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Using Poetry to Express Emotions in Arabic and English as a Second Language

Ahmed Mohammed Alharfi
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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USING POETRY TO EXPRESS EMOTIONS
IN ARABIC AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
May 2015
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This study investigated nine Saudi participants’ perceptions of expressing the emotion of fear in Arabic and in English. It studied, in depth, potential barriers and opportunities of using poetry to express this emotion. Most participants reported a willingness to express their emotions through poetry writing. This willingness was challenged by the inherited poetry writing rules and by the culturally situated assumptions, such as the notion that poetry writing is an innate gift, poetry writing has rules that should be respected, and the potential difficulties that some students might experience when asked to apply emotional writing. Other challenges that were reported including the lack of English lexical items needed to reflect the participants' emotions in their second language, as well as the lack of previous creative writing activities in language classrooms in both languages. Overall, the findings showed how nine Saudi male English speakers perceived writing poetry as a suggested pedagogical activity in Saudi language classrooms to reposition learners to be the center of the learning/teaching process.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

As a lecturer at a university in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, I had the chance to observe and deal with second language learners as they performed different in-classroom and out-of-classroom writing assignments taken from a variety of textbooks. I also had the chance to use different textbooks written and published by major publishers in the world. One similarity I noticed is that these textbooks, which are written by and to people from other cultures, are not related to Saudi students’ culture. This lack of familiarity made students complain about the writing activities that are irrelevant to the students’ lives. Therefore, students reported that they feel less motivated and engaged with many textbooks’ rigid activities. Hence, some of my students came to my office and asked, “What and how should I write when the topic is about a trip to the Rocky Mountains? I haven’t been there and I have no idea of that place”. Others complained about a prompt contradicting the culture of Saudi Arabia. The prompt was “It’s your first date with your girlfriend/boyfriend, do you think it is a good idea to kiss or not? Explain what this date would be like in no more than 400 words”.

Shah, Hussain, and Nasseef (2013) conducted a study about the challenges that teachers of English suffer from in the Saudi Arabian context. One of the findings of the study revealed that one of the challenges teachers face is “irrelevant textbook materials” (p. 117). This is not to say the problem is having textbooks, it is rather to say that the types of activities need to be related to students’ lives if the ultimate goal is to encourage students to write. In other words, students need to be the center of the language teaching/learning process (Hanauer, 2012). Classroom activities can be more encouraging
and fruitful if they enable students to talk about their experiences and personal stories. Writing is more of a tool to express and convey meaning and ideas rather than a way to assess students’ mastery of grammatical rules and word choice (Hanauer, 2014). What Hanauer pointed out is a problem in many language-teaching programs in the world. This study focused on nine participants within the Saudi context to empirically investigate the meaningful literacy approach in this particular context.

**Statement of the Problem**

The Arabic culture is patriarchal and hierarchical; therefore, students expect teachers to spoon feed them rather than challenge their minds since they believe that authority comes from above, they expect instructors to transmit materials for them rather than help them to construct their meanings. (Abu Rass, 2011, p. 211)

During my teaching journey, as a lecturer in the Department of English for ten years, I noticed that writing courses are the most difficult ones for our students. The manner in which beginning students expect writing to be is nothing but a memorization of texts or basic sentence corrections. As for more advanced students, they expect writing assignments to be about topics that interest their teachers, but not necessarily themselves. Most writing assignments are not related to the Saudi culture nor do they relate to students’ lives. The result is students feeling that writing courses are difficult and boring. What I experienced correlates with some studies conducted in the Saudi context (McMullen, 2009; Almukhaizeem, 2013). Both authors’ findings revealed that Saudi students struggle with writing courses more than other language skills. A third study, which was conducted by Al Murshidi (2014), claimed, “Saudi students indicate that they are 'less comfortable' in doing writing assignments and presentations” (p. 93). The
difficulty varies from basic writing techniques for many students, to the lack of
knowledge of the norms of academic writing. The reason behind this issue could be due
to students' level of proficiency in English, especially an insufficient number of
vocabulary words, which are needed for academic writing. We, teachers of English at the
university where I work, teach students how to master writing techniques such as
formatting, thesis statement writing, coherence, cohesion, using punctuation, editing,
narrating, etc. Students start by learning how to write a well-constructed paragraph in
Composition 101, and they end up writing essays in Essay Writing in the third and fourth
semesters. With this being said, students have not been exposed to the importance of their
lived experiences and personal stories as sources for pedagogical activities in language
classrooms (Ahmed, 2014; Al-Khairy, 2013; Shukri, 2014). This irrelevancy confirms
Hanauer’s (2004) point of view that some learners can hardly connect the activities they
have in class to significant moments in their lives. Students use specific writing genres in
writing classes such as personal and business letters, things-to-do lists, how to argue for
and against something, and writing short descriptive essays. They write what they are
required to write about, according to their textbooks or the instructions of the teachers.

Even though teachers of English give students their feedback on the students’
performance, this feedback is mainly about the techniques of writing but not about the
content itself, the meanings and/or ideas students want to talk about. This means the
nature of feedback students receive is mainly concerned with grammar, spelling, and
word choice. Thus, students have no, or little, chance to be involved in meaningful and
creative writing throughout their eight-semester program at the university where I teach.
The lack of topics related to students' personal lives in English classrooms could be, as
Consequently, many English teaching programs, Saudi Arabian universities included, have no or a limited focus on creative writing. Donnelly (2009) noticed this and claimed, “The majority of graduate creative writing programs do not include coursework on the pedagogy of creative writing” (p. 16). Similarly, Ritchie (1989) noticed that students “leave school conceiving of writing as an act of retrieving a fixed body of information and putting it into a correct form to meet the requirements of the teacher and the institution” (p. 159).

