- (5) **Ghadah:** *but the shadow*
- (6) **Ghadah:** *the cup's shadow is sloping a bit.*
- (7) **Ghadah:** *and the orange background* 😞
- (8) **Ghadah:** *is it strong or just the photo shot?*
- (9) **Ghadah:** *but the elements are perfect* 👍 👍 👍
- (10) *S2: attaching an image*
- (11) *S2: the original photo has a sloping shadow* 😞

As can be seen above, instructor Ghadah uses both forms of emoticons. The verbal expresses her emotions and reaction to a student's work, as she provides feedback represented by the emoticons in line (4), where she used two thumbs up icons. The non-verbal form used in Line (7) gave an indirect disapproval of the painting background using the emoticons instead of expressing her disliking in blunt words. It could be argued that the instructor used the emoticon in line (7) to mitigate the feedback and save the student's face in front of the group. Thus, the emoticon served

as a politeness act, and in turn, a relational practice (Holmes et al., 2005) especially knowing Saudi students' cultural shyness and apprehensiveness as discussed in Chapter 4. In line (11), the student's response is in alignment with the instructor's use of emoticons as she uses one as well. Hence, it appears that the instructor's use of emoticons signaled to students a shared understanding that these informal and playful emoticons are 'ok' and maybe 'preferable' to be used to convey reactions.

In addition, some instructors such as Hala used emoticons solely to express like-mindedness, using the thumbs up icon instead of typing "I agree" or "you're right" etc. It could be inferred from such use of emoticons that as typed asynchronous communication is inherently time consuming, some instructors use emoticons to save time, so serving brevity, which as a result implies a sense of informality in the space.

On the other hand, instructor Galiah used emoticons creatively to transfer the atmosphere from a dull learning experience to a lively convivial and fun space. She used various icons to match the words or topic under discussion with students. For instance, when she asked a question about the importance of money, she used money icons, and other representative icons to turn that statement from text to visual. It could be inferred that such instructors are aware of the ambiguity of increased text exchange; therefore, they thoughtfully deploy these emoticons to support apprehensive students. This marker has served to convey an informal spirit as well as disambiguating the novel space. The next episode is another example of how students appear to be mutually influenced by such vigorous use of emoticons. This is Galiah's group, where she asked students about what they would like to be if they were someone else:

Extract (10)- Galiah's group, Week 1

- (1) **Galiah:** *Like what* 😎 ☁️ ☁️
- (2) *S1: I want to become Alwaleed bin Talal (a Saudi prince)* 😎
- (3) *S2: Oprah because she has a lot of money* 😍
- (4) **Galiah:** *why S1 and S2?*

(5) *Galiah: Ok Oprah* 🤪 💰 💰

(6) *S3: laughs*

(7) *S4:* 😂

(8) *S2* 😂

Overall, instructors used emoticons for various purposes including expressing feedback, injecting a playful mood in the space, saving time, removing ambiguity and assuring students about interacting freely in the space. Although students' use of emoticons is not systematically analysed, it could be inferred that once their instructors opened the gate for accepting and adopting emoticons for several purposes, students appear to directly embrace them. Consequently, the frequent use of these social devices appears to make instructor-student shared understanding less formal and the space more social and convivial, contrary to the serious classroom atmosphere instructors and students report in Study 1 in Chapter 4.

**Apologising.** This marker accounted for (3%) of instructors' corpora. Instructors usually employed the apology marker in announcements and in responding to questions. Two purposes of apology appear to be notable: providing an apology to re-establish social harmony after failing to achieve the required act, and providing an apology to convey politeness. For instance, here's Khadija's episode with her students after asking them about the last lecture they have:

Extract (11)- Khadija's group, Week 1

(1) *S1: thank you Dr.Khadija but your voice was very low and I couldn't hear*

*you very well* 😞

(2) *Khadija: Oh that's really bad. I'm sorry next time I promise I'll speak*

*louder. Just remind me plz* 😊

(3) *S1: ok... I'm sorry thanks a lot.*

In line (2), instructor Khadija expressed a sincere apology and promises forbearance. This apology as a social marker re-articulates a feeling of warmth and solidarity between the instructor and her student, preserving the social balance between them. This is evident, as the student's response included an embedded politeness act represented by the apology she used as an appreciation and solidarity act. In other

words, it could be inferred that the student apologised, because Saudi students usually avoid threatening the instructor's face as she did in line (1). Other instructors employ the apology device as a politeness marker or a face-saving act. For instance, instructor Maya was late for her class, so she uttered: *"Forgive me girls... I'll be a bit late... wait for me."* Another example is in instructor Hind's apology for being late in sending out the reports: *"my beautiful students I apologize for not sending the reports yet... I had an emergency to attend to... but I'll cut some parts of it and send it today."* Students expressed their thanks and appreciation in messages like: *"May Allah grant you good health,"* and *"thanks so much Miss Hind."* These religious expressions signal politeness, appreciation and gratitude to the instructor.

To summarise this section, the Emotional Expression category, describes how Saudi instructors are articulating emotions, feelings and mood through their messages in the mediated environment. Instructors' mediated communication, when they convey feelings, exchange playful emoticons and self disclose, deviates from their traditional, cultural face-to-face classroom practices. Instructors' and students' reporting in Chapter 4, suggest a lack of social instructor-student interaction inside and outside the classroom, where humour, self-disclosure, and emotional expression can be expected. More specifically, the expected formality of the classroom context makes humour seem inappropriate to most instructors and students in a classroom context, as described in Chapter 4.

Interpersonal communication practices that students do not have the opportunity to see in the formal classroom time appear to be practised in the medium. While instructors are adapting to interact with their students in a mediated environment, where non-verbal cues are absent, they are intentionally or unintentionally enacting an altered persona that is more casual and open, compared to their constructed traditional image described in Chapter 4. Thus, it could be argued that Saudi instructors are merely human beings, but they are most likely trapped by the formal norms of the classroom, coupled with the lack of other forms of teaching, such as in small groups. As a result, social media provides environments where a user feels the need to clarify text and remove ambiguities in order to support students and create solidarity in the space. The affordances of social media are inherently informal, such as emotions in their natural context, as they are deployed by instructors for several



purposes. Hence, such circumstances and choices come with associations of informality. The following section introduces a pervasive category in instructors' discourse, which is the 'Interpersonal and Interactive' category.

### **Category 3: Interpersonal and Interactive**

This category with its various linguistic devices is the most widespread (34%) in instructors' corpora. Saudi instructors tend to display a number of interpersonal and interactive linguistic elements when communicating with students, such as Openings, Praising and Encouraging, Reassuring, Expressing Like-mindedness and engaging in Phatics with their students. Interestingly, these strategies or subcategories are usually associated with several religious and cultural expressions, which signal a social and interpersonal communication.

**Openings.** Several instructors used Openings (7.6%), such as greetings '*Hi girls!, Hello everyone!, Welcome everyone, Good morning, Good evening ladies...etc.,*' and salutations, '*Salam Alikum girls, Salam*' (peace be upon you), and its response '*wa `alaykum assalaam*' (and peace be upon you), when they initiate a new message to students with various purposes. Openings are usually used before starting a new discussion session, in announcements, requests, and acknowledging the presence of new students in both synchronous and asynchronous groups. To Saudi instructors, it appears that the use of openings, such as greetings and salutations serves to initiate contact, gain presence recognition, and is a polite act to start a conversation. Greetings and salutations within Saudi society demonstrate affability, care and social connection between people. In fact, greetings in Arab cultures are usually understood as a sign of politeness, as the exchanges in this culture are usually filled with socio-cultural values and religious invocations (Alharbi & Al-Ajmi, 2008). In fact, the same instructor may exchange greetings several times a day.

The majority of instructors used the short form of greetings and salutations, although some instructors used the complete form of opening, such as instructor Maya. For example, in some of her openings in her synchronous group, Maya used the full Islamic salutation (*Alsalam alikum wa rahmtu Allah wa barakatuh*), and some times she accompanied the salutation with religious terms and formulaic expressions (*We begin the session with praise be to Allah the Lord of the worlds and may the*

*blessings and peace of Allah be upon the most honoured of messengers our master Muhammad and upon all his family and companions)* before starting and closing the discussion session. Maya's students usually respond to her salutation using the same formal style she is using. Hence, it can be argued that students understand that this is the code to greet and salute in this group, so they act reciprocally and in coordination. Although this creates a certain norm for interaction and mutual understanding, it can be characterised as more formal intersubjectivity in this .synchronous group

There was an absence of greetings in instructor Hala's practice, where she usually directs her messages to students without using any form of greetings. In contrast, other instructors like Ash, Galiah, and Ghadah used informal, short forms of greetings, such as "*Salam ladies, Hello lovelies, Salam alikum beauties, Good morning young ladies,*" and usually accompanied by emoticons, and a personalised informal vocative, as explained in Addressivity in the following section. Another observation concerns the way some instructors react to new students participating in the group. Ash, Galiah, and Ghadah acknowledged the presence of new students and welcomed them into the discussion using greetings. This pattern does not appear in Maya or Hala's practice. The following episode from Galiah's discourse illustrates this point.

Extract (12)- Galiah's group, Week 3

- (1) **Galiah:** *No one at all* 😊
- (2) *S1: I want to try this adventure*
- (3) *S1: Yes*
- (4) *S2: Hello*
- (5) **Galiah:** *What an adventure! What would you like to see there?*
- (6) *S3: Maldives* ❤️
- (7) *S2: [S1 name] take me!*
- (8) *S1: I think I'll learn a lot of things when I travel alone*
- (9) **Galiah:** *Hello [S2 name] and [S3 name]!*
- (10) **Galiah:** *[S3] would like to go to the Maldives... woowoow!*
- (11) *S3: Thanks Mrs. Galiah* 😊

Line (9) demonstrates how instructor Galiah stops the flow of discussion about the ‘faraway land’ and greets the newly participating students (students 2 and 3). Such acknowledgement from instructors appears to leave positive traces in students, and most likely their participation level. This could be inferred from students’ responses to instructors’ greetings, where several instances showed students' gratitude and excitement for valuing their presence. Line (11) in the above episode is an example of such inference. It has also been observed that they both continued participating in the current discussion and in the upcoming sessions. Galiah is one of the instructors who has embraced the opening marker as she uses it extensively for starting and ending conversations, as well as acknowledging that each student announces presence in the synchronous discussion.

Overall, it could be inferred from the instructors’ use of openings that they are normally practising the polite cultural act of saluting people in each encounter. Instructors greet students before beginning a discussion, announcement or any other teaching and communication act to gain presence recognition, as well as acknowledging students presence in the space. As openings appear to be deployed in each conversational encounter, an increased sense of solidarity and closeness is most likely to be infused in the space, especially where a number of instructors are adopting the marker to communicate their high appraisal of students’ presence in the space. This may have long term implications for increased student participation.

***Praise and Encouragement.*** This marker constitutes 7.3% of instructors’ messages and appears to convey a sense of motivational informality, as it solicits a positive response from students during interaction. Instructors used forms of encouragement for different purposes, but the most prevalent purpose is for prompting students’ participation in the group. Instructors used a number of phrases and linguistic markers to drag students onto the discussion floor. For example, instructor Ghadah said: “*let’s see your artistic work here... I know how brave you are 😊* “, and “*there are a couple of students here and I wish they would share their work here! They did a reaalllly great job in the midterm*”. Other instructors use shorter versions of encouraging phrases as a way to prompt a student's communication, such as

instructor Nadia, who usually uses phrases like “Come on...Where are the others?? ...I’m waiting for brilliant paintings to be shared 😊”. Such strategies did not fail to encourage at least one student to respond to the instructor’s messages.

Another version of praise takes a shorter form, when instructors praise students' answers or contributions using phrases, such as “Excellent!”, “Bravooo,” “*You did a great job with the colours.*” Students appear to appreciate such praise of their contributions as these linguistic devices elicit excited responses that usually get represented by emoticons ( 😍 ), or by sincere thanks “*Thaaaank you so much Mrs. Ghadah ❤️*”, or by the same student frequently coming back to the group to participate. Other instructors like Khadija and Galiah tend to empower students with their encouraging practice. Here is an episode from instructor Galiah who ended the “If you were someone else, who would you like to be and why?” discussion session with very encouraging words to her students:

Extract (13)- Galiah’s group, Week 4

- (1) *S1: i don’t understand*
- (2) *Galiah: I mean not all Duaa (religious individuals) are men... you may be a female religious person.*
- (3) *Galiah: You are wonderful ladies and you’ll be wonderful wives and mothers. You have good hearts and bright minds.*
- (4) *Galiah: If I were you, I wouldn’t choose to be another person... you are a special person.*
- (5) *Galiah: Do all what you can to be a good person, not a different one. Love you all 🌸*
- (6) *S1: Thank u miss ❤️❤️*
- (7) *S2: thank u miss 🥰❤️*
- (8) *S3: ❤️*

This text is a manifestation of how these encouraging devices reinforce social relations in this space. Instructor Galiah in the above episode created a persona for students by relating to them even when she is not asked to, or expected to do so. As Saudi students consider their instructors as their role models, lines (6), (7) and (8)

show students being thrilled with such words from them. Such an act certainly contributes to construct a rich interpersonal space, where students are excited to interact, coming back energetically every session. While students in Study 1 Chapter 4 reported effortless forms of encouragement that they appreciate, such as an instructor's recall of their name, and increasing students' self esteem through praising their work, the above mentioned level of closeness and intimate communication exceeded the extent of what has been reported by students in the traditional face-to-face classroom context. The integration of emoticons, the spoken style of language, and the playful tone expanded and shifted the interpersonal communication to a new level.

**Reassuring.** This marker (1.6%) has an important role in providing a sense of safe and supportive climate for students. Saudi instructors communicated a number of reassurance forms in different contexts, such as reassuring students before an exam, before submitting work, or in personal circumstances. The use of this marker usually extracts favourable responses from students. Examples of this interpersonal element appear in instructor Galiah's introduction of a discussion session: "*Speak your mind* ( 📱 ) *and don't be afraid to make mistakes* ( 😊 )." Another form of reassurance occurred from instructor Nadia, when a student expressed her concern about her art project and consulted the instructor about it in the following episode:

Extract (15)- Nadia's group, Week 6

- (1) *S1: Good evening Mrs. Nadia*
- (2) *[...S1 is describing the project and what she has done.....]*
- (3) *I don't have much time...I hated the first design so much... I just can't get myself to work on this... I feel like I am gonna cry* 😭
- (4) *Nadia: okay... Calm down pretty... I know exactly how you are feeling. But don't be fooled by Satan... I think If you just begin working on it from a different angle, it won't seem so bad...*
- (5) *just have a cup of coffee, and think positive* 😊 *... I'm sure it will turn out just the way you like.*
- (6) *S1: hope so...*
- (7) *S1: Thanks Mrs Nadia... I'll do my best* ❤️

This form of reassurance gives students a sense of a supportive space, where they can express their concerns and fear and be responded to, boosting their confidence and capabilities. Again, like the Opening subcategory, this interpersonal element often invokes religious expressions (line 4: *But don't be fooled by Satan*), with meanings usually coming from the Quran and that support the reassurance act. A more personal reassurance occurred from instructor Khadija, who reacted to a student's (1) disclosure of sad news about her sick father. The following is part of the episode:

Extract (16)- Khadija's group, Week 5

- (1) Khadija: I'm really sorry to hear that [student name]**
- (2) Khadija: May Allah protect him and give him health and strength**
- (3) Khadija: the most important thing u do now is never lose hope... Allah is the only god who can cure him... just be faithful**
- (4) S2: yes.. be faithful [student 1 name]**
- (5) Khadija: Darlin'...Inshallah ...I'm sure you and your family will hear good news about his health soon... don't worry.**
- (6) S3: hope he gets well soon**
- (7) S1: Ameen... Thank you ALL for your best wishes... and thank you Dr. Khadija for your advice and support and may Allah protect your loved ones and may you and your family never see harm...**

This episode offers an example where the instructor's use of the linguistic markers "don't worry", "I'm sure", "just be faithful", coupled with religious prayers and formulaic expressions, which as a whole communicate a warm reassurance manifested in this safe and supportive climate. In several instances of these personalised cultural reassurances including the above episode, students actively reciprocate the instructor in supporting their classmate in this difficult time in lines (4) and (6). Hence, such instance may strengthen the interpersonal relationship that instructors and students have constructed in this space. It could be argued that both instructors and students found a space where an informal supportive relaxed form of interaction can occur, where they are habituated to interact in entertaining settings with family and friends, but not with their instructors in an educational context. The

classroom is a space charted with formality, while this mediated space is a new uncharted space. Instructors are discovering ways of interacting in this mediated context, and many of these ways are characterised by openness, causality and cultural solidarity. It is evident how students are mutually influenced, as they tend to trace their instructors' linguistic practices.

***Expressing Like-mindedness.*** Expressing agreement (2.6%) is a marker used by some instructors in instances, such as responding to students' questions about assignments and timetables, agreeing and confirming students' answers or comments, or recognition of contributions. Most of these expressions can be characterised by causality based on the relaxed manners they take. Expressions of agreement often take a short form such as "*Yeah that's it!*", "*Okay*", "*yup*", similar to forms of agreement exchanged by friends rather than instructors and their students. In some instances, agreement is expressed using the religious and cultural term "*inshallah*" or "*With Allah willingness.*"

It could be inferred that this marker contributes to building common ground for participation. Examining instructors' corpora, expressing agreement is considered an important closure to students' questions, concerns, or comments. Such expressions of agreement tend to be followed by positive responses from students showing appreciation through emoticons that their contribution is valued, or using thanking expressions. Therefore, it could be argued that it might be the underlying reason for students to come back for more participation in groups where acknowledgement and solidarity is being provided (i.e. Galiah and Ash's groups), compared to groups where such a marker is lacking (Hala and Maya). Furthermore, Eggins and Slade (1997) argue that such responses indicate interpersonal support, and contribute to construct and maintain relationships. Hence, it could be implied that the lack of this act could jeopardise the chances of students coming back to this space for more communication.

**Phatics.** This is the most dominating marker in the Interactive and Interpersonal category that charts the space with social texture. Although this space is considered an institutional context, where discussion or course-related communication is on-going, it does not lack extraneous chat (15.2%). Phatics are exchanges that construct a social mode by sharing anecdotes or everyday small talk rather than communicate ideas or course information. In addition, while some of this marker's expressions take short forms, they occur a fair amount during different intervals and contexts of communications. Although traces of Phatics are observed in the early weeks of interaction, the majority of these instances surfaced towards the end of the semester, when the messages started to gradually become less formal, and instructors with even strict conversation structures began to adhere less to their own systematic participation.

Phatics communication that instructors initiate includes asking about students' health, studies, and life "*How is everyone? Have you enjoyed the holiday?*" and good luck and good wishes "*wish you all the best of luck.*" This interpersonal element is usually associated with ritual and religious expressions, which are culturally contextualized to serve as politeness signals, respect, and initiating a social encounter, or maintaining a closer interaction. Examples of instructors' phatics accompanied by ritual expressions and supplications are "*May you see no harm,*" "*May you be happy and lucky,*" "*May Allah makes things easier for you.*" These linguistic markers are not associated with particular traditional communication exchanges or flows of conversations, as they are scattered across the corpora of each instructor. However, the most frequently occurring context is at the beginning and end of a session for synchronous groups, and scattered randomly in asynchronous groups. Although religious content is usually invoked in almost all social contexts within Saudi culture, instructors and students in this study are using it mostly to signify politeness, to thank, express appreciation, and for good wishes. Here is an episode between Khadija and her students that shows such a conversation:

Extract (17)- Khadija's group, Week 8

**(1) Khadija: Salam alikum**

**(2) How's everyone? How is studying going with you?**

**(3) May Allah makes things easy for you**



(4) S1: *walikum alsalam* 😊

(5) *Thanks to Allah* 👍

(6) S2: *walikum alsalam wa rahmt Allah... Allah bless you Dr....as for me... I'm resting today... and tomorrow I'll start studying inshallah (with Allah willingness).*

(7) **Khadija: May Allah help you**

(8) **While youre studying...if**

(9) **You come across something difficult, just send me a message n I'll try to explain it inshallah.**

As can be seen in the above extract, small talk can usually be found to be mixed with ritual expressions in a way that it cannot be separated from the social context in which it is situated. It appears that the Saudi cultural form of Phatic expression may take longer than other cultural social exchanges, as the religious discourse is embedded within exchanges. These ritual conversational routines usually give a sense of closeness, usually express appreciation for the sender, and are usually exchanged between people of equal status, such as friends, and classmates. However, these expressions rarely appear between instructor and students within this educational ecology. In the above episode, instructor Khadija's use of the ritual expressions within phatics situates her in a closer position to her students, where she shares their feelings and expresses her good luck wishes through several formulaic expressions in lines (2), (3) and (7). It appears in lines (5) and (6) that students are reciprocally exchanging small talk associated with ritual phrases that convey their appreciation for the instructor's concern.

Many forms of Phatics initiated by instructors position them as caring and empathetic figures. For example, instructor Ash initiated: "*because it's exam period...I won't take much of your time today... so you can study well* 🤞". This concerned and caring message triggered students to express their appreciation and gratitude, as they felt that the instructor cared for them personally. Students' responses to such markers are similar to their response in the following episode:

Extract (18)- Ash's group, Week 8

- (1) **Ash: I hope you reallllly understand these points**
- (2) **S1: we got it... don't worry** 👍
- (3) **Ash: fabulous!... and hope you always get it** 😊
- (4) **S2:** 😊
- (5) **Ash: whoever wants to leave now... you can... take care** 🙌
- (6) **S3: May Allah grant you good health** ❤️
- (7) **S4: thanks Mrs. Ash**
- (8) **Ash: you're most welcome... I'll see you tomorrow with Allah willingness.**
- (9) **Ash: I already took 6 minutes more of your time**
- (10) **Ash:** 😊
- (11) **S5: thanks so much** ❤️
- (12) **St6: It was a wonderful discussion** 😍
- (13) **Ash: if anyone has any question about today's discussion... feel free to ask here... okay?**

Instructor Ash exposed her caring persona in a way that made her concerns, expressed in line (1), open for confirmation or reflection. It is clear how the instructor's small talk was positively received by students through the flow of students' reciprocal social messages. Another form of Phatics is evoked when a student is absent or has been sick. The following example is by instructor Khadija who reciprocally shared her good wishes for a student:

Extract (19)- Khadija's group, Week 7

- (1) **S1: Forgive me because I didn't keep in touch... I had an operation and was in hospital for a couple of days**
- (2) **S2: welcome back!** ❤️
- (3) **S3: May you see no harm [student1 name]**
- (4) **S4: hope you're feeling better now** ❤️ ❤️
- (5) **S1: thanks girls**
- (6) **Khadija: Sweetheart... May Allah grant you good health... I hope you're better now** ❤️

(7) *S1: thanks*

The above example shows that not only students are mutually influenced by instructors' choice of relational language, instructors, like instructor Khadija in line (6), are reciprocally engaging in small talk with students. Another example of small talk emerged at the end of one of instructor Galiah's discussions with her students, where she concluded the session by sharing her feelings and constructing a positive mood:

Extract (20)- Galiah's group, Week 7

(1) **Galiah:** *Thank you ladies for an active hour. Hopefully next topic will be as exciting as this one* 👍 **LOVE YOU ALLLLL** ❤️ ❤️ ❤️

(2) *S1: Love youuuu too*

(3) *S2: Love you too*

(4) *S3: [laughs]*

(5) **Galiah:** 🥰 🥰 🥰

(6) *S4: we love you too* ❤️

The high level of immediacy and intimacy expressed by the instructor, and mutually exchanged by students cannot be overlooked in the above episode. The exchange, started by Galiah's Phatic discourse in line (1), and ended with an intimate expression. This intimate initiation evoked students' reciprocal responses, that coordinated with their instructor's language choice. The existence of such small talk enriches the intersubjective space, exchanging warm feelings that chart the space with an interpersonal and informal texture. It appears that instructors' interest, caring and empathic behaviours expressed in the mediated space extend beyond what students have experienced in face-to-face settings. The constraints that inhibited such interpersonal communication from occurring, as discussed in Study 1 in Chapter 4, seem to be eliminated in the space. As a result, the space creates informal opportunities for the human side of instructors to be communicated and verbalized in relational language.

Overall, Interactive and Interpersonal markers are the most embedded subcategories in Saudi instructors' social media communication with students. Most interestingly, Phatics is the most prevalent marker, as instructors exercise different forms of it in different contexts. Openings, praise and encouragement, reassurance, and expressing like-mindedness play a role in facilitating a favourable conversation for students to get involved in. The perceived authoritarian interaction practices of Saudi instructors described in Chapter 4 appear to be being reshaped and reconstructed by the mediated space. Although receiving forms of encouragement and care has been acknowledged by students in Study 1, the reported incidents do not reach the level of informal solidarity, conviviality and interpersonal communication exchanged in the medium. The following section presents the fourth category of the markers used by Saudi instructors.

#### **Category 4: Addressivity**

Vocatives or the use of addresses is notably extensive (21%) throughout instructors' messages. This is understandable, as the use of address devices can be considered a tool for turn-taking in chat. It is expected that chat type of conversations show a higher amount of address use compared to normal discussion board forum conversations due to the nature of the message exchange system within chat. In this study, instructors used two main forms of address: addressing an individual student, and addressing the group of students. Addressing an individual student (9.6%) can take the form of using a student's first name, and is often associated with requests, "[*student name*], can you come to my office please," directing questions, "*Is this the only reason, [student name]?*" or responding and giving feedback to that particular student, "*That looks fine, [student name],*" or in praise, "*Impressive [student name]!, now you've got it!*"

Another form of addressing an individual student can take an endearing socio-cultural device, such as instructor Hala's response: "yes habibti," which is equivalent to the English 'sweetheart' in expressing like-mindedness or solidarity. By the last two weeks, some instructors, like Hala, used this personalised address form to mitigate requests or orders, such as "you must add the names darling," or in Ghadah's following episode:

Extract (21)- Ghadah's group, Week 4

- (1) *Ghadah: [Student 1 name]... sweetheart it would be great if you could come to complete your exam in the lab tomorrow*
- (2) *Ghadah: thanks a lot*
- (3) *Ghadah: and girls don't forget the application on the small painting*
- (4) *S1: Of course 😊*
- (5) *Ghadah: 👍😊*

It appears that several instructors use personalised and endearing devices for addressing students to defuse the power of request, or orders they initiate. *Sweetie, darling, and sweetheart* are used in addressing individual students and mostly surfaced in politeness messages, such as thanks remarks and small talk or phatics, for instance: “[student name] darling thanks for your cooperation during the semester.” Other instructors like Khadija and Galiyah used the device “*dear*.” which sometimes could be accompanied by the student's first name. Most instructors change the way they address individual students over time. Only instructor Nadia kept using the same form of address across her corpora. She was consistent in using the student first name in addressing individual students over the eight-week period. A previous study suggests that addressing individuals by name is an essential cohesion expression, and another study found a connection between vocatives and immediacy of recall (Kelley & Gorham, 1988). Recalling student names when meeting them outside the classroom was an important aspect that students perceived as high value in seeking more interaction with instructors, as reported in Section 4.4.2.2.3 in Chapter 4. The few students who experienced outside-the-classroom interaction observed how the language in addressing them shifted from ‘girls’ to ‘my daughter or darling.’ In the above episode, student 1 offered a positive informal response in line (4), which indicates the possible positive influence of the personalized address from Ghadah. Thus, addressing students individually appears to shape a more informal personalized communication.

Patterns of addressing the group of students (11.5%) are similar to addressing individual students, where it can be divided into formal terms such as “Dear

students,” “My students,” and usually associated with opening devices in announcements and requests. Informal and intimate devices, such as “my sweethearts,” “my beautiful students,” “sweeties,” “darlings” and “girls” are being used. The more informal devices are used in mitigated requests, announcements, and are next to Phatics, and self-disclosure exchanges. It appears that the use of both types of addressing device, whether used individually or collectively, contributes to creating an atmosphere in which students may feel at ease and comfortable, with feelings that they personally ‘matter’. Eggins and Slade (1997) state that “*the use of redundant vocatives would tend to indicate an attempt by the addresser to establish a closer relationship with the addressee*” (p. 145). The positive responses from students, when instructors call their names in the medium, reflect the implication of the previous statement. It could be inferred that students feel that they are called to take a turn on stage, or take the floor in the mediated space, and in turn, it leaves a positive feeling of value and recognition of presence. The following section discusses the findings of Study 2.