A scan of the literature revealed a severe lack of studies conducted in the Saudi Arabian context regarding implementing poetry writing in English language teaching classrooms. As noted by Tudor (2001), “classroom is a socially defined reality and is therefore influenced by the belief systems and behavioural norms of the society of which it is part” (p. 35). For example, the Saudi culture is based on overlapping ideologies of Islam and the traditions that people inherited for generations. Post 9/11, there were calls worldwide for sociopolitical and educational curricula reforms to occur within the Saudi society (Elyas, 2014). As said by Elyas (2014), some reports in the media, outside and inside Saudi Arabia, accused textbooks and the teachings of Islam of being the reason for violence and terror in the world recently. These calls for reforming the Saudi society made some people react negatively to these reforms. They perceived reform to be a way to westernize or Americanize the Islamic Saudi culture, which was a cultural intrusion for them (Elyas, 2014).

As a teacher of English, I experienced the conflict that has been going on in Saudi schools. When I chose a textbook or an activity to teach in my classrooms, I was
surprised several times by the way a good number of deans, department chairs, teachers, and students perceived English not as just a language but as a way to challenge the teachings of Islam. For example, an activity had ‘wine’ and ‘kissing’ as part of a dialogue. Some students complained about the existence and the nature of this activity, which they perceived to question their beliefs as Muslims. The dean supported this claim, although these words appear in the Quran, and this activity caused a problem that I was not aware of. Therefore, English, to some extent, was not merely perceived as a language or a medium of instruction in its linguistic representation. For some Saudis, English teaching is perceived as a means to westernize the conservative Saudi culture, whereas for others, English classrooms are “a place where the ‘local’ and ‘global’ come together” (Shah, Hussain, & Nasseef, 2013, p. 107). Going back to English teaching classrooms, I agree with Elyas’ (2014) claim that, “This environment of rapid changes and conflicting public discourses is likely to challenge teachers’ performance of their professional identities and likewise influence students’ learning identities” (p. 28).

Furthermore, another cultural assumption in Saudi Arabia is that poetry writing is an innate talent that some people have. It is also commonly understood that poetry writing should follow strict and specific rules (Al-Tami, 1988; Sayuti, 2000; Ziadeh, 1986). More research on poetry writing as a pedagogical classroom activity is necessary to help educators and policymakers improve teaching English in Saudi Arabia. Meaningful literacy activities would reposition students to be the center of learning and teaching. It would make students link their experiences to the language learning, which in the end would make learning more enjoyable. Thus, making learning and teaching more enjoyable and beneficial is one of the purposes of conducting this study.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Saudi speakers of English express their emotions using poetry writing. It studies the differences in perception between writing poems in the first and second language. Furthermore, the study suggests that this pedagogical approach be considered in English teaching classrooms in Saudi Arabia. It contributes to a more scientific understanding of the social assumption – that poetry writing is an innate ability – and how teachers can enhance emotional writing in their language classrooms. Some scholars, such as Hanauer (2004, 2010, 2014), claimed that everyone can write poems; therefore, there is a necessity to investigate and study this in the Saudi Arabian context. However, this particular context is affected by certain cultural practices, assumptions, and beliefs that should be acknowledged and investigated as well. The first cultural assumption that should be addressed is that poetry writing is a natural gift some people have. The second cultural constrain to emotional writing is the cultural resistance to expressing one’s self (Shukri, 2014). The third assumption is that rules should be followed in poetry writing. Therefore, as claimed by Ahmed (2014), “To introduce poetry in ESL classes at Saudi universities has always been considered as a taboo. It has never been tried and incorporated in ESL curriculum” (p. 127). Based on the literature, the subversion of traditional poetic forms might have social and political consequences in the Saudi context that are very different from assumptions about poetry writing within other contexts.

The emotion of fear is discussed based on its nature. For many people, fear is an unpleasant emotion to be experienced. The second purpose of the selection is the gender of participants. The participants in the study are Saudi males. Due to the culturally-
situated norms within the Saudi context, expressing weakness is perceived as unacceptable. By writing poems in Arabic and English, participants lived the experience of emotional writing in two different languages. Moreover, this bilingual approach added more understanding to the participants’ emotional expression, linguistic choices, and insights into poetry writing using the two languages. Through poetry writing, they discovered the opportunities and/or challenges of expressing their fears.

Based on this, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways do ESL Saudi students express fear using poetry writing in Arabic?
2. In what ways do ESL Saudi students express fear using poetry writing in English?
3. What are the differences in ESL Saudi students’ perceptions of expressing fear in Arabic and English?
4. What are the cultural constraints, cultural characteristics, and culturally located perceptions of poetry writing within the Saudi context?

**Overview of the Chapters**

The study consists of five chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, and discussion and conclusion. The literature review presents the theoretical framework of the study, suggests meaningful literacy as a pedagogical classroom practice, and shows how poetry writing and expressing emotions are perceived in the Saudi context. The methodology chapter demonstrates how the experiment was conducted, step-by-step. The findings of the study are reported in chapter four. This chapter shows the participants’ opinions related to poetry writing and expressing emotion. Finally, chapter five has the summary of the findings and how these standpoints can be utilized to help scholars, researchers, educators, and curricula makers to introduce
poetry writing in the Saudi context. Lastly, it also discusses some limitations of the study, as well as suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews different theories and empirical studies that evolve around the core issues that this thesis is presenting. It starts by touching upon language, culture and the evolution of a core term in this study, namely ‘meaningful literacy’. This is followed by discussing how meaningful literacy is applied in ESL/EFL classrooms. It tackles various topics related to meaningful literacy such as students’ voices, the importance of implementing writing meaningfully, and the benefits of this type of literacy to teachers, as well as students. Then it moves to poetry in Arabic and elaborates on how the culture of Arabs impacts the way they perceive poetry writing. It builds upon this view to investigate further if scholars can use poetry writing as a pedagogical classroom activity in EFL/ESL contexts. The chapter then points out how poetry can encourage students to express their emotions in writing. Before discussing these issues, the chapter is introduced with the theoretical framework that can best help investigate using poetry writing in teaching English in second language contexts.