## **5.5 Discussion**

This study focuses on exploring female Saudi instructors’ social media communication practices with their students via two similar social networking applications, WhatsApp and MessageMe. From a social, cultural, and educational point of view, this investigation focused on instructors’ messages in terms of the interpersonal, relational and informal side of the communication, and the ways in which these practices change over an eight-week period. In addition, instructors’ discursive practices were examined in terms of how instructors and students re-constructed shared understanding in the space. The findings are discussed in this section with respect to each of the two research study questions.

### **5.5.1 RQ1: Interpersonal linguistic profile of instructors' messages**

The investigation of instructors’ communication practices in social media revealed the use of particular linguistic markers that serve both interactive and informal functions. Four major interpersonal elements emerged from instructors’ discourse: Spoken Style of Communication, Emotional Expression, Interactive and Interpersonal, and Addressivity. The basic elements of Saudi instructors’ linguistic

communication practices adhere to several linguistic markers that are frequently considered characteristic of CMC in the literature, such as the spoken style of communication (Herring, 1996; Bieswanger, 2013), self-disclosure (Chyng-Yang & Stefanone, 2011), humour (Zappavigna, 2012), some social presence indicators (Anderson, et al, 2001), and e-immediacy behaviours (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2016). A detailed discussion of each category is presented below.

***Spoken style of communication.*** Instructors in this study are found to intentionally, or unintentionally employ repetition, repair, and switching codes during interaction. Repetition has emerged in numerous different studies as an important stylistic feature in online communication that conveys social meaning (Parkins, 2012), and is usually associated with several other paralinguistic cues, including capitalised words and repeated punctuation (Riordan & Kreuz, 2010). Among the several purposes of employing repetition, such as denoting a change in pitch, filling a pause, or creating a loud shout (Kalman & Gergle, 2014), consistent with Riordan and Kreuz's (2010) findings, Saudi instructors use this marker to stress and emphasise. In addition, this study suggests that instructors correct or repair their spelling mistakes to correct students' understanding and maintain intersubjectivity. This is in alignment with previous studies' findings examining why and how repair is being used in mediated environment (Kuruhila, 2001; Meredith & Stokoe, 2014). Furthermore, instructors shift the code of conversation to DA in order to signal a casual social change in register and action as a result of students' informal exchange, or to assure uneasy students.

According to Wardhaugh (1992), *'code switching is a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights and obligations.'* Therefore, it could be argued that code-switching practices invoke a change in the atmosphere to a relaxed tone, which may reconfigure the instructor-student relationship. A number of code switching studies that examined the Spanish-English code switching in email exchanges (Goldbarg, 2009), and in English and Arabic language use (Warschauer, El Said & Zohry, 2002) suggest that people tend to switch to the spoken language they identify with the most in order to convey a degree of intimacy, which is the case in this study. Abbreviation did not emerge in instructors' linguistic practices and

capitalisation does not exist as a concept in Arabic language. Overall, these inherently informal markers as used by instructors, come with implications for a greater degree of conversationalisation and informality (Fairclough, 1995) in the environment.

***Emotional expression.*** Instructors communicated their emotions and feelings through Self-disclosure, Using Humour, Emoticons, and Apologising. A number of previous studies examining online communications found self discourse among the emerged practices that emphasise how the immediacy of the medium, the little time and energy required, and the interpersonal atmosphere created, increases an individual's tendency to disclose personal information in online contexts (Joinson, 2001; Chyng-Yang & Stefanone, 2011). It could be argued that such affordances and aims could usefully explain the depth and breadth of instructors' self-disclosure texts, which ranged from declaring one's location, to seeking social support through disclosing private matters (i.e. instructor's mother health) in the space. The humorous notes that instructors shared with students' enacted laughter, providing greater means for reinforcing solidarity and creating a convivial atmosphere. This is supported by research that explored style in social media (Zappavigna, 2012), where humour as an interpersonal function reinforces solidarity among group members (Schunurr, 2013).

Emoticon use was the most prevalent marker used by instructors as a verbal feature to provide feedback and serve brevity, or as a non-verbal feature accompanying and further enhancing their textual communication. Its popularity among Saudis appears to be in line with the Hong Kong high use reported in Lee's study (2007). These insertions appear to highly affect the degree of formality of the text (Walther & D'Addario, 2001), where instructors thoughtfully deploy them in several instances to save time and clear the ambiguity of the online group for students. Emoticons can fundamentally change the mode and sometimes the meaning of the message. In some cases, the formality and dullness of messages due to the absence of non-verbal cues was effortlessly mitigated by inserting a smiley at the end. The incorporation of these smiley faces adds the playful and amusing nature of instructors' feedback, praise and encouragement, which appears to be at a higher interpersonal level compared to encouragement articulated in classroom contexts. Thus, they appear to



alter the course of educational exchange to a lively and friendly chat. The Apology marker was less pronounced in the pragmatics literature of mediated communication. While rare occasions of apology occur in Westbrook's (2007) study of librarians' and users' online communication, which raised the level of formality, instances of apology in this study revealed a more open persona of Saudi instructors that is not usually practised in face-to face contexts. It is in these 'Emotional Expression' practices where reciprocity between instructors and students evidently surfaced. Students mutually exchanged laughter, emoticons, and interpersonal responses, and on many occasions followed the relaxed, informal model of practice that instructors normed as acceptable, and over time nurtured in the space.

***Interpersonal and Interactive.*** While instructors may select to use particular linguistic markers in an educational context, they construct either a degree of distance, or intimacy between themselves and their students (Deroey & Taverniers, 2011). In addition to the interpersonal influence on the atmosphere of the space of opening, encouragement, reassurance, expressing agreement, and exchanging small talk, it could be argued that these markers may have the potential to promote students' motivation and interactivity in mediated educational contexts. As most of the interpersonal and interactive elements are established within the teacher immediacy literature as verbal immediate behaviours (O'Sullivan et al., 2004) and e-immediacy (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2016), they are found to increase students' participation and communication satisfaction. This is inferred as instructors' interactive strategies are usually followed by positive responses from students through emoticons or thanking expressions, expressing appreciation that their contribution is praised, valued and recognised. It could be argued that it might be the underlying reason for students to come back for more participation in groups where acknowledgement and solidarity is being provided compared to groups where such markers are lacking.

***Addressivity*** is extensively used by instructors in this study, which reminds us of the nature of the chat type of conversation that necessitates calling on this linguistic feature. In addition, vocatives or addressivity, such as social presence subcategories (Anderson et al., 2001), immediacy (O'Sullivan et al., 2004), and CMC pragmatics (Herring, Stein & Virtanen, 2013) has been highlighted within the literature.

Instructors used informal forms of individual and group address in mitigating requests to maintain reserved Saudi students' public face, and expresses a change in instructor mode to a relaxed one. This effect of address as a marker was highlighted by de Oliveira (2013) in his review of address literature in CMC. The positive responses from students when instructors call their names in the medium reflects a positive feeling of value and recognition of presence on the part of students. Given the supported characteristics of instructor-student interaction in this study from previous literature, it could be argued that this hybrid media space may have the potential to support building interpersonal relationships. This is supported by Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal perspective, which argues that the online text based environment, and its lack of non verbal cues, multiplies both the speed and opportunities for individuals to promote interpersonal relationships.

Although, at first, the emerged linguistic markers from this Saudi study appeared to be similar to the characteristics of CMC within the literature, a closer examination of the messages reveal not only pure, well-known stylistic features, rather, these features are intertwined with distinctive culturally-contextualized use of ritual and formulaic expressions. A cultural and social lens to communication shows a prevalence of an assortment of socio-cultural values and religious signals in phatics, openings and reassuring markers, with phatics being the highest frequently used marker across instructors' corpora, as discussed in Section 5.4.5. These conversational routines provide an important cultural interpretation of the variety of their linguistic forms, and how they signal social communication. The majority of Saudi instructors in this study appear to use these expressions in order to express politeness, show respect, solidarity, and gaining presence recognition (Alharbi & Al-Ajmi, 2008). It is argued that the absence or presence of an opening, and the type of greeting adopted, sets the tone for the subsequent conversation (Waldvogel, 2007). Thus, they support setting the stage for a more interpersonal communication in the space.

This distinctive cultural addition to the discourse is discussed by Ferguson (1978), who in terms of the greetings discourse, pointed out that the major source of difference between Arabic and English in examining politeness formulas in both languages is related to the rhetorical formation and use of greeting rituals. Ferguson

discusses the connection between these expressions and the social and cultural background of Arabic societies. This linguistic practice is a result of a significant influence of religion on the spoken Arabic. This practice is in alignment with Hassanain's (1994) study results that suggest that Saudis' greetings are largely dominated by religious discourse, especially in greeting devices. He suggests that *"... the greetee does not thank the greeter, but rather thanks God for the state of his own health"* (ibid:72). These expressions are originally encouraged by the Quran, which indicates varieties of Arabic greetings: *'When a (courteous) greeting is offered you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous, or (at least) of equal courtesy. Allah takes careful account of all things'* (Al-Nissa, 86). Thus, this specific cultural convention of 'the same or more' is an essential component of Arabic greetings that most Muslims adhere to and appears to inject the medium in this study with more solidarity and closeness. This is in alignment with Hossjer (2013) who argues that small talk can act as 'face-boosting acts' that satisfy the receiver, which appears to be the case with Saudis' culturally personalised phatics. It also could be argued that instructors' cultural and religious beliefs exert an influence on their presented 'self' with a variety of interpersonal expressions in the online discourse (Samburskiy, 2013).

Furthermore, the findings of this study establish a clear discrepancy between the formal character of instructors' practice in the face-to-face classroom context, discussed in Study 1 in Chapter 4, and their interpersonal discursive practices in the medium in this study. It could be argued that instructors mediated communication, where they convey feelings, exchange playful emoticons, use self-disclosure, and phatics, deviates from their traditional cultural face-to-face classroom practices. Instructors' and students' reporting in Study 1 suggests rare incidents of social interaction. In fact, the cultural-based discourse convention in the classroom context is to be formal, respectful and avoid exchanging humorous notes as reported by students. It appears that the cultural image of the Saudi instructor and the formal relationship that instructors and students nurtured is being re-charted by instructors' informality in the medium. The contextual constraints, discussed in Chapter 4 Section 4.4.2.2.3, specifically the formality and limitation of class time, are no longer a concern with the flexibility of time and place found in an uncharted mediated space that is usually used for social interaction and now being used in an

educational context. It could be argued that Saudi instructors are simply humans, but they are most likely trapped by the formal norms of the classroom coupled with the lack of other forms of teaching, such as small groups. Thus, online spaces offer an interpersonal room for both instructors and students to intentionally or unintentionally disclose information, be humorous, and use emoticons among several other informal affordances. The high adoption of emoticons, as shown in Table 5-10 in Section 5.4.3, may indicate a seemingly painless insertion by instructors, which might have opened the gate for loosening the interaction more rapidly. Although students' messages were not systematically examined, several instances suggest a strong indication of mutual influence and reciprocity in following instructors' established informal models of practice in this new educational space, and such mutuality probably moves both instructors and students forward together.

In addition, it could be argued that instructors' self-presentation in these spaces is being reshaped by their perceptions of self-concept and beliefs about teaching (Bandura, 1995), and their own conceptions of the instructor-student relationship. In Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2.1.2, the majority of instructors described more liberal beliefs about the relationship, based on mutuality, two-way communication and support, than the traditional beliefs of a Saudi instructor. As discussed in Chapter 4 discussion section 4.4.2.2.1, students do not witness many opportunities in a class context where their instructors vocalise warmth and support that resembles instructors' beliefs. However, the mediated environments offered inherently informal affordances, coupled with opportunities for instructors' 'ideal' conceptions of relationship to be enacted in greater informality.

### **5.5.2 RQ2: Change in instructors' interpersonal markers over time**

Both quantitative and qualitative findings prove a significant positive trend towards conversationalisation in instructors' exchanges within mediated environments, such as social media. This finding is consistent with the literature on the shift towards more informality in educational discourse, where casual and spoken discourse is evident (Pe rez-Sabater, 2012; Zappavigna, 2012). This finding proved that the formal quality of Saudi instructor-student communication practices are not cocooned from such changes. Although these interpersonal markers were embedded in

exchanges with differing amounts and modes of communication over time, the high degree of using such elements across instructors' corpora suggests that the environment for most groups, is generally warm, casual and collegial. According to White (2000), any type of human interaction can be placed along a continuum of interpersonal expression. He also argues that "*the Interpersonal-Impersonal Continuum assumes that a person has a choice to be more or less interpersonal*" (p. 5). Thus, although increasing gradually, the resultant linguistic profile of the messages in this study suggests that most Saudi instructors tend to interact on the interpersonal as opposed to impersonal end of the continuum in the online medium. In addition, it appears that the divergence of instructors' enacted behaviours into more informality is triggered more by the synchronicity of spaces than by the asynchronous mode. Table 5-10 in Section 5.4.3 shows that the synchronous extreme cases of informality have a higher percentage of markers compared to asynchronous cases. Thus, it could be argued that higher hopes exist for a synchronous design of communication for stimulating informality, or injecting more relaxed instructor-student interaction. Overall, this study supports Walther's (1996) assumption that social relationships will develop when interacting over time, and this study offers supporting evidence to Walther's SIP that Saudi instructors and students achieved a relatively informal interpersonal communication level that exceeded their face-to-face communication.

## 5.6 Summary

This study provides an insight into Saudis' interpersonal communication practices in a social media context. The content and discourse analysis of Saudi instructors' discursive practices has shown the potential impact of social media on the formal character of educational discourse manifested in a highly formal society, such as that of Saudi Arabia. The findings echo the long tradition in CMC literature, whereby Saudi instructors' practice suggests the emergence of interpersonal elements and a tendency towards informality. Although there exist instructor variations, the tendency over time towards an increasingly 'conversational' style is evident in the messages of most participants. Despite the stable formality of Saudi instructor-students in traditional face-to-face contexts in Study 1, this is not so apparent in a social media context. Although they emerged gradually, conventional

communication exchanges, such as requests, announcements, clarifying meaning, and directing questions are some patterns where interpersonal elements have clearly surfaced. Consequently, the dynamics of their offline relationships may be influenced by the conversational exchanges and the shared intersubjectivity established in their online groups. The question remains as to whether the broad adoption of social media by Saudi higher education initiatives will make it possible to transform the traditional university culture of communication. Transferring this new form of online cultural communication to the traditional university culture might alleviate barriers to more two-way effective communication, or “transactional listening” in formal educational systems. It might be the fluid nature of social media that has the potential to shift communication practices between instructors and students in a classroom context, to a more convivial communication. Thus, this may set the conditions for revitalized instructor-student relationships within such an educational ecology in both social media exchanges and face-to-face classrooms.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Thesis research challenges

This thesis reports an empirical investigation into a Saudi culture and had two overarching aims. The first was to explore the resilience of firmly established instructor-student interaction practices and the character of these relationships within a university classroom context in a female only campus. The second overarching aim was to explore the ways in which evolving social media reconfigures the formal quality of instructors' communication practices within the Saudi culture in a social media context. These two aims were explored in two separate chapters: Study 1 in Chapter 4 and Study 2 in Chapter 5.

Study 1, presented in Chapter 4, is a research study having the significant purpose of opening a window onto current educational and interaction practices between instructors and students within the Saudi educational system, and is given from both instructors' and students' perspectives. The Saudi educational system is often associated with having a certain kind of formality in its interpersonal communications, but this issue is not well documented within the available literature. Study 1 is a step forward in understanding this issue and posed the following research challenges or questions:

- **RQ1:** What are students' perceptions of the university-learning environment at KAU?
- **RQ2:** What are instructors' perceptions of their interpersonal relationships with their students at KAU?
- **RQ3:** What are students' perceptions of the current nature of interpersonal relationships with their instructors at KAU?
- **RQ4:** To what extent is there a difference in the perception of instructor-student relationships between instructors and students?

Study 1 served as a backbone for Study 2, which was valuable in generally understanding how current pedagogies and instructor interaction practices that take place within Saudi educational institutions react to social media, which Saudis are

engaging with in their everyday lives. In particular, the marked form of interaction practices and the resulting relationship from Study 1 steered the direction of Study 2, where it informed and sharpened the inquiry to examine instructors' social media discourse specifically for social and interpersonal markers and patterns of shared understanding. Thus, Study 2 set out to explore the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What are the informality and intimacy markers that exist in Saudi instructors' communication practices with their students in social media contexts?
- **RQ2:** To what extent is there a growth in instructors' emerging informality markers over time via the medium?

In exploring these questions, the goal was to contribute to knowledge about instructor-student relationships and interaction practices in higher education in general and in the Saudi traditional higher education system in particular. Saudi culture is a convenient case for examining how these labile forms of communication practices are situated within the playful social media context. Although the results have been discussed in depth in both Study 1 and Study 2 chapters, this chapter will attempt to integrate the results, and the next section gives a summary of these findings.

## **6.2 Summary of the findings**

Chapter 4 presents Study 1: an investigation of the Saudi university classroom climate from a relational viewpoint. This was achieved by seeking both instructors' and students' perceptions of educational practices, instructor-student interaction practices and their interpersonal relationships. A mixed methods methodology was employed for the purpose of answering the research questions by using two psychometric surveys, semi-structured interviews for instructors, and focus groups for students. More specifically, the first research question concerns students' views of the quality of the university classroom environment. A triangulation of CUCEI survey results and students' focus group findings provided a general picture of the classroom climate in terms of current pedagogy and interaction practices. Students



paint a general picture of a didactic teaching ecology, mainly focused on imparting textbook information and an apparent absence of student-centred approaches to teaching, where students would play much more than a 'listening' role.

In addition, students echoed a dearth of instructor-student interactions inside the classroom, and they suggested that interaction is inhibited by a number of contextual constraints. The constraints that students gave as the main reasons for the lack of interaction within their classrooms are: the large group size in a class, instructors' authoritarian teaching, and students' cultural apprehensiveness. As for instructor participants, they reported a general dissatisfaction with the rigidity of the Saudi educational system including traditional teaching, learning and assessment approaches. Thus, there was a strong articulation for the need for reform of the system, where the majority of instructors show liberal attitudes to new teaching strategies, and receptiveness to students' needs. These conceptions that align with innovative educational approaches are a result of the exposure of some of these instructors to student-centered approaches during their graduate studies abroad.

The second research question concerned instructors' perceptions of their interpersonal relationships with students. A triangulation of QTI survey results alongside instructors' interviews showed that instructors evaluated their interpersonal behaviour in relation to interaction practices as highly dominant, but immensely caring and approachable. Thus, instructor participants in this study supported a respectful, balanced instructor-student relationship. Their description of the seemingly modest interaction practices with students both inside and outside the classroom settings was clearly shaped or constrained by their conceptions and beliefs of students as being uncommunicative and distant, and their beliefs about what or how the relationship between instructor and student should look like. These conceptions of interaction were conveyed through concepts such as mutual respect, honesty, balance, formality and boundaries. While the majority of instructor participants hold transformed beliefs of a more relaxed relationship, there was little evidence of translating these conceptions into actions. This could be explained by the low frequency of instructor-student interaction reported, and thought to be due to a number of contextual constraints. These constraints, such as a student's uncertainty

about interacting, instructor's interest, group size and brevity of class time diminish opportunities for these interactions to occur, inside and outside the classroom.

The third research question dealt with students' perceptions of their instructors' interpersonal behaviour and the character of their relationships. Their views portrayed instructors as low on affability, but somewhat supportive. Students called for a more convivial style of communication, more empathy and understanding of their needs and circumstances, and above all, acknowledgement and valuing of their voices and opinions in their learning. Student participants in this study described a generally formal and distant relationship with their instructors as a result of several intertwined ingredients, such as the student belief in keeping a culturally proper instructor-student relationship nurtured by contextual constraints to interactions. These culturally entrenched ideas are constantly feeding the formality of the classroom environment, such as not exchanging jokes in class, obedience oriented approaches, and student shyness and cultural reserve concerning interaction with the instructor.

The core message taken from Study 1, which responds to the fourth research question, is the fact that the formal instructor-student relationship is a result of several contextual factors mainly related to the Saudi educational system based on the wider culture. Saudi instructors participating in this study are just humans like all instructors from other cultures. They tend to view their interpersonal behaviour in an idealised way as being highly caring, understanding, empathic, approachable, interactive and friendly. However, evidence from this study indicates that these views of optimum behaviours do not actually take place or are translated into actions. What hinders these positive behaviours in coming to light is not only the physical place where teaching and learning within this traditional cultural educational system is played out, but also the curriculum design and the stable, traditional, pedagogical paradigm that has been exercised and maintained over the years. Thus, it is not the individuals who are responsible for the shaped, formal interpersonal relationship; rather, it is the underlying system through which these people are allowed to interact. In addition, the lack of interaction between instructors and students is partly a result of the absence of a powerful form of teaching, such as small group seminars and the nature of a classroom climate that largely echoes

undifferentiating, large scale meetings and lectures. The low frequency and quality of these interactions do not make way for argument and discussion to take place and for shared understanding and the construction of intersubjectivity to be established. Hence, these caring, understanding, empathic behaviours, construction of shared understanding, and many 'unrevealed' informal and intimate behaviours from instructors constrained by the system could be released within other enabling environments, such as social media. This is what prompted Study 2.

Chapter 5 presents Study 2: an investigation of the ways in which social media reconfigures the formal quality of instructors' communication practices. This was achieved by examining instructors' conversations with students via social networking applications for any existing informal, interpersonal texts within the exchanges. Mixed method approach, using content and trend analysis, was employed to explore this study's two research questions. The study research questions concerned the interpersonal markers, stylistic features, interpretations of intent in instructors' messages, and whether there exists any growth in these patterns over time. The findings suggested a high level of informality in instructors' conversations represented by four interpersonal elements that emerged from their exchanges: Spoken Style of Communication, Emotional Expression, Interactive and Interpersonal, and Addressivity. A closer examination of these categories uncovered a distinctive culturally contextualised use of formulaic expressions embedded within these discourse features. Instructors' openings, phatics and reassuring markers hold an assortment of socio-cultural values and religious expressions that signal and support a social communication.

These ritual expressions cannot be separated from the social context in which they are situated and unlike other forms of phatics belonging to non Arabic culture, the Saudi form of what may seem to be conversational routines may take longer in conversational time than any social exchange that exists within other cultures' discourse practices. The informality markers, alongside the cultural conventions of the variety of Arabic greeting rituals, appear to have injected the medium with more solidarity and closeness. In addition, the high adoption of emoticons by Saudi instructors radically changed the mode and sometimes the meaning of the message. They did add a playful and amusing flavour for instructors' feedback, praise, and

encouragement, sometimes standing alone as an acceptable engaging response (such as the thumbs up or the clapping hands). This seemingly painless insertion of emotions might have opened the gate for loosening the interaction more rapidly, which was evident in the markers' growth pattern over the eight-week period. The findings of the trend analysis prove a significant positive trend towards conversationalisation in instructors' exchanges. Although there exists variations in communication patterns across the time period, this study offers supporting evidence that Saudi instructors and students may have achieved a relatively informal interpersonal communication level that exceeded their face-to-face communication. Thus, this mediated space is a promising avenue which supports crafting a more convivial relaxed atmosphere that invites solidarity and social support.

The final message of the thesis findings is that the discrepancy between instructors' formal practices in a classroom context and their discursive practices within social media is evident. All interpersonal and intimate behaviours that appeared to be restricted in a face-to-face context, such as humour, self-disclosure, reassurance, phatic expression, praise and many more, are gradually being released within a social media context. They bypassed all obstacles that the Saudi educational system is putting into place. The latent social, natural and informal behaviours within people passed around the historical and cultural obstacles of the formality of classroom practices, as well as the physical obstacles represented by the large lecture halls and the infrastructure of institutions. These contextual constraints disappeared within a social media space, and as a result, informal and interpersonal actions found one of the 'Web 2.0 opportunities' (Crook, 2012) to be made possible, released and nurtured. Although instructor variations existed, the tendency towards increased sociability over time was evident in the discourse of most participants.

The next section discusses the contribution of this research and its implications.

### **6.3 Contribution to Knowledge and Implications**

This section discusses the ways in which this research contributes to knowledge on a number of issues related to three main areas of research: the instructor-student relationship in higher education, higher education systems characterised with formal

quality in general and that of Saudi Arabia in particular, and social media adoption in educational contexts.

### **6.3.1 Instructor-Student Relationship in Higher Education**

Study 1 of this thesis adds to what is known about the instructor-student relationship in higher education literature. A review of the literature on relationships indicates that it is a less comprehensively studied construct, and its abstract psychological relationship concepts are not firmly understood, sometimes with one concept being associated with two or more meanings (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Thus, this mixed method research contributes to the literature in understanding of the relationship by capturing the reported stories of interaction practices inside and outside the classroom. Participants were able to distinguish a number of themes as important for a relationship to develop, such as caring, approachability, formality, and exercising authority by articulating beliefs, conceptions and concrete examples from their practical experience.

In addition, the multiple method perspective was extremely invaluable in understanding the multiple dimensions of Saudi learning culture. For instance, without student focus groups it would have been difficult to elicit elaborations on students' perceptions of formality of communication with instructors. Students' reporting and reflections about current teaching practices and how these practices impact the form of relationship they develop with instructors, supports the literature on the relationship construct where teaching practices and context influence the relationship between instructors and students. Thus, it is strongly advisable to employ mixed methods when researchers aim to understand entrenched cultural factors within an educational system as they eventually impact the instructor-student relationship.

This leads to the observation that this study is one of the few examples of research on the relationship construct that includes culture as an influencing factor (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). One of the valuable implications of this study is recognizing the importance of including the background context when studying educational practices in different cultures. Without including culture as a factor,

Saudi instructors would have been held responsible for the formality of the instructor-student relationship according to students' views. In fact, Saudi instructors are humans and being led by the cultural educational system, which is one of the elements responsible for teaching, learning and relationship outcomes. Hence, it is strongly advisable that the underlying cultures of educational systems are taken into consideration in similar research.

Study 1 is one of the first to use the cross culturally generalizable QTI questionnaire and the CUCEI in the Saudi context for assessing instructors' interpersonal behaviour from a teaching perspective and the classroom as a learning environment. This study contributed to the literature by validating an Arabic version of QTI and CUCEI survey with a relatively good sample size of students. Evidently, Fraser's (2014) review of the research on learning environments confirmed the absence of studies in this area in the Middle East. The lack of valid instruments in the Arabic language might be a reason behind such dearth. Also, Hagenauer and Volet (2014) argue that the lack of standardised instruments that examine instructor-student relationships through interpersonal behaviour and interaction practices presents challenging tasks for instructor-student relationship researchers studying different cultures. Thus, the validated Arabic version of QTI and CUCEI could benefit educators and researchers examining classroom environments and the instructor-student relationship in Middle Eastern countries. Also, the Arabic version of QTI and CUCEI used in this study was further validated by the use of qualitative interviews and focus groups. While most CUCEI scales appeared reliable, with only the 'involvement' scale having a low reliability, this study indicates a need for further improvement of the Arabic CUCEI for the Saudi context. All in all, the quality of the Arabic versions of these surveys should be tested with a larger data set involving more than one institution from different cities or regions in Saudi Arabia.

This research enforces the importance of relationships as being one component of developing students' critical thinking, self-confidence, and discussion and communication skills - among many other aspects of the student experience. Several cognitive and affective outcomes have been associated with instructor-student interactions and relationships: they are well documented in the literature and include leadership abilities, critical thinking and problem solving, self-concept and identify,

as well as better sense of purpose, communication skills, personality development, and grades and performance (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Kim & Sax, 2007; Komarraju; et al., 2010; Micari & Pazos, 2012; Kezar & Maxey, 2014). In addition, this research is in line with previous study which indicates that students who sensed instructors cared about them have also shown increased levels of engagement in their courses - which resulted in their success and retention (Crombie et al., 2003). This is valuable especially for the circumstances of Saudi students who generally lack confidence to discuss and argue and may also lack willingness to engage in their courses. There is often a tendency to assume that students' hard work and skills alone will guarantee students' success. However, the relationship between students and their instructors can play a major role in shaping and developing critical Saudi thinkers and confident arguers which eventually will enhance the Saudi students' learning experience. Thus, Saudi academics should aim at exploiting the 'relationships' element by creating encouraging and safe opportunities for interaction and discussion, and demonstrating genuine interest in helping students to learn and argue. These attempts along with instructors who bring themselves to the classroom by sharing anecdotes and talking about their own professional stories, and helping to create a connection with students- all make an impact on student success (Cox et al., 2010; Vogt, 2008).