Theoretical Framework

Language teaching has gone through many revisions concerning what is beneficial, applicable, and practical for teachers and students. These revisions include teaching methods, which will be discussed throughout this chapter, and how important it is to adopt them based on what research shows is applicable and useful in different contexts and cultures. Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2003a, 2006) claimed that we no longer need to implement an alternative method in English teaching classrooms; we rather need an alternative to methods. This claim, by him and some other scholars in the field,
initiated a new era in language teaching, which has been called ‘post-method’. The macrostrategic framework that Kumaravadivelu (2003a) suggested consists of two zones, macrostrategies and microstrategies. Kumaravadivelu (2003a) defined macrostrategies as:

Guiding principles derived from historical, theoretical, empirical, and experimental insights related to L2 learning and teaching. A macrostrategy is thus a general plan, a broad guideline based on which teachers will be able to generate their own situation-specific, need-based microstrategies or classroom techniques.

(p. 38)

This macrostrategic framework is “theory-neutral as well as method-neutral” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 38). This means, as suggested by Kumaravadivelu, that this framework is not based on or constrained by any assumptions of theory of language learning or teaching. Moreover, this framework does not depend on any classroom procedures or activities that are usually linked to any language teaching methods.

Drawing on this framework, one goal of the study is to consider emotional writing as a pedagogical classroom practice in English language classrooms within the Saudi context. Kumaravadivelu (2003a) asserted, “The best way we can maximize learning opportunities in our classes is through meaningful learner involvement” (p. 48). In a similar point of view, Norton (2000) mentioned “learner investment” and the importance of activities that engage students’ personal lives and experiences in these classroom activities. She said that “when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (p. 11). Thus, Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2003a, 2006), Norton (2000), Hanauer (2004, 2010, 2012)
and other scholars stated that teaching and learning a language is more enjoyable and beneficial when language learning activities are related to learners’ lived experiences and personal lives.

Kumaravadivelu (2003a) claimed that for any language pedagogy to be successful, it “must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu” (p. 34). In saying this, Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2003a) pointed out that there is no single method based on any theoretical principles that can be claimed to work the same in all EFL teaching contexts. He, instead, encourages teachers to investigate each case based on its “local educational, institutional and social contexts in which L2 learning and teaching take place” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 35). Therefore, prior to implementing new learning pedagogies, teachers are asked to test the theorized method in language classrooms, observe and evaluate this method and its outcomes to identify challenges and opportunities, and finally apply the modified method to see what works and what does not work (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a). In fact, Kumaravadivelu touched upon these steps when he discussed the parameter of particularity.

The parameter of particularity is crucial in examining new methods that researchers want to apply in new contexts. There must be, as Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2003a) noted, a true understanding of this new context’s culture, politics, beliefs, and linguistic particularities. The aim of postmethod pedagogy in general, and the parameter of particularity in specific, is to “help teachers become autonomous decision-makers [who can] construct their own situation-specific pedagogic knowledge in the emerging
postmethod era” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 40-41). Kumaravadivelu (2001) said, “Teacher autonomy is so central that it can be seen as defining the heart of postmethod pedagogy” (p. 548). This postmethod pedagogy “allows us to go beyond, and overcome the limitations of, method-based pedagogy” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 34). The teachers who believe deeply in this idea would spend time and effort improving their own teaching styles based on their reflection on what is happening in their classrooms before, after, and during the process of teaching the language. Kumaravadivelu (2003a) continued that these teachers develop their skills and knowledge and “begin to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize” (p. 43). By doing this, their experience in teaching makes them “recognize the need to break away from such a constraining concept of method” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 549). The postmethod teachers use their personal experiences to shape their own teaching methods. These teaching methods rely on what is applicable, practical, and possible in the local contexts in which these methods will be practiced.

In short, this study is based on the postmethod approach in which writing, the topic under investigation, is about making sense of the world around us. It is beneficial now to talk about core issues in this study, namely language, culture and meaningful literacy. The chapter then will present how meaningful literacy is perceived and give suggestions on how it could be applied in language classrooms. Moreover, the gap in literature will be addressed to justify the need for this particular study in the Saudi Arabian context.
Locality of Pedagogy

Teachers of English as a second/foreign language use various pedagogical methodologies that differ according to their contexts. Kumaravadivelu (2003a) has encouraged teachers to adopt teaching methods that work well with their students’ needs. He argued that using universal methods of teaching should be preceded by recognizing the local needs and preferences of the teachers, students, and language institutes.

Similarly, Pennycook (2007a) pointed out the importance of local language ideologies by saying, “Language use in any context is subject to the interpretation of those languages through local language ideologies” (Pennycook, 2007a, p. 112). Both scholars pointed out that teachers in ESL/EFL are not advised to adopt new teaching methods before learning the local context that they want to introduce this method to. Pennycook clarified that several elements are involved in localizing a new pedagogical instructional method in a new context. He said, “Localization inevitably involves complex relations of class, race, ethnicity, and language use” (Pennycook, 2007a, p. 102). Introducing new cultural forms and using global Englishes, as claimed by Pennycook (2007b), will add new forms of localizations to the local contexts. For him, languages “move across space, borders, communities, nations but also become localized, indigenized, re-created in the local” (Pennycook, 2007b, p. 8).

Kumaravadivelu (2001) asserted the importance of the locality of pedagogy. He pointed out “All pedagogy, like all politics, is local. To ignore local exigencies is to ignore lived experiences” (p. 539). In saying this, teachers need to be aware that even though a teaching method could work in a certain context, the exact method could be less effective or even a total failure in another context. That is because “context-sensitive
pedagogic knowledge can emerge only from the practice of particularity” (p. 540).

Coleman (1996a) touched upon this notion of the relationship between the sociocultural factors of a certain context and the pedagogical goals that teachers want to apply in their language classrooms. The aim of his book Society and the Language Classroom was to “explore the proposition that behavior in the classroom can be explained or interpreted with reference to the society outside the classroom” (Coleman, 1996a, p. 9). This relationship can explain why “innovation in classroom methodology may have unexpected repercussions for the teaching [and] learning” (Coleman, 1996a, p. 10). He continued to say that some pedagogical efforts could have negative results because they can potentially contradict learners’ beliefs. This academic transmission to that particular context makes learning become impossible because “meaning of the English language classroom must be culturally embedded” (Coleman, 1996a, p. 13). That is to say, there is a clear connection between what is happening outside the classroom, or the culture of a certain society, and teaching any subject in classrooms. Coleman (1996b) noted that the reason behind some teachers’ behavior in classrooms is not that they are poor teachers. Instead, scholars need to interpret teachers and students’ behavior “within its cultural context” (p. 82). Shamim (1996) agreed on this standpoint and said that students in classrooms reflect the social norms of their society. Thus, the culture of the classroom often goes with the culture of the society. This is because, as claimed by Shamim (1996), classrooms’ members derive their behaviors from their society since they are part of the wider community. The role of culture and its direct effect on the success or failure of methods of teaching will be outlined below by presenting some studies in different area of the world.
Chick (1996) described his classroom situation when he was teaching mathematics at a school in KwaZulu, South Africa. He said that it is a teacher-centered classroom in which the teacher, the source of knowledge, does most of the talking “with few pupil initiations” (Chick, 1996, p. 21). In such classes, students are expected to not be as active as they are in other contexts. They do not ask questions or give suggestions. Therefore, there was no or little chance for them to be creative and/or initiative students (Chick, 1996). Another factor was the reality of South Africa’s culture at that time, which had been affecting these black students. Students’ behavior was constrained by the racial segregation in schools and the discriminatory legislation “through which groups and individuals exercise power and deny it to others” (Chick, 1996, p. 31). Because of these in/out classroom factors, Chick said that not only teachers, but also students, were reluctant to adopt new egalitarian de-centralized methods of teaching. This made him think whether using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in this particular culture was a right decision to make. Chick (1996) explained that “what is good for Europe or the USA [might not] be good for KwaZulu” (p. 22). Consequently, the main finding of Chick (1996) was that for new methods to work in classrooms, they must be accompanied by a structural change in society, outside the classroom.

LoCastro (1996) pointed out that one aim of the new curriculum of teaching English in Japanese classrooms was to “require teachers to attend to speaking and listening skills in lessons, thereby placing greater emphasis on the attainment of communicative language ability by the learners” (p. 40). To reach this goal, the Ministry of Education required teachers in 1993 and 1994 to adopt the CLT approach in teaching English in junior and senior high schools. The planners at the Ministry, as claimed by
LoCastro (1996), “may be unaware of the extent to which the Japanese sociocultural context and all of its interlocking elements make the adoption of notions and concepts from the Anglo-American applied linguistic setting difficult, perhaps impossible” (p. 45).

As a result, a mismatch occurred between the Japanese students’ behavior in language classrooms and the practices of teachers who wanted to implement CLT in their teaching. In other words, there was a clear conflict between theory and practice. LoCastro concluded by suggesting to the Ministry of Education to address the educational issues “by ‘inside’ experts, working within their own sociocultural, historical, and economic contexts” (p. 56).

The case in Thailand was not any better as claimed by Saengboon (2013). He said, “CLT in Thailand has been met with challenges because a large number of Thai students still cannot function effectively in English” (p. 158). In a similar vein, Bax (2003) argued that CLT neglects the importance of the context in which it takes place. Therefore, he warned teachers that “CLT needs to be deposed in favor of context [otherwise] we will continue to sell our students short” (Bax, 2003, p. 286). The failure of CLT in different EFL contexts asserts the importance of studying the targeted context in which new pedagogical practices are going to be introduced. In this sense, developing a sensitivity to local cultures is crucial when introducing new teaching methodologies and pedagogical practices within new contexts. The following section sheds light on the significance of this suggestion prior to adapting new teaching practices or ideas.

**Internationalizing Pedagogical Practices**

Each culture has its specific local features that are rooted in that particular context. When cultural values or understandings of a region travel to a new context, they
need to meet the beliefs and the norms of the new context. In an attempt to address the relationship of particular social forms and contexts, Appadurai (2001) asserted that for the transferred social norms to be practiced in the new context, the transformation should take a form of bottom-up rather than a top-down approach. He added that the new elements that are brought to the new context should be continuously reshaped and contextualized based on the local norms. This way of transformation would help practitioners in situating an alternative, locally accepted process. Appadurai (2001) named this process, which supports the notion of region as a global object in itself, as “grassroots globalization” or “globalization from below”. For Appadurai (2001), globalization is “a new role for the imagination in social life” (p. 14). With this view, each region considers itself to have a global context. Hence, in terms of scientific studies and research, the relationship between regions and education requires conscious studies. In other words, it is a crucial “prerequisite for internationalizing academic research, especially when the objects of research themselves have acquired international, transnational, or global dimensions of vital interest to the human sciences” (Appadurai, 2001, p. 15).