### **6.3.2 Formal Educational Systems: Saudi Arabia and Social Media**

This research provides evidence about the traditions of teaching, the classroom environment, the quality of the instructor-student relationship, and the adoption of social media by the Saudi higher educational system.

Study 1 adds to the literature on the tension that exists between Saudi traditional teaching and learning approaches, their influence on the instructor-student relationship and the inclination to keep cultural values intact. Although Study 1 offers a small window onto the traditional educational practices of Saudi instructors, the educational system still generally reflects didactic teaching. This study challenges the notion that Saudi academics firmly believe that traditional teaching approaches are their favoured methods and that they are the best strategies for Saudi students' learning (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). This study showed a clear dissatisfaction of Saudi instructors for the rigidity of the system and the difficulty of

proposing change. Also, qualitative themes from instructors' interviews in Study 1 offer reinforcement of the need for change through anecdotal evidence of instructors' attempts to change curriculum design and assessment approaches.

Previous research suggests that Saudi academics do not believe in change, because of their entrenched beliefs and that teacher-centred approaches are the only pedagogical model to which they have been exposed. However, evidence from this study indicates that half of the participating instructors received their graduate degrees from US, UK and Canadian universities and, in turn, have been exposed to different and innovative teaching and learning strategies. It is expected that Saudis and Saudi academics in particular adopt more changed beliefs regarding teaching and learning strategies as universities and colleges around the Kingdom have been welcoming hundreds of thousands of Saudi students sent overseas for graduate studies as part of the Saudi scholarship program that was first initiated in 2005 with full funding support. It is one of the very few international education initiatives that is expected to have a significant impact on the development of Saudi education in general and higher education in particular.

With future Saudi academics being engrossed in western traditions of teaching, it might be expected to witness changed views not only in relation to tradition of teaching but also on conceptions of instructor-student relationships and their interaction practices, such as the conceptions shared by participants, as illustrated in Study 1 Section 4.4.2.1.2. This view of change should be supported by the central authority and the Ministry of Higher Education after determining the optimal balance between culture and academic vision. This will lead to an appropriate and enhanced university system and at the same time, one that maintains the important standards of the religious-based culture. Thus, the Ministry of Higher Education's next challenge is to reconcile the societal culture with the culture of innovative teaching and learning. This study also supports Alnassar and Dow's (2013) claim that the responsibility for achieving progress, in terms of the major challenge of shifting didactic pedagogy to high quality teaching and learning standards, is the responsibility of not only the Ministry of Higher Education or institutional leaders, but it is also a shared partnership between enthusiastic individual academics and their departments.



Study 1 also challenges how Saudi students have been described as passive victims of the system. Those reporting in the focus groups portray critical, thoughtful students who are eager for change to happen in their learning environment. This study clarifies why they have long been perceived as passive, as they are not given opportunities to have agency over their experience. Thus, the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education policy and instructors' practice should consider the value and outcome of including students' interests and needs in teaching and learning practices.

The work of Study 2 is one of the rare examples of research that adds to the literature on the shift towards informality in online written styles (Fairclough, 1992, 1995) by providing evidence from a non-English speaking country. The findings of this study could be of benefit to researchers examining the online written styles in the Arabic language. The discourse categories that emerged in this study could be used as a scheme or a building block to analyze and validate larger Arabic corpora for informal and interpersonal markers. The cultural flavour embedded alongside informality markers within traditional communication exchanges could be of interest to researchers in language studies to further investigate in comparison to discourse originating from other cultures.

Study 2 findings suggest that Saudi academics should endorse the integration of social media into their teaching and communication practices with their students. Study 1 offers evidence of the lack of channels for continuous two-way communication between instructors and students, such as small group seminars, discussion sessions, and collaborative activities. Instructors in Study 2 adopted WhatsApp and MessageMe as both asynchronous course related communication channels and synchronous discussion sessions. These additional channels may have significant potential for the circumstances of the Saudi educational system. While less cultural and more developed higher education systems use social media for more sophisticated activities, such as enabling students to create, collaborate and publish as co-producers of knowledge (Selwyn, 2011), it is probably a promising step for the Saudi academics to adopt these tools to make available a space for students to discuss, argue and make their voices heard.

Furthermore, practice within social media spaces has the potential to encourage what is lacking in Saudi students, participation and critical thinking (Ajjan & Hartshorne 2008), and foster increased peer support and communication about course materials (DiVall & Kirwin, 2012). More specifically, the established asynchronous course related text communications in this study might compensate for the lack of instructor-student communication and alleviate barriers to transactional listening (Waks, 2011). Also, the synchronous groups, those instructor participants established in this study, provided students with learning activities where they are rarely invited to engage in a face-to-face context. These online spaces are well-aligned with social constructivist views of learning and value knowledge as decentralised and co-constructed (Dede, 2008). Hence, adopting these spaces has implications for transforming teaching practices and instructors' and students' roles. Consequently, these spaces may have the potential to shift Saudi instructors' traditional teaching practices to more student-engaging practices.

In addition, a major implication of endorsing the adoption of social media by Saudi instructors is to increase opportunities for constructing a social relationship with students. The findings of Study 2 contribute to the literature on social media adoption in formal educational contexts, such as that of Saudi Arabia and its potential to reshape instructors' communication practices. The formalities of interaction practices in face-to-face contexts that surfaced in Study 1, were gradually becoming loose in the online groups. The cultural flavour, embedded alongside informality markers within traditional communication exchanges, supports the literature, which indicates the abilities of these spaces to convey sociability and intimacy, and increases over time (Walther, 1992, 1994). It turns out that this is true even in highly cultural and formal educational systems, such as that in Saudi. In fact, the association between Saudi society, culture and religion, shapes more socially separate identities, as they are away from the walls of the formal system: a system that portrays and keeps the classroom climate as formal as possible.

In a social media environment, this association between society and culture is positive, as it expands sociability in social media through a vigorous use of emoticons that removes both their cultural uncertainty, where uncertainty is inherent, especially in asynchronous text communication. Also, the thriving use of phatics,

which contain extended cultural greetings rituals not usually exercised by many cultures does inject the space with solidarity and closeness. Thus, adopting social media as an additional educational communication channel outside-the-classroom not only has the potential to increase opportunities for interaction, and instructors' perceived approachability, but could be expected to foster the formation of a more relaxed and social relationship as a result of increasing informality markers (such as encouragement, reassurance, phatic expressions, emoticons, humour, and self disclosure) in instructors' communication practices. Thus, academics operating within formal educational systems, such as that of Saudi, are highly advised to employ social media to complement and compensate for what the face-to-face environment lacks.

However, it should be acknowledged that not all instructors would welcome the workload that such educational and communication changes imply. Evidence of reluctance to embrace the new educational practice due to the heavy effort and time required was articulated by some Saudi instructors in a previous study (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010). In addition, although the online educational activity is often advantageous, and is usually in the best interest of student progress, it should be stressed that such activity is controversial. This social activity brings both risks and opportunities for instructors to think about. The opportunities include the conventional educational benefits for students' learning, while instructors face the issue of favouritism, the dilemma of managing the boundary, and whether to disclose or safeguard their social or personal lives from students. Once the instructor decides to take the opportunity of employing online channels for interacting with students, s/he is going to encounter more risks, where the lines are blurred by the fluid and playful nature that may influence every individual taking part in communicating within the space. For instance, these mediums introduce difficult tensions in managing unwarranted intimacy, expressing favouritism, and socializing with selected students. Instructors show what they are prepared to express when they decide what to type and send within this kind of online communication practice. Thus, this thesis provides an empirical basis through which to think about and address the way relationships are managed in an educational sector, and how the words of a teacher could be managed and balanced when such a practice is put in place.

## **6.4 Limitations**

This research, like that in any other thesis, has several lessons embedded within its methodological and analytical decisions that eventually bring recognition of both limitations and strengths. These are considered in the following sub-sections.

### **6.4.1 Instructors Sampling**

It is well known that there is an intrinsic difficulty in recruiting university instructors for the purpose of answering several questions, whether for surveys or interviews. For the purpose of distributing a QTI questionnaire, as a researcher, my primary aim was to achieve a large number of participants. Unfortunately, the QTI online version for instructors yielded a low response rate. Even my attempt to reach instructors in their offices during the time period devoted to data collection was not very fruitful compared to collecting the students' sample. This was due to the fact that it was the end of the semester when staff are usually busy assessing exams, or are not available. Even though statistically significant differences exist for a number of QTI scales, and the qualitative data analysis results add significantly to understanding what concepts and dimensions are perceived to be important for instructor-student relationships, a bigger sample size of university instructors would have provided more statistical power, and may have increased the probability for other scales to show statistical differences, if in fact they exist.

Looking for instructor volunteers to be interviewed was even more difficult. Several approaches were attempted, such as word of mouth, phoning colleagues and spreading the word about the research and its valuable purpose. Most instructors were sceptical and the only way that they could be encouraged to opt in, was when they were being asked to participate not only in interviews about their interpersonal behaviour and interaction practices with students, but knowing that the research concerns the potential of social media in educational contexts. As a result, most participating instructors were selectively sampled in a way that they were receptive, interested and enthusiastic about using technology in their practice. This issue has implications for the findings of Study 1, as most instructors reflect the atypical Saudi instructor, especially in being open to Saudi students' predicaments and non-

traditional teaching approaches. Simultaneously, without this selective sampling this research would not have acknowledged the existence of a group of receptive university instructors that is growing with the scholarship programme and the exposure to different pedagogical paradigms than the traditional one exercised within the cultural system. All in all, the recommendation is to plan a more representative sample of instructors within the target population.

#### **6.4.2 Social Media Pedagogy**

As previously discussed in Study 2 methodology, this case study gave participating instructors various options regarding social media tools and examples of interactive educational scenarios to choose and use with their students. Instructors were also given a period of time to think about and decide on integrating one of the social media tools based on their specific course objective. However, more than half of the instructors opted for the safe choice for them, an asynchronous channel for communication of course-related matters. Although the majority of instructors were vastly receptive towards trying new learning tasks in these media, they lacked knowledge and training about what pedagogies relevant to their courses could fit these novel environments.

It would be both extremely difficult and unfamiliar for them to appropriate textbook information delivered in lecture halls to interactive sessions in social media. Also, leading a learning activity in a mediated social space with their students could be considered a great cultural uncertainty that they would rather avoid. Hence, faced with a problem of both lacking the knowledge of implementing activities in social media, and their uncertainty avoidance, only a few instructors made the jump and implemented synchronous discussion activities. Therefore, the recommendation is that receptive instructors should receive support, training and orientations on how to implement an online curriculum that fits their course objectives.

#### **6.5 Future Research**

This section gives some recommendations for future work stemming from some promising observations from this research.

### **6.5.1 Students' exchanges and mutuality**

This research particularly examined instructors' communication practices by looking at informality markers within their text messages in social networking applications over time. Although student discourse was not examined, several episodes show an interesting dynamic that is worth examining in future work in this area. Investigating the dynamics of discourse between instructors and students, and the extent of mutuality exchanged by students, will open new possibilities and opportunities for more questions to be posed, such as what triggers students' informality to surface? What informality markers are being invoked and when? How is students' informality developing over time compared to that of instructors?

### **6.5.2 Difference between the emergence of informality in synchronous and asynchronous communication over time**

Another promising area of future research within formal cultures like Saudi is to dig deep into how the emergence of informality differs in synchronous and asynchronous forms of communication. This thesis makes an observation that is consistent with the idea that there might be higher hopes for synchronous forms to elicit more sociability and relaxed interaction. Future research needs to follow that and examine this distinction by looking at what the conditions of communication are that are most favourable to a growing informality? What is the role of different designs of communication with which it would be possible to achieve a more relaxed educational dialogue within formal cultures? Adding rigour through statistical analysis may gain the potential to recognize exactly when instructors and students tend to be more 'conversational' and in what 'informal' ways over a period of time. Therefore, if we are striving to stimulate informality, or inject more of it into a formal culture, this future research could point towards a specific form of communication to seek.

In the last section of this chapter, I close this thesis by drawing on my doctoral experiences and reflect on this journey by considering a few of the many lessons I learned from conducting this research.

## **6.6 Lessons learned and reflexive observations**

When I first started this research three years ago, I kept telling myself: *‘This research will go just the way I planned it.. this is my home country, my institution.. I know everything about it.. it will be as easy as pie!’*. And I can say now, at the end of this terrific and complicated journey, that at the time I had no idea what I was talking about.

I think this misconception about the ease of conducting research, especially the qualitative part of it, is linked to the ambivalence I had about ‘my role’ in the research. More specifically, I was largely unaware of my important role in the collection of data, the analytic process, the interpretation, and the predetermined ideas and assumptions I would bring to the research at all of its different stages (Devine & Heath, 1999). One of the lessons I learned is not to underestimate the implicit need for the researcher to manage the power relations during data collection (Wolf, 1996).

My first focus group session with a group of students was a total failure. I was not successful in encouraging the culturally reserved students to speak up. It was not until the third session that I had interesting discussions with students when I used humour to give students the illusion of normal conversations instead of formal interrogation about their instructors’ practices and their own conceptions. The temporary informality I brought to the setting gave my participants the impression that I was ‘one of the gang’. Thus, although an insider, humour in a way was a rewarding approach in releasing discomfort in relation to my difference as a researcher and instructor.

Another lesson that may appear obvious to experienced researchers is that good interpretation takes time, practice and countless painful trials. I used to think that being armed with a deep immersion in the literature would be the only and most

important task I would need to prepare myself for analysis and interpretation, neglecting the Saudi institutional and interpersonal context, ontological and epistemological assumptions embedded within my analytical methods and the ways in which I am using them. It was not until several stages of shifts and turns of confusions and tensions, while immersing myself in the data, that I started to question my subjectivity in interpreting the participant's voices and discourse. I realized that reconstructing a transparent research account is a joint outcome of the subjectivities of the instructors, students and me as researcher. Thus, situating myself socially and emotionally in relation to participants was vastly important in influencing my interpretation of their voices and discourse.