Patel and Lynch (2013) pointed out the importance of the learners’ culture when teachers try to involve students’ personal experiences. The authors said, “Learning is effective when contextualized within the local context because that context frames the learner’s experience and lived reality” (p. 225). Afterwards, Patel and Lynch (2013) added, “Learners bring to the third culture space their diverse cultural worldviews but it is through the respectful exchange of their cultural wealth that they will map their shared futures” (p. 225). In this sense, learners would have three cultures that work together,
their L1, L2 and the third or the modified cultures. This phenomenon of implementing or borrowing new social forms is what Patel and Lynch (2013) and Shi (2013) called glocalization, based on the works of the well-known sociologist Roland Robertson. Glocalization occurs, as stated by Shi (2013) when “the global phenomena adapt, fuse, merge, and blend with the local conditions they encounter” (p. 92). In the same vein, Appadurai (2001) noticed that prior to transforming ideologies and research projects among different cultures, “one aspect of such deliberation involves a recognition of the constitution peculiarities of the idea of research, which itself has a rather unusual set of cultural diacritics” (p. 15). Based on this claim, several concerns that are fundamental in this study can be raised. First, poetry writing is a means toward context specific pedagogy; therefore, it is crucial to understand culturally specific understandings of poetry writing in the targeted context. Second, we cannot ignore the huge impact of the sociopolitical ideas of the embedded cultural norms, which can be perceived as problematic, that members in the learning communities or the people in that context in general perceive when they write poetry. For example, an issue related to teachers and students in language classrooms is the potential risk of speaking freely because doing so is not permissible within certain contexts. Consequently, classrooms can potentially be unsafe places to practice free writing. Applying meaningful literacy in new contexts can create failure, as can be the case with applying CLT in some cultures, if scholars do not pay attention to the social forms and norms that exist in that particular context. Therefore, it can be argued that the phenomenon of transferring new pedagogical practices, which are based on localized cultural norms, to new contexts is a crucial step in enhancing a new teaching method.
The Evolution of ‘Meaningful Literacy’ in Language Teaching

This section defines some terms that appear in this study. The terms are addressed during different time spans to trace how scholars develop the way they understand these concepts in relation to language teaching. Kramsch (2008) started her book *Language and Culture* by saying that human beings interact and socialize with each other via language. She pointed out that when we use language to communicate with the world around us, “it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways” (Kramsch, 2008, p. 3). According to her, language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural reality. In this sense, language and culture correspond to form the ways in which we individually understand different linguistic aspects such as “etiquette, expressions of politeness, social *dos and don’ts*” (Kramsch, 2008, p. 6). Kramsch added that discussing the idea of the effect of language on people goes back to the eighteenth century, to scholars such as Johann Herder (1744-1803) and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1762-1835). Referencing these scholars, Kramsch (2008) claimed that, “different people speak differently because they think differently, and that they think differently because their language offers them different way of expressing the world around them” (p. 11).

Di Pietro (1978) pointed out constrains societies and cultures put on language among speakers of different languages. He said, “There is no doubt that society dictates both the form and use of much of what we say” (p. 150). In saying this, he asserted what scholars noticed about the correspondence of language with culture and society. This is to say that the linear fashion of learning/teaching a language is not valid and in fact, language is much more complicated than just words and grammar. Therefore, Di Pietro (1978) suggested that ESL teachers should teach some “verbal strategical expressions” to
learners in order to make them able to communicate with language users. Di Pietro (1981) justified this call by saying that there is a “need for learners to generalize from the conventions of language form and use presented within the constraints of the classroom to the free options and innovations needed by them in real-life communication” (p. 27). This standpoint made a noticeable shift in language teaching at that time. Clearly, there is an overlap between Di Pietro’s view of the meaningful language teaching and the new call for using meaningful literacy in classroom activities. His focus was on the topics presented in language classrooms in order to help students communicate better with the L2 speakers. Thus, it can be said that the main difference that these scholars were suggesting is where learners are positioned in learning and teaching process. In other words, what should be at the center of teaching and learning: topics or the learners? It is necessary now to start with discussing how literacy is defined in the literature.

The simplest way to define literacy is “the ability to read and write”. This simple definition is opposed by Gee (1996) because literacy is situated in societies rather than the individuals. In academia, literacy is tackled from different perspectives. Hiebert (1991) defined literacy as “active transformation of texts”. She added that the meaning is not in the text itself, it is rather “created through an interaction of reader and text” (Hiebert, 1991, p. 1). Langer (1991) took a step further and introduced culture as a main player within which texts can be understood. According to her, literacy is:

The culturally appropriate way of thinking, not the act of reading or writing, that is most important in the development of literacy. Literacy thinking manifests itself in different ways in oral and written language in different societies, and educators
need to understand these ways of thinking if they are to build bridges and facilitate transitions among ways of thinking. (Langer, 1991, p. 13)

Some scholars give literacy a new domain of understanding, which covers multiple literacies rather than a simple understanding of literacy. Kramsch (2008) said that the notion of literacy has changed from viewing societies as literate (use writing and print) and illiterate (use no or little writing) to a new perception that covers diverse literacies “as a plural set of social practices within social contexts of use” (p. 56). Because there are multiple literacies within languages, the understanding of what it means to be literate changed to “the capacity to understand and manipulate the social and cultural meanings of print language in thoughts, feelings, and actions” (Kramsch, 2008, p. 56). She mentioned that, because literacy is acquired in schools, some people have misunderstood and confused it with schooling. Hanauer (2004) discussed the meaning of literacy to make an argument about what this term really means. He agreed with Kramsch (2008) and said that literacy is not just the technical skills that we teach our students in schools, nor does it mean reading comprehension or the mastery of the language vocabulary, syntax, and phonology. Hanauer’s (2004) argument was that literacy should “create meaningful interpersonal and cross-cultural communication” (p. 88). He viewed literacy as a “means of exploring the relationship between the internal and external worlds of the individual” (Hanauer, 2004, p. 88). In other words, a significant relationship takes place between the inside of the individual and the community where this individual lives. The teaching pedagogy that Hanauer suggested in his works focuses on how teachers can stimulate these inside personal stories and experiences to enhance language learning.
This type of teaching pedagogy is one that provides multiple activities situating the learners at the center of teaching and learning processes. In doing this, learners are expected to acquire the language more efficiently. Spigner-Littles and Anderson’s (1999) findings were in line with Hanauer’s claim about the practicality of engaging learners’ personal lives and experiences in language teaching. Their study revealed that “among students of all ages, learning is most effectively accomplished when new information is connected to and built upon a student’s prior knowledge and real-life experiences” (Spigner-Littles and Anderson, 1999, p. 204). They stated that the language teacher functions as “a facilitator and moderator and serves mainly to keep students focused as they share their views and perspectives and actively contribute to the subject matter being explored” (Spigner-Littles and Anderson, 1999, p. 204).