For instance, having lived a Saudi student experience myself, during initial trials of the analysis, I was aware that this background might have led me to romanticise students' voices and subjectivities. What made the balance for me, in addition to my awareness of the issue, is that I am an instructor as well. Thus, I can relate to the instructors' aims and conceptions too. In the end, among the different paths through the mire, I managed to end up with the route that provided legitimate understandings for my research aims, with my research account being just 'one' unfolded story within the realms of possible stories.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1a: Study 1 & 2 Instructor Participant Information Sheet

**Researcher:** Jamilah M. Alamri, PhD Candidate, Learning Sciences Research Institute, B3, Exchange Building LSRI, School of Education, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK  
+447874321997  
ttxjmal@nottingham.ac.uk

This information sheet is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

#### **Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into instructor-student interaction practices in face-to-face contexts as well as how social technologies might support interaction practices between instructors and students, and understand the ways in which instructors provide useful engagement in online environments. We hope to learn things that will help to understand the nature of instructor-student relationship and the ways in which social technology influences educational practice in Saudi Arabia.

You were chosen as a possible participant and eligible faculty member due to your meeting the following criteria:

- Having prior experience of, or an interest in, using Web 2.0 technologies in teaching.
- Willing to explore the experience of teaching in an online learning environment.

I would like to invite you to be a participant in my study. No prior knowledge of the technology used in the study is necessary.

#### **What Will You Be Asked To Do?**

As an instructor participant, you will be required to:

- Read and review the instruction sheet and consent form with the researcher, and sign it (anticipated time=~10 minutes).
- Discuss the suggested technology options by the researcher, on mutually agreed date and time, and decide which one(s) you are going to experiment with that will involve your students during the semester (anticipated time=~an hour).
- Use the technology that you chose with your students: the text of the online conversations during your online activity with your students will be kept for sharing. Please note that text in the open-to-the-Internet spaces is visible to your students and anyone else who knows the URL, while text in

group/joining spaces is visible only to your student(s). The amount of time and commitment for each online activity will be negotiated at the time of the meeting.

- Participate in a semi-structured interview, (audio-recorded - no longer than 1 hour), at mutually agreed upon dates and locations. Please understand that your participation is voluntary, you may refuse to participate, or you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. What benefits? If there are none, don't mention them.
- By the end of the experiment, you may be contacted by the researcher for follow-up questions.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate altogether, or you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There's those unspecified benefits again.

### **What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?**

Identifying information will be collected in this study for the purposes of data analysis only. It will be used in the doctoral thesis and the present research might lead to outcomes that would be used in future publications or reports. However, identifying data will never be publicly displayed in any manner. The audio recordings, group/joining conversations, and open spaces transcripts will only be used by the researcher and her supervisors. Note that your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained and data will not be accessible to any other individuals. Every precaution will be taken to keep the all data locked in a safe place.

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym, gender, age, computer experience, teaching experience, academic major, and previous teaching with technology experience if any.

### **What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

All data will be kept in the researcher's password-protected laptop and securely on her hard drive and/or jump drive under password protection and/or in her file cabinet under lock and key.

Participation is completely voluntary and your name will be kept anonymous. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study by emailing, telephoning or informing the researcher in person. There is no anticipated harm to you, or any of the participants. No one except the researcher and her supervisors will be allowed to use any of the raw data. Your name will be kept anonymous for any public presentation or publication of results.

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

#### ***Researcher:***

Jamilah M. Alamri

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If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:

[educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk)

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

## Appendix 1b: Study 1 & 2 Instructor Participant Consent Form

**Project title:** The Interpersonal Fabric of Classroom and Online Contexts:  
A Case Study of a Saudi Institution

**Researcher:** Jamilah Mohammed Alamri

**Supervisors:** Dr. Charles Crook, Mr. Tony Fisher

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

- I have read the Instructor Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I may refuse to participate altogether, or I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.
- I understand that any identifying information will not be used in published material. I understand that my anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained and every precaution will be taken to keep my name anonymous to others.
- I understand that I will be audio-taped during the interviews.
- I understand that the researcher may quote me and use my pseudonym :
- I understand that there is no anticipated harm to me, or any of the participants.
- I understand that the raw data will be represented by a pseudonym, or remain anonymous via the aggregation of all data including coding and presentation.
- I understand that data in all forms (audio-recordings, observations, applications conversations, and open spaces transcripts) will be kept securely on the researcher's hard drive and jump drive under password protection and/or in her file cabinet under lock and key. A copy of data will also be stored on CD's for back-up purposes. These CD's will also be kept in her locked file cabinet.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisors if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed ..... (research participant)

Print name ..... Date .....

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

**Researcher:**

Jamilah M. Alamri  
PhD Candidate  
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If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:

[educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk)

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

## **Appendix 1c: Study 1- Students Focus Group Consent Form**

**Project title:** The Interpersonal Fabric of Classroom and Online Contexts:  
A Case Study of a Saudi Institution

**Researcher:** Jamilah Mohammed Alamri

**Supervisors:** Dr. Charles Crook, Mr. Tony Fisher

You have been asked to participate in a focus group. The purpose of the group is to try and understand how is the social climate for students at KAU. The information learned in the focus groups will be used in a PhD study to examine the learning environment at KAU and the status quo of the relationship between instructors and students which enhances or constrains students' abilities to achieve their educational goals.

You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group and stop at any time. Although the focus group will be tape recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report.

There are no right or wrong answers to the focus group questions. We want to hear many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. We hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group. In respect for each other, we ask that only one individual speak at a time in the group and that responses made by all participants be kept confidential. I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

**Researcher:**

Jamilah M. Alamri  
PhD Candidate  
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B3, Exchange Building LSRI  
School of Education  
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If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:

[educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk)

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

## **Appendix 1d: Study 2- Student Participant Information Sheet**

**Researcher:** Jamilah M. Alamri, PhD Candidate, Learning Sciences Research Institute, B3, Exchange Building LSRI, School of Education, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK  
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This information sheet is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

### **Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into how social technologies might support interaction practices between instructors and students, and understand the ways in which instructors provide student engagement in online environments. We hope to learn things that will help to understand the ways in which social technology influences educational practice in Saudi Arabia.

Your instructor is going to take part in this research. Therefore, you were chosen as a possible participant and eligible student if you are willing to explore the experience of learning/interacting in an online learning environment.

I would like to invite you to be a participant in my study.

### **What Will You Be Asked To Do?**

As a student participant, you will be asked to:

- Read and review the instruction sheet, and sign the consent form.
- Note that the record of the online activities between you, your instructor and classmates will be captured during the semester, and the text of conversations will be kept for observation and sharing. Please note that two sets of social media tools are going to be used: Tool set A (can be accessed by a URL), and Tool set B (group-joining activity). Tool set A is open to the Internet. Tool set B is an activity with a group of people join but their activity is visible to all. Therefore, your text in tool set A is visible to your instructor and classmates and anyone knows the URL, while text in tool set B is visible only to those who are permitted by the instructor to join the group.
- Please understand that your participation is voluntary, you may refuse to participate, or you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty to which you are otherwise entitled.
- You may be contacted by the researcher for follow-up questions.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary, you may refuse to participate, or you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty to which you are otherwise entitled. The information collected up to the withdrawal date will be kept and included.

### **What Type of Information Will Be Collected?**



Identifying information will be collected in this study for the purposes of data analysis only. In addition, access to the text in the open space activity (accessed by a URL) used in this research study is possible for anyone who knows the URL. In the group/joining activities ; however, text will be visible to your classmates and your instructor only. However, identifying data will never be publicly displayed in any manner. The online text and transcripts will only be used by the researcher and her supervisors. Note that your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained and the data will not be accessible to any other individuals. Every precaution will be taken to keep the all data locked in a safe place.

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym, gender, age, computer experience, major, and previous technology experience if any.

### **What happens to the Information you Provide?**

All data will be kept in the researcher's password-protected laptop and at home securely on her hard drive and/or jump drive under password protection and/or in her file cabinet under lock and key.

### **What happens if you do not want to take part or you change your mind?**

Participation is completely voluntary and your name will be kept anonymous. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study by emailing, telephoning or informing the researcher in person. There is no anticipated harm to you, or any of the participants. No one except the researcher and her supervisors will be allowed to use any of the raw data. Your name will be kept anonymous for any public presentation or publication of results.

If you decide to take part in the online activities, you do not need to do anything – you will be notified by your instructor/ the researcher about when and how to participate in the near future.

You have the right to opt out from participating in the study. If you decide not to take part, you need to complete the opt-out form and return it to the researcher or contact the researcher by telephone or email (details above).

If you decide to take part and then change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time without needing to give a reason. If you do this please rest assured that we will destroy any data collected about you as part of the study.

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

#### ***Researcher:***

Jamilah M. Alamri  
PhD Candidate  
Learning Sciences Research Institute  
B3, Exchange Building LSRI  
School of Education  
University of Nottingham  
Nottingham, UK  
+447874321997

ttxjmal@nottingham.ac.uk

**Supervisors:**

Professor Charles Crook  
Director, Learning Sciences Research Institute  
School of Education  
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NG8 1BB  
charles.crook@nottingham.ac.uk  
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Mr. Tony Fisher  
Lecturer, Faculty of Education  
University of Nottingham  
Room B77 Dearing  
Jubilee Campus  
Nottingham  
NG8 1BB, UK  
Tony.Fisher@nottingham.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:

educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

## Appendix 1e: Study 2- Student Participant Consent Form

**Project title:** The Interpersonal Fabric of Classroom and Online Contexts:  
A Case Study of a Saudi Institution

**Researcher:** Jamilah Mohammed Alamri

**Supervisors:** Dr. Charles Crook, Mr. Tony Fisher

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

- I have read the Student Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I may refuse to participate altogether, or I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.
- I understand that any identifying information will not be used in published material. I understand that my anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained and every precaution will be taken to keep my name anonymous to others.
- I understand that the researcher may quote me and use my pseudonym :  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I understand that there is no anticipated harm to me, or any of the participants.
- I understand that the raw data will be represented by a pseudonym, or remain anonymous via the aggregation of all data including coding and presentation.
- I understand that data will be kept in the researcher's home securely on her hard drive and jump drive under password protection and/or in her file cabinet under lock and key. A copy of data will also be stored on CD's for back-up purposes. These CD's will also be kept in her locked file cabinet.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed .....  
(research participant)

Print name ..... Date  
.....

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

***Researcher:***

Jamilah M. Alamri  
PhD Candidate  
Learning Sciences Research Institute  
B3, Exchange Building LSRI  
School of Education  
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If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:  
[educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk)

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

## Appendix a2: Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) - English Version

This questionnaire asks you to describe the behaviour of your teacher. This is NOT a test. Your opinion is what is wanted.

This questionnaire has 48 sentences about the teacher. For each sentence, circle the number corresponding to your response. For example:

Never Always

This teacher expresses himself/herself clearly.    0       1       2       3       4

If you think that your teacher always expresses herself clearly, circle the 4. If you think your teacher never expresses herself clearly, circle the 0. You also can choose the numbers 1,2 and 3 which are in between. If you want to change your answer, cross it out and circle a new number. Thank you for your cooperation.

	Behaviour	Never <span style="float: right;">Always</span>				
		0	1	2	3	4
1	This teacher talks enthusiastically about her/his subject.					
2	This teacher trusts us.					
3	This teacher seems uncertain.					
4	This teacher gets angry unexpectedly.					
5	This teacher explains things clearly.					
6	If we don't agree with this teacher, we can talk about it.					
7	This teacher is hesitant.					
8	This teacher gets angry quickly.					
9	This teacher holds out attention.					
10	This teacher is willing to explain things again.					
11	This teacher acts as if she/he does not know what to do.					
12	This teacher is too quick to correct us					

	when we break a rule.					
13	This teacher knows everything that goes on in the classroom.					
14	If we have something to say, this teacher will listen.					
15	This teacher lets us boss her/him around.					
16	This teacher is Impatient.					
17	This teacher. is a good leader.					
18	This teacher realises when we don't understand.					
19	This teacher is not sure what to do when we fool around.					
20	It is easy to pick a fight with this teacher.					
21	This teacher acts confidently.					
22	This teacher is patient.					
23	It's easy to make a fool out of this teacher.					
24	This teacher is sarcastic.					
25	This teacher helps us with our work.					
26	We can decide some things in this teacher's class.					
27	This teacher thinks that we cheat.					
28	This teacher is strict.					
29	This teacher is friendly.					
30	We can influence this teacher.					
31	This teacher thinks that we don't know anything.					
32	We have to be silent in this teacher's class.					
33	This teacher is someone we can depend on.					

34	This teacher lets us fool around in class.					
35	This teacher puts us down.					
36	This teacher's tests are. hard.					
37	This teacher has a sense of humour.					
38	This teacher lets us get away with a lot in class.					
39	This teacher thinks that we can't do things well.					
40	This teacher's standards are very high.					
41	This teacher can take a Fake.					
42	This teacher give9 us a ot of free time in class.					
43	This teacher seems dissatisfied.					
44	This teacher is severe when marking papers.					
45	This teacher's class is pleasant.					
46	This teacher is lenient.					
47	This teacher is suspicious.					
48	We are afraid of this teacher.					

## Appendix a2: Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) - Arabic Version



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### عزيزتي الطالبة

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته وبعد،

أنا محاضرة في جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز وباحثة في تقنيات التعليم وهذا البحث الذي أنا بصددته هو دراسة استكشافية وتحليلية عن البيئة النفسية والاجتماعية للفاعات الدراسية في جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز من خلال استطلاع رأي الطالبات، وذلك استكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الدكتوراه في الفلسفة من جامعة نوتنجهام (University of Nottingham) بالمملكة المتحدة. أدعوكم للمشاركة بتعبئة هذه الاستبانة والتي تهدف إلى جمع معلومات حول البيئة التعليمية في جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز بصفة عامة، وطبيعة العلاقة بين عضوات هيئة التدريس والطالبات. هذه الاستبانة بشكل عام مبنية على وجهات نظر طالبات جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز وتصوراتهم وخبراتهم التجريبية. تعاونكم ومساعدتكم بتعبئة هذه الاستبانة مهم جداً وسيكون له الأثر الكبير إن شاء الله في نجاح هذه الدراسة والتوصل إلى نتائج يستفاد منها في عملية التعليم والتعلم وتعزيز المنهجية العلمية في التحليل والبحث.