Similarly, Hanauer (2003) concluded his analysis of a poem written by Zara Houshmand by arguing that poetry is “constructed around the principle of the linguistically and cognitively unique, allows the entrance of the individual understanding of the world and the linguistic system” (p. 84). Hanauer’s analysis of the poems emphasized the role of unique individuals’ experiences in EFL/ESL language classrooms. This argument was further developed and elaborated by Hanauer (2012) when he asserted the importance of humanizing second and foreign language classrooms. He stated that humanizing the language classroom “is the idea of this living, thinking, experiencing and feeling person at the center of the language learning process” (p. 106). The aim of this idea is “to make the literacy work in the class meaningful on the personal and social levels, as well as giving a sense of depth and ownership to the writing itself” (p. 108-109). This explanation of the notion of humanizing language classrooms was followed by
four principles of second and foreign language writing instruction, which are autobiographical writing, emotional writing, personal insight, and authentic public access. However, Hanauer (2012) admitted, “the real difficulty of language teaching is to find a way to make language learning a personally contextualized, meaningful activity for the learner” (p. 106). Based upon the discussion and definitions that were presented in this section, the following section is going to address how meaningful literacy could be applied in ESL/EFL classrooms.

Meaningful Literacy in ESL/EFL Classrooms

The idea of encouraging students to write about issues/topics related to their personal lives, cultures, and lived experiences has been discussed thoroughly in the literature (Hanauer, 2004, 2010, 2012; Hyland, 2003a, 2007; Park, 2013). In doing this, teachers encourage students to represent their voices as language learners in their writing. For example, Elbow (1981) showed that this experience was new and most of his students had never been encouraged to embody their own voices while writing in language classroom activities. According to the findings of Elbow’s study, engaging students’ voices in writing assignments made students start “a journey – a path toward new thoughts, feelings, memories and new modes of seeing and writing” (p. 284).

Similarly, Ritchie (1989) pointed out that when students write, they bring into language classrooms a “powerful, sense of self which developed as they experimented with new forms of written expression” (p. 156). Hanauer (2012) rephrased and asserted these claims by saying that “The basic idea that directs my pedagogy is that on a deep level every human being wishes to express and explore the meaning of their own lives” (p. 112). He added that students could use their own memories in literacy practices that take
place in language classrooms. In this process, students will better discover themselves and they will link themselves to the world around them.

The benefits of implementing meaningful literacy in language classroom activities and homework are not limited to language learners. Teachers also can be motivated to read what students write, as claimed by Elbow (1981). He said that when he read and graded his students’ assignments, “It felt real, it had a kind of resonance, it somehow rang true” (p. 283). Although Elbow’s feelings reflect what some teachers would feel, Bishop (1993) and Micciche (2007) noted that some teachers might not feel comfortable dealing with students’ personal stories in language classrooms. In general, for teachers who prefer to introduce personal stories of their students in classroom activities, it would be helpful to assist and direct their students during the process of writing about their lived experiences. The following section discusses poetry writing as a pedagogical practice in ESL classrooms.

**Poetry in ESL/EFL Classrooms**

Poetry writing is a way that leads to meaningful literacy. By writing poetry, second language learners can express their emotions, experiences, and personal stories. The definition of poetry, as claimed by McLoughlin (2013), is impossible because it “means so many different things to many different people” (p. 41). McLoughlin further clarified his point by saying “To some, it must have rhythmic beat; to others it must have musicality; some would argue for both; and others for none” (p. 41). He pointed out that the existence of poetry is not in its shape or line length, it is rather in “what it does with language, and what it makes you feel when you hear and read it” (McLoughlin, 2013, p. 41). Based on this, poetry cannot be given one fixed definition and poetry is defined
According to the scholar’s understanding of this concept, Hanauer (2004) defined poetry as "a literary text that presents the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the writer through a self-referential use of language that creates for the reader and writer a new understanding of the experience, thought, or feeling expressed in the text" (p. 32). According to Hanauer (2004), poetry writing is a fashionable way to enhance students' competence in writing. It encourages students to use language in a creative way compared to many other writing genres. Hanauer (2004) and Parini (2008) agreed that there are at least three reasons that support implementing poetry writing in ESL/EFL classrooms. First, poetry writing enhances students' ability to express, and at the same time understand, their experiences, thoughts and feelings in the target language. Second, poetry in itself is unique and remarkable when it is compared to other writing genres that students are used to. Third, poetry reading and writing help learners know more about different people and cultures in the world. Therefore, poetry might serve as an effective and creative method in language teaching that could be adopted and introduced in ESL/EFL classrooms to develop learners' language skills. One might ask, when could students be introduced to poetry reading and writing? Do foreign and/or second language learners need to be advanced students to read, analyze, and write poems professionally?

Language teachers are expected to have these questions in mind when they think of implementing poetry writing as a classroom activity. Hanauer (2004) pointed out that teachers of English should introduce poetry reading and writing to their students in all language levels. However, students from varied levels are given different tasks depending on their proficiency. Having talked about when to introduce poetry writing in ESL/EFL
classrooms, we can now ask why poetry writing should be introduced in ESL/EFL language classrooms.