الإجابة على هذه الاستبانة ستكون مجهولة المصدر تماماً وسيتم التعامل مع جميع المعلومات التي يتم جمعها بسرية تامة وسوف تُستخدم لأغراض البحث العملي فقط. لذلك الرجاء التكرم بالإجابة على الاستبانة بصراحة وموضوعية قدر الإمكان. نتائج هذا البحث ستكون متوفرة حسب الطلب. في حال وجود أي استفسار أو سؤال، يمكن التواصل مع الباحث على البريد الإلكتروني :

[jalamri@kau.edu.sa](mailto:jalamri@kau.edu.sa)

أو

[ttxjmal@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:ttxjmal@nottingham.ac.uk)

أشركم على المشاركة واستقطاع هذا الجزء من وقتكم الثمين لإكمال الاستبيان وتفضلوا بقبول فائق التقدير والاحترام.

الباحثة

جميله محمد العمري

جامعة نوتنجهام





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### تعليمات حول كيفية تعبئة الإستبان

- (١) الاستبيان موجه لطالبة جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز والتي تدرس في برنامج (بكالوريوس، أو دراسات عليا) في أي سنة من سنوات الدراسة. اذا كنت غير معنية بالدراسة الرجاء المساهمة بإعادة توجيه الاستبيان لمن يمكنها المشاركة.
- (٢) هذا الاستبيان يطلب منك أن تصفي سلوك أستاذك والتي درستك آخر محاضرة دراسية حضرتها. هذا ليس اختبار. رأيك هو المطلوب. هذا الاستبيان يتكون من ٤٨ جملة عن أستاذك. لكل جملة، حدي الإجابة المقابلة لرأيك.
- |       |        |
|-------|--------|
| أبداً | دائماً |
| ١     | ٤      |
| ٢     | ٣      |
| ٣     | ٢      |
| ٤     | ١      |
- مثال: هذه الأستاذة تعبر عن نفسها بوضوح.

إذا كنت تعتقدين أن أستاذك تعبر عن نفسها دائماً بشكل واضح، حدي الرقم (٤). إذا كنت تعتقدين أن أستاذك لا تعبر أبداً عن نفسها بشكل واضح، حدي (١). يمكنك أيضاً اختيار الأرقام ٢ و ٣ والتي هي بين بين.

(٣) الرجاء قراءة جميع الأسئلة بعناية وبتفكير عميق قبل الإجابة.

(٤) الرجاء الإجابة على الأسئلة بواقعية وتجنب المبالغة حيث أن إجاباتكم سوف تؤثر على نتائج الدراسة.

(٥) لا توجد إجابات صحيحة أو خاطئة على الأسئلة المطروحة، لذلك يرجى اختيار الأنسب والإجابة بحسب ما تعتقدين أو تشعرين في الوقت الراهن.

(٦) إذا كنت بحاجة إلى المساعدة في إكمال الاستبيان أو لديك أي سؤال أو استفسار فلا تترددي في التواصل مع الباحثة.



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**المعلومات الشخصية:**

أنا طالبة: ☐ بكالوريوس ☐ دراسات عليا ☐ أخرى  
أنا أدرس في برنامج: ☐ الانتظام ☐ الانتساب ☐ التعليم عن بعد  
الكلية: \_\_\_\_\_

أنا في المستوى الدراسي: \_\_\_\_\_

البريد الإلكتروني: \_\_\_\_\_

هذا الاستبيان يطلب منك أن تصفي سلوك أستاذك والتي درستك "آخر محاضرة دراسية حضرتها". هذا الاستبيان يتكون من 48 جملة عن أستاذك. لكل جملة، ضعي إشارة مكان الإجابة المقابلة لرأيك.

	السلوك	دائماً					أبداً
		0	1	2	3	4	
1	هذه الأستاذة تتحدث بحماس عن موضوعها.						
2	هذه الأستاذة تثق بنا.						
3	هذه الأستاذة تبدو غير متأكدة.						
4	هذه الأستاذة تغضب بشكل مفاجئ.						
5	هذه الأستاذة تشرح الأمور بوضوح.						
6	- إذا كنا لا نتفق مع الأستاذة، يمكننا أن نتحدث عن ذلك.						



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	السلوك	دائماً				أبداً
		0	1	2	3	4
7	هذه الأستاذة متريدة.					
8	هذه الأستاذة تغضب بسرعة.					
9	هذه الأستاذة تشد انتباهنا.					
10	هذه الأستاذة مستعدة لشرح الأمور مرة أخرى.					
11	هذه الأستاذة تتصرف كما لو أنها لا تعلم ماذا تفعل.					
12	هذه الأستاذة سريعة جداً في التصحيح لنا عندما نكسر القاعدة.					
13	هذه الأستاذة تعلم كل ما يدور في القاعة الدراسية.					
14	هذه الأستاذة تستمع إلينا إذا كان هناك ما نريد قوله.					
15	هذه الأستاذة تمنحنا الفرصة لإدارة المكان كيفما نشاء.					
16	هذه الأستاذة غير صبورة.					
17	هذه الأستاذة هي قائدة جيدة.					
18	تدرك هذه الأستاذة عندما لا نفهم.					



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السلوك	دائماً	3	2	1	أبداً
19	هذه الأستاذة ليست متأكدة مما يجب فعله عندما ترتكب الحماقات.				
20	من السهل استفزاز هذه الأستاذة.				
21	هذه الأستاذة تتصرف بثقة.				
22	هذه الأستاذة صبورة.				
23	من السهل أرتكاب الحماقات في وجود هذه الأستاذة.				
24	هذه الأستاذة ساخرة.				
25	هذه الأستاذة تساعدنا في واجباتنا.				
26	يمكننا أن نقرر بعض الأمور في محاضرة هذه الأستاذة.				
27	هذه الأستاذة تعتقد أننا نغش.				
28	هذه الأستاذة صارمة.				
29	هذه الأستاذة ودودة.				
30	يمكننا التأثير على هذه الأستاذة.				
31	هذه الأستاذة تعتقد أننا لا نعرف أي شيء.				



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السلوك	دائماً					أبداً
	0	1	2	3	4	
32						علينا أن نلتزم الصمت في محاضرات هذه الأستاذة.
33						هذه الأستاذة شخص يعتمد عليه.
34						هذه الأستاذة تسمح لنا بارتكاب الحماقات في المحاضرة.
35						هذه الأستاذة تحبط معنوياتنا.
36						هذه الأستاذة اختباراتنا صعبة.
37						هذه الأستاذة لديها حس الفكاهة.
38						هذه الأستاذة تكلفنا بالكثير من الواجبات.
39						هذه الأستاذة تعتقد أننا لا نستطيع أن ننجز الأمور بشكل جيد.
40						معايير هذه الأستاذة مرتفعة جداً.
41						هذه الأستاذة يمكن أن تتقبل نكتة.



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السلوك	دائماً					أبداً
	0	1	2	3	4	
42	هذه الأستاذة تعطينا الكثير من وقت الفراغ في المحاضرة.					
43	هذه الأستاذة تبدو غير راضية.					
44	هذه الأستاذة شديدة عند تصحيح الاختبارات.					
45	محاضرات هذه الأستاذة ممتعة.					
46	هذه الأستاذة متساهلة.					
47	هذه الأستاذة تميل إلى الشك.					
48	نحن نخاف من هذه الأستاذة.					

انتهى الاستبيان!

أشكر على المشاركة واستقطاع هذا الجزء من وقتك الثمين لإكمال الاستبيان،  
لك جزيل الشكر والتقدير.

**Appendix b2: College and university classroom environment inventory  
(CUCEI)- English version**

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out your opinions about the class you are attending right *now*.

This questionnaire is designed for use in gathering opinions about *small classes* at universities or colleges (sometimes referred to as *seminars* or *tutorials*).

This form of the questionnaire assesses your opinion about what this class is *actually like*. Indicate your opinion about each questionnaire statement by circling:

SA if you STRONGLY AGREE that it describes what this class is actually like.

A if you AGREE that it describes what this class is actually like.

D if you DISAGREE that it describes what this class is actually like.

SD if you STRONGLY DISAGREE that it describes what this class is actually like.

All responses should be given on the separate Response Sheet.

1. The instructor considers students' feelings.
2. The instructor talks rather than listens.
3. The class is made up of individuals who don't know each other well.
4. The students look forward to coming to classes.
5. Students know exactly what has to be done in our class.
6. New ideas are seldom tried out in this class.
7. All students in the class are expected to do the same work, in the same way and in the same time.
8. The instructor talks individually with students.
9. Students put effort into what they do in classes.
10. Each student knows the other members of the class by their first names.
11. Students are dissatisfied with what is done in the class.
12. Getting a certain amount of work done is important in this class.
13. New and different ways of teaching are seldom used in this class.
14. Students are generally allowed to work at their own pace.
15. The instructor goes out of his/her way to help students.
16. Students "clockwatch" in this class.
17. Friendships are made among students in this class.
18. After the class, the students have a sense of satisfaction.

19. The group often gets sidetracked instead of sticking to the point.
20. The instructor thinks up innovative activities for students to do.
21. Students have a say in how class time is spent.
22. The instructor helps each student who is having trouble with the work.
23. Students in this class pay attention to what others are saying.
24. Students don't have much chance to get to know each other in this class.
25. Classes are a waste of time.
26. This is a disorganized class.
27. Teaching approaches in this class are characterized by innovation and variety.
28. Students are allowed to choose activities and how they will work.
29. The instructor seldom moves around the classroom to talk with students:
30. Students seldom present their work to the class.
31. It takes a long time to get to know everybody by his/her first name in this class.
32. Classes are boring.
33. Class assignments are clear so everyone knows what to do.
34. The seating in this class is arranged in the same way each week.
35. Teaching approaches allow students to proceed at their own pace.
36. The instructor isn't interested in students' problems.
37. There are opportunities for students to express opinions in this class.
38. Students in this class get to know each other well.
39. Students enjoy going to this class
40. This class seldom, starts on time.
41. The instructor often thinks of unusual class activities.
42. There is little opportunity for a student to pursue his/her particular interest in this class.
43. The instructor is unfriendly and inconsiderate towards students.
44. The instructor dominates class discussions.
45. Students in this class aren't very interested in getting to know other students.
46. Classes are interesting.
47. Activities in this class are clearly and carefully planned.
48. Students seem to do the same type of activities every class.
49. It is the instructor who decides what will be done in our class.



## Appendix c2: College and university classroom environment inventory (CUCEI) -Arabic Version



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### عزيزتي الطالبة

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته وبعد،

أنا محاضرة في جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز وباحثة في تقنيات التعليم وهذا البحث الذي أنا بصددته هو دراسة استكشافية وتحليلية عن البيئة النفسية والاجتماعية للقاعات الدراسية ذات الأعداد الصغيرة من الطالبات (من طالبتين - ٢٥ طالبة بحد أقصى) في جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز من خلال استطلاع رأي الطالبات. وذلك استكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الدكتوراه في الفلسفة من جامعة نوتنجهام (University of Nottingham) بالمملكة المتحدة. أدعوكم للمشاركة بتعبئة هذه الاستبانة والتي تهدف إلى جمع معلومات حول البيئة التعليمية في القاعات الدراسية الصغيرة جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز بصفة عامة، وطبيعة العلاقة بين عضوات هيئة التدريس والطالبات بصفة خاصة. هذه الاستبانة بشكل عام مبنية على وجهات نظر طالبات جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز وتصوراتهم وخبراتهم التجريبية. تعاونكم ومساعدتكم بتعبئة هذه الاستبانة مهم جداً وسيكون له الأثر الكبير إن شاء الله في نجاح هذه الدراسة والتوصل إلى نتائج يستفاد منها في عملية التعليم والتعلم وتعزيز المنهجية العلمية في التحليل والبحث.

الإجابة على هذه الاستبانة ستكون مجهولة المصدر تماماً وسيتم التعامل مع جميع المعلومات التي يتم جمعها بسرية تامة وسوف تُستخدم لأغراض البحث العملي فقط. لذلك الرجاء التكرم بالإجابة على الاستبانة بصراحة وموضوعية قدر الإمكان. نتائج هذا البحث ستكون متوفرة حسب الطلب. في حال وجود أي استفسار أو سؤال، يمكن التواصل مع الباحث على البريد الإلكتروني :

[jalamri@kau.edu.sa](mailto:jalamri@kau.edu.sa)

أو

[ttxjmal@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:ttxjmal@nottingham.ac.uk)

أشكركم على المشاركة واستقطاع هذا الجزء من وقتكم الثمين لإكمال الاستبيان وتفضلوا بقبول فائق التقدير والاحترام.

الباحثة

جميله محمد العمري

جامعة نوتنجهام



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### تعليمات حول كيفية تعبئة الإستبانة:

- ١) الاستبيان موجه لطالبة الانتظام في جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز والتي تدرس في برنامج (بكالوريوس، أو دراسات عليا) في أي سنة من سنوات الدراسة. اذا كنت غير معنية بالدراسة الرجاء المساهمة بإعادة توجيه الاستبيان لمن يمكنها المشاركة.
- ٢) هذا الاستبيان يطلب منك أن تقيمي البيئة التعليمية من خلال آخر محاضرة دراسية حضرتها في قاعة دراسية بعدد صغير من الطالبات (من طالبتين - ٢٥ طالبة بحد أقصى). هذا ليس اختبار. رأيك هو المطلوب. هذا الاستبيان يتكون من ٤٩ جملة عن البيئة التعليمية والأستاذة التي درستك آخر محاضرة حضرتها في هذه البيئة التعليمية. لكل جملة، حددي الإجابة المقابلة لرأيك.
- ٣) الرجاء قراءة جميع الأسئلة بعناية وبتفكير عميق قبل الإجابة.
- ٤) الرجاء الإجابة على الأسئلة بواقعية وتجنب المبالغة حيث أن إجاباتكم سوف تؤثر على نتائج الدراسة.
- ٥) لا توجد إجابات صحيحة أو خاطئة على الأسئلة المطروحة، لذلك يرجى اختيار الأنسب والإجابة بحسب ما تعتقدين أو تشعرين في الوقت الراهن.
- ٦) إذا كنت بحاجة إلى المساعدة في إكمال الاستبيان أو لديك أي سؤال أو استفسار فلا تترددي في التواصل مع الباحثة.