Poetry is a unique way to learn language skills. It is also a way for ESL/EFL teachers to use creative and fashionable teaching activities in their classrooms activities. Moreover, poetry helps us express our emotions. This has been true for people from different backgrounds throughout human history. It is also related to people’s cultures, thoughts, ideologies, societies, and perceptions of what is happening around them. Kim (2004) supported this understanding of the importance of poetry and added, “Students often related the text to their own values and experiences. When the text or the discussions inspired personal associations, they shared their personal stories in the discussions” (p. 152). Therefore, poetry writing is a unique classroom activity that makes students motivated to reflect on their own lives and points of views (Hanauer, 2004). When learners use their own cultures and perceptions of life to write poems, they inform the world about their cultures and thoughts as well as learning English through practicing their language.

Another issue, which is related to poetry writing in ESL/EFL contexts, is the difference between poetry writing for one’s self and for others. Bizzaro (2014) argued that there is a difference “between sensual experience- one way we collect data about the world- and the poetic rendering of that experience offered in these poems for the benefit of others, his readers” (p. 357). The former way of writing is the one in which writers express themselves in a personal and creative manner to reflect on their emotions and experiences. The latter way of poetry writing takes place when the writer writes for an audience. Therefore, writing for others may not necessarily be meaningful to the writer.
When people write with an audience in mind, poetry writing is expected to be a highly formalized literary practice. This raises a critical issue, which is, considering the two different components when writing a poem or using it pedagogically that Bizzaro (2014) mentioned, can poetry writing as a classroom activity be perceived as a meaningful literacy practice? Going back to Kumaravadivelu’s argument, is expressing emotions using poetry an alternative method or alternative to methods?

Overall, Hanauer (2004) summarized the benefits of using poetry reading and writing in ESL/EFL classrooms by stating that it involves students' thoughts and feelings in language learning. It also makes students aware of the culture of the target language and at the same time increases their perception of their own culture. Kim (2004) noted that this was true in her context. She said, “Readers responded actively to what seemed exotic to their own cultures. As students in this class were from several different countries, they frequently asked questions and exchanged their ideas on cultural differences” (p. 153). Kim and Hanauer agreed that the use of culture in ESL/EFL classrooms would foster students’ language acquisition. Scholars in the field have suggested various guidelines and suggestions to implementing poetry writing as a pedagogical activity that would humanize language classrooms. The following section will discuss some of these suggestions.

**Poetry Implementation Guidelines**

For poetry to be effective as a language learning strategy, Hanauer (2004) suggested that students be involved in peer-group work in class to discuss different forms of poetry that are in the literature. Teachers should encourage students to try to write poems in a creative way. It is also important to give students positive and encouraging
feedback on their poems to build students' confidence in this new task. Giving students negative feedback can deter them and advocate the claim that poetry writing is difficult and unreachable. The feedback can be supported by giving students various examples of poems and guidelines on how to write poetry. The teacher can also help students by giving them some creative ideas that can be topics for their poems. For this direction to work efficiently, it is preferred that students know there are different forms of poems in the literature, and that they do not have to follow any poetic rules as long as they are writing poems and prose. It is logical then to say, as mentioned by Hanauer (2010), that this classroom activity cannot be implemented in ESL classrooms for beginners, or for students who do not have the language proficiency needed to help them read and write poetry. In general, the findings of Hanauer (2010) and Kim (2004) suggested that second language learners could be involved in poetry reading and writing. Hanauer (2010) clarified this and said that second language learners need a certain language proficiency and knowledge to write poetry. However, these learners do not have to be engaged in poetry writing technique classes or poetry reading classes prior to writing poems in their second language. One factor that can be useful with poetry writing implementation is that poetry is tightly connected to our emotions, personal stories and experiences. Teachers can inspire their students to write poetry by showing them how effective it is to express emotions. The following section discusses the Saudi context in detail to shed light on main points that make this particular context unique.

**The Saudi Context**

Based on the existing literature, little research has been conducted in Saudi Arabia to investigate the effects of implementing meaningful pedagogy on students’ performance
in language learning classrooms. In general, teachers in Saudi Arabia “tend to impose information that may be irrelevant to students’ lives and experiences” (Hamdan, 2014, p. 204). Teachers are the source of knowledge, and students should receive information, keep it, and then recall it as needed. In this sense, most Saudi classrooms, as claimed by Shukri (2014), are perceived “in the traditional style where it abides by rules, and a certain structure” (p. 191). A goal of this study is to have a better understanding of students’ perceptions of writing poems in their first and second language. This new pedagogical practice to the Saudi context would help students reflect on their culture and beliefs in language classrooms. It calls for situating learners to be the center of teaching and learning. Thus, it is preferred for researchers who want to introduce this new pedagogy to have a better understanding of the Saudi context in terms of two main issues that are related to the study. First, the cultural construction of poetry as it is perceived in the Middle East. Second, the classroom culture in which creative writing is to be applied. This takes us to the following section, which will shed light on how Arabs perceive poetry writing and how this affects Arab students when they are asked to write poetry as a classroom activity.

**Poetry in Arabic and English**

Arabs express their emotions and thoughts using poetry. In fact, the root of the word poetry in Arabic (She’er) is (Sha’ar), which means to feel. In expressing emotions and thoughts, Arab poets have been using sixteen fixed forms throughout poetry writing history, a history that no one is certain of how long it is. These sixteen forms have certain rhythms and meters. An Arab philologist, whose name is Alfarahidi (718-791), noticed the use of these forms and wrote about them in detail. This lexicographer had a book
called *Al-Arod*¹, in which he laid down the Arabic prosody. Ziadeh (1986) noted the clear
effect of using fixed forms on poetry writing in Arabic. He commented on how poets
have been following these forms by saying that:

Evidence presented suggests that meter and rhyme were instrumental in shaping
the morphological structure of the language by forcing the poets to coin new word
forms, to modify others, and generally to make many features of the language
serve the requirements of meter, and sometimes rhyme or assonance. (Ziadeh,
1986, p. 338)

Having rules that manipulate poetry writing is not limited to Arabic poetry, as
claimed by Cahnmann (2003). She said that even though poets who write in English
break free from the old forms, “Formal elements of craft are critical to all poets because
their existence offers the writer techniques to play with for greater effect” (Cahnmann,
2003, p. 31). When dealing with poetry writing in Arabic, in general or as a possible
classroom activity, the forms are not the only obstacle that prevent non-poets to compose
poems. The way people have perceived poetry writing in the Arabic culture is a major
factor that needs to be discussed.