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#### المعلومات الشخصية:

أنا طالبة: ☐ بكالوريوس ☐ دراسات عليا ☐ أخرى  
أنا أدرس في برنامج: ☐ الانتظام ☐ الانتساب ☐ التعليم عن بعد  
الكلية: \_\_\_\_\_

أنا في المستوى الدراسي: \_\_\_\_\_

البريد الإلكتروني: \_\_\_\_\_

هذا الاستبيان يطلب منك أن تعطي رأيك عن آخر محاضرة حضرتها في قاعة دراسية صغيرة من حيث البيئة التعليمية وأستاذة المادة. هذا الاستبيان يتكون من ٤٩ جملة. لكل جملة، ضعي إشارة مكان الإجابة المقابلة لرأيك.

	السلوك	التقييم			
		أوافق بشدة	أوافق	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة
1	الأستاذة تأخذ بعين الاعتبار مشاعر الطالبات				
2	الأستاذة تتحدث بدلاً من أن تستمع.				
3	القاعة الدراسية تتكون من أفراد لا يعرفون بعضهم البعض جيداً.				
4	الطالبات يتطلعن إلى حضور المحاضرات المقبلة.				
5	الطالبات يعرفن بالضبط ما الذي ينبغي القيام به.				
6	نادراً ما تجرب أفكار جديدة في هذه المادة.				



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	السلوك	التقييم			
		أوافق بشدة	أوافق	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة
7	يتوقع من جميع الطالبات في المادة القيام بنفس التكليف، بنفس الطريقة وفي نفس الوقت.				
8	تتحدث الأستاذة بشكل فردي مع كل طالبة .				
9	الطالبات يبذلن جهدهن فيما يقدمونه للمادة.				
10	كل طالبة تعرف بقية الطالبات في القاعة بأسمائهن الأولى.				
11	الطالبات غير راضيين عن ما يتم في المحاضرة.				
12	من المهم إنجاز عدد محدد من الواجبات في هذه المادة.				
13	نادراً ما تستخدم طرق جديدة ومختلفة في التعليم في هذه المادة.				
14	يسمح للطالبات عموماً العمل على وتيرتهم الخاصة.				
15	الأستاذة تخرج أو تغير من طريقتهما التعليمية لمساعدة الطالبات.				
16	الطالبات حريصات على عدم الحضور وقت أكثر أو العمل في هذه المادة أكثر من الساعات المخصصة لها.				



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	السلوك	التقييم			
		أوافق بشدة	أوافق	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة
17	الصداقات موجودة بين طالبات هذه المادة في هذه القاعة.				
18	بعد المحاضرة، تشعر الطالبات بالرضا.				
19	غالباً ما تتحرف مجموعة الطالبات عن غايتها بدلاً من التمسك بهدف معين.				
20	الأستاذة تفكر في أنشطة مبتكرة لتقوم بها الطالبات.				
21	الطالبات لهن رأي في كيفية استغلال وقت المحاضرة.				
22	الأستاذة تساعد كل طالبة لديها مشكلة في حل الواجبات.				
23	الطالبات في هذه المحاضرة ينتبهن إلى ما تقوله زميلاتهن.				
24	الطالبات في هذه القاعة ليس لديهن فرصة كبيرة للتعرف على بعضهن البعض.				
25	المحاضرات هي مضيعة للوقت.				
26	هذه المحاضرة غير منظمة.				
27	تتميز مناهج التدريس في هذه المادة بأنها مبتكرة ومتنوعة.				
28	يسمح للطالبات باختيار الأنشطة وكيف سيعملون عليها.				



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	السلوك	التقييم			
		أوافق بشدة	أوافق	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة
29	نادراً ما تتحرك الأستاذة في جميع أنحاء القاعة الدراسية للحديث مع الطالبات.				
30	نادراً ما تقوم الطالبات بعرض أعمالهن في القاعة الدراسية.				
31	التعرف على جميع أسماء الطالبات الأولى في هذه المادة/القاعة يستغرق وقتاً طويلاً				
32	المحاضرات مملة.				
33	واجبات هذه المادة واضحة، والجميع يعلم ما يجب القيام به لانجازها.				
34	يتم ترتيب المقاعد في هذه القاعة بنفس الطريقة في كل أسبوع.				
35	أساليب التدريس في هذه المادة تسمح للطالبات بالتقدم كل بحسب سرعته.				
36	الأستاذة ليست مهتمة بمشاكل الطالبات.				
37	هناك فرص للطالبات للتعبير عن آرائهن في المحاضرة.				
38	الطالبات في هذه المادة يعرفون بعضهم البعض جيداً.				
39	يستمتع الطالبات بحضور محاضرات هذه المادة.				
40	نادراً ما تبدأ المحاضرات في هذه المادة في الوقت المحدد.				



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	السلوك	التقييم			
		أوافق بشدة	أوافق	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة
41	الأستاذة غالباً ما تفكر في نشاطات غير عادية للمادة.				
42	هناك فرصة ضئيلة للطالبة لمتابعة ما تهتم به بشكل خاص في هذه المادة.				
43	الأستاذة غير ودودة ولا تراعي الطالبات.				
44	( الأستاذة تسيطر على مناقشات المحاضرة.				
45	الطالبات في هذه المادة/القاعة غير مهتمين بالتعرف على الطالبات الأخريات.				
46	المحاضرات مثيرة للاهتمام.				
47	النشاطات في هذه المادة مخطط لها بعناية وبشكل واضح.				
48	الطالبات يقمن بنفس النوعية من الأنشطة في كل محاضرة.				
49	الأستاذة هي التي تقرر ما سيتم القيام به في المحاضرات.				

انتهى الاستبيان!  
أشكرك على المشاركة واستقطاع هذا الجزء من وقتك الثمين لإكمال الاستبيان،

لك جزيل الشكر والتقدير.

### **Appendix a3: Instructor Semi-Structured Interview Guiding Questions**

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself. who are you? what courses do you teach?
2. What do you find most rewarding about teaching?
3. How well do you feel you know your students?
4. What do you feel are your responsibilities towards individual students?
5. What do you like best about today's students? why?
6. How do you think the ideal instructor ought to relate to their students?
7. How close to you think "you" are to your ideal/ How would like your students relate to you?
8. Do you greet any of your students whenever you see them?
9. Are there student who you would have a conversation with?
10. If you saw a student you teach in a supermarket, hair dresser..etc, what kind of conversation you might imagine having with the student?
11. Has any of the following incidents ever happened to you with any of your students, and if it did, How would you feel about it or how you received it... or if it were to happen in the future how would you receive it?
  - tells a joke to you in class or outside of class? why?
  - offers you a chocolate in Eid or without specific occasion?
  - comments on how you looked like? feel like? in a particular day?
  - says how much they enjoyed your lecture today?
  - introduces a friend they were with when they met you?
12. How are students able to contact you? what are the rules? do you have office hours? do you encourage email contact? Do you think therefore, you are approachable?
13. If any of your students had difficulty in doing the assignment and asked you to extend the deadline for submission? How would you deal with this?
14. If any of your students send an add request through one of the social media tools, would you accept the request? why?
15. If a student disagrees with the instructor's opinion inside class at KAU, how would the instructor react?
16. For your small group classes, how informal they are? what sort of climate you experience when in them?
17. Do you encourage discussion in class? why?



## **Appendix b3: Student Focus Group Guiding Questions**

### ***Engagement Questions:***

1. Describe your favorite learning environment?
2. In your opinion, what are the characteristics of the ideal instructor in relation to the relationship with her students?
3. How do you imagine an ideal relationship between you and your instructor?

### ***Exploration Questions:***

1. What is your general perception about instructors at KAU?
2. How satisfied are you with your social life at the university in relation to your communication with instructors?
3. Have you ever chatted with your instructor outside of class about issues related to the course? why? how was it?
4. If you passed by an instructor who teaches you this semester around campus, would you stop to say “Hello” and chat with her? why?
5. If you saw your instructor outside campus (in the supermarket, in social events..etc), would you stop to say “hello” and chat with her? why? and how do you imagine her reaction?
6. When you need to contact your instructor to ask questions about the course, how do you reach/communicate with her?
7. How do you evaluate your instructors’ use of technology in general?
8. How do you describe your relationship as a student with KAU faculty members who have taught you? formal? informal?
9. Name one or two things that would make you feel more comfortable in your class ..
10. Think about instructors who have taught you, if you had to send an email to them, how would you think her reply look like? why?
11. Do you prefer to communicate with your instructors face to face or using social media? why?

### ***Exit Question:***

12. Is there anything else that you feel like you need to mention..?

## Appendix 4: CodeBook

### Codebook of Interpersonal and Informality Markers in an Online Formal Educational Context

This codebook is prepared to code online interpersonal and informality markers within a formal educational context. Each marker is defined based on its use in this study. The coders are to refer to these definitions and only these definitions while coding online interpersonal communication. The codes are informed by the literature discussed in this thesis in Section 5.2. Coders may know of other definitions of these words/texts, but those do not apply to this study.

#### ▪ Basic Instructions for Coding

- ***Unit of Analysis:*** the recording unit which refers to a single entry or message of the instructor. This could be as short as ‘Yup’ or a three-line message containing several sentences.
- All codes or recording units of the single instructor’s entry primarily pertain to *What are the interpersonal markers that exist in instructors’ interaction practices with their students in a social media context?* Also, instructors’ overall entry or messages are coded to describe traditional communication categories.
- The codes in this codebook are filled out for each instructor transcript, as well as filling out the following transcript demographics information:
  - Instructor name
  - Total no. of messages/entries
  - Total no. of messages in each week
  - No. of students
  - No. of students’ messages
- Each instructor’s transcript should be read completely. In a second reading, the coder should start to pay attention to texts representing the first level of coding illustrated in the following section. After finishing the 1<sup>st</sup> level of coding, reading of each instructor’s transcript should begin for gaining familiarity of interpersonal texts exist in the corpora.
- Each entry or message is coded and counted into one or more of the categories illustrated in this codebook.

#### ▪ 1<sup>st</sup> Level of Coding: Traditional Communication Categories’ Codes of the single entry/message (context unit):

- These codes provide educational contexts to the interpersonal language that they carry.
- The coder should first select the type of entry s/he is coding for each instructor’s message/entry:

1. ***Responding or giving feedback:*** These entries come after a student’s asking for a feedback or instructor’s opinion, or a student directing a question to the instructor.

2. **Asking questions:** These entries identified by direct question structures, and seeking students' responses in a discussion.
3. **Requests:** These entries could appear as indirect requests and may not contain a question structure.
4. **Announcements:** These entries contain news about course related matters such as the assignments deadlines, exams dates, etc.
5. **Clarifying Meaning:** These entries exist in a course discussion, after students' discussion about a specific course issue, or a student's direct question about clarifying meaning of an issue.
6. **Information Exchange:** These entries relate to exchanging information about office hours, location of exams, chapters included in an exam..etc.

○ **Traditional Communication Codes Rules:**

- Each entry/message is coded only once to each of the above categories.
- The coder may face a message that could be coded to more than one code; the most descriptive code would be chosen and then checked for its validity.
- These texts should be coded numerically as well.

▪ **2<sup>nd</sup> Level of Coding: Interpersonal and Informality Markers' Codes (recording unit)**

**Category 1: Spoken Style**

1. **Code switching:** Instances when an instructor switched from the Standard Arabic (SA) to the Dialectal Arabic (DA). The coder should pay attention to the linguistic structure and identify these instances or sentences by the change in the grammatical structure from passive tense to active tense and informal language.
2. **Repair:** Instances when an instructor stops the on-going trajectory of exchanges to fix mistakes in their own typing. The linguistic structure involves typing the word again in a corrected form or adding an asterisk to the corrected form as well.
3. **Repetition:** Symbolized by repeating words, letters, or vowels within words for emphasis.

**Category 2: Emotional Expression**

4. **Self-disclosure:** The instructor discloses private or life details occurring outside of class. Symbolized by presenting some social insecurity or private fact in the message.
5. **Using Humour:** Joking, teasing, and using sarcasm or irony. These instances can be accompanied by emoticons or standalone.
6. **Using Emoticons:** Using the emoticons and emotional images afforded by the applications. These icons could represent an entire message where instructors use it for brevity or can be attached to sentences. Emoticons are counted once in a single message.

7. **Apologising:** Expressing an apology, regret, request for forgiveness, or promise of forbearance. Symbolized by words such as I'm sorry, I apologise, and forgive me.

### Category 3: Interpersonal and Interactive

8. **Openings:** Greetings, salutations which serve as politeness devices. Symbolized by words such as Salam, Alsalm Alikum, Marhaba (Hello/Hi), with praise be to Allah the Lord of the worlds, Welcome, Good morning, and good evening.
9. **Phatics:** Small talk and exchanges that serve a totally social function. These instances may be associated with polite religious and cultural expressions. Symbolized by phrases asking about students' health, studies, and life "*How is everyone? Have you enjoyed the holiday?*" and good luck and good wishes "*wish you all the best of luck.*" They are usually associated with cultural and religious expressions such as May you be happy and lucky, May Allah makes things easier for you.
10. **Praising and Encouraging:** Instructor expresses admiration, approval and appreciation and gives positive support and confidence. Symbolized by words such as Bravo, excellent, you did a great job with the portrait, I'm waiting for the brave ones to send their work here...etc.
11. **Reassuring:** Clearing doubts and fear of students and assuring them. These instances may be associated with polite religious and cultural expressions such as May Allah protect him and give him health and strength, be faithful, Allah (God) is the only god who can cure him.
12. **Expressing Like-mindedness:** Expressing agreement with students' or their contributions. Symbolized by words such as Okay, yup, or using the religious and cultural term inshallah or With Allah willingness.

### Category 4: Addressivity

13. **Addressing an individual or by name:** This can take the form of using a student's first name or an endearing socio-cultural device such as 'habibti' or 'sweetie'.
14. **Addressing the group of students:** This can take either formal terms such as Dear students or my students, or informal and intimate devices such as my beautiful students, sweeties, darlings, and lovelies.

#### ■ Coding Rules:

When coding a recording unit to one or more of the codes, the coder follows these rules:

- If the recording unit contains more than a single sentence, a word or an emoticon, the recording unit can be coded to more than one code.
- If the recording unit contains only a word or an emoticon, the recording unit should be coded to only one code.
- The coder should start coding the text based on the codes describing the linguistic structure such as code switching, repair, repetition, emoticons, apologizing and then move to the remaining codes that mainly depend on interpretation of intent such as Reassuring and Self-disclosure.

- o In reading each message, it is possible for words or phrases to have vague meanings. The coder's best judgment in coding based on interpretation and linguistic structure is required here.
- o Every code should also be numerically counted for each instructor's corpora.