Sayuti (2000) claimed that “Arab literary critics regarded [poetry] as the crowning
achievement of Arabic belles-lettres” (p. 1). Al-Tami (1988) agreed with this and said,
“Poetry is, and has always been, the chief art of the Arabs” (p. 11). This could be the
reason why some poets perceive poetry-writing forms as a holy tradition that should be
neither questioned nor changed. The fact is that even after Arabs embraced Islam
fourteen centuries ago and interpolated Islamic ideas into poetry, the “standard of poetic
excellence generally remained the same” (Sayuti, 2000, p. 8). Al-Tami (1988) also agreed

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¹ prosody
that poetry throughout the Arab history was regarded as a holy tradition. He pointed out that Arabic poetry, through the Islamic era, has gained a religious sacredness. However, Al-Tami (1988) also mentioned the call for change that Arabic poetry experienced during the second half of the twentieth century. He further stated that there was an evolution in the Arabic literature. Therefore, poetry writing “acquired stylistic and expressive flexibility and underwent an important transition in its diction, stylistic expression, and rhythm” (Al-Tami, 1988, p. 2). He argued that:

The late forties marked a critical turning point in the history of Arabic poetry. Since then Arabic poetry has been characterized by revolutionary experimentations which rebelled not only against the ivory tower position of the symbolist poets and the introverted and over-sentimentalized vision of the romantic, but also against the basic conventions of the traditional poetic structure which neither romanticists nor symbolists had transcended. (Al-Tami, 1988, p. 2)

The poets who adopted the western style of writing poetry are known as the poets of Al-Mahjar. These poets called for changing the old and classic way of writing Arabic poetry to a more ‘modern’ style of poetry writing that breaks free from the classical rules and forms. Similar to other revolutionary movements, Al-Tami (1988) reported that this movement had supporters and opposition among Arab poets. Al-Tami (1988) stated that there was resistance to break free from the old rules because poets inherited the traditional way of writing poetry from the fathers of Arabic poetry. What Al-Tami (1988) said can be rephrased as many Arab poets have not changed the way they acquire, perceive, and learn how to write poetry because poetry is tightly connected to the culture as well as the ivory tower that poetry has been placed on. Because of this perception,

2 Al-Mahjar means the country where a group of people emigrate to.
poetry writing is not typically used as a pedagogical tool in Saudi classrooms, as reported by Ahmed (2014), “To introduce poetry in ESL classes at Saudi universities has always been considered as a taboo. It has never been tried and incorporated in ESL curriculum” (p. 127).

Many teachers are at loss and avoid teaching poetry due to a variety of factors not necessarily limited to the rules and forms of poetry writing (Duncan, 2012). Some teachers fear using poetry in classrooms and rush through it in their teaching due to having anxiety when it comes to poetry teaching (Janeczko, 2000). There are some factors that explain this phenomenon such as saying that poetry is hard for students (Showalter, 2003), poetry does not fit in the schools’ curriculum (because it focuses on helping students pass the standardized tests (Perfect, 2005)), and any negative experience that some teachers had with poetry (Duncan, 2012). Therefore, the case in the Arab world is not unique when it comes to not using poetry writing as a pedagogical tool in language classrooms.

**Saudi English Teaching Classrooms’ Culture**

Hyland (2003b) pointed out that when students write in classrooms that focus on creative expression, students discover and share personal meaning, beliefs, experiences and ideas with others. Therefore, teachers’ goal in these classes is “fostering L2 students’ expressive abilities, encouraging them to find their own voices to produce writing that is fresh and spontaneous” (Hyland, 2003b, p. 8). Expressivism in this sense “leans heavily on an asocial view of the writer, and its ideology of individualism may disadvantage second language students from cultures that place a different value on self-expression” (Hyland, 2003b, p. 9). He added that some L2 writers/learners may not benefit from the
expressivism approach “as it tends to neglect the cultural backgrounds of learners, the social consequences of writing, and the purposes of communication in the real world, where writing matters” (Hyland, 2003b, p. 10). For example, many Asian cultures, as Hyland (2003b) noticed, discourage the western style of learning in which students construct their points of views by criticizing and recombining existing knowledge. Instead, these cultures favor “conserving and reproducing existing knowledge, establishing reverence for what is known through strategies such as memorization and imitation” (Hyland, 2003b, p. 38). As a result, a student’s personal voice is absent and “is largely irrelevant as the student does not presume to improve on acknowledged truths but to communicate what is socially shared” (Hyland, 2003b, p. 39). Kumaravadivelu (2003b) mentioned that western literature associates three stereotypes about some Asian countries, such as China and India. These stereotypes are that students are submissive to authority, do not think critically, and are passive in classroom activities. He said that “Western scholars have unscrupulously furthered their own vested interests by not only failing to acknowledge but also by deliberately denigrating the production and dissemination of local knowledge in these two ancient cultures” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b, p. 713). He argued that the comparison between Asian students’ behavior in ESL classrooms could be compared to American students’ behavior when they learn a second language. Kumaravadivelu (2003b) said studies showed that Americans have a similar resistance to participate in classrooms when they are compelled to use the second language. Kumaravadivelu (2003b) also reported that his personal experience showed that although some American students are critical thinkers, “I have also come across U.S.
students who seem to believe that critical thinking is hazardous to their intellectual health” (p. 713).

Hyland (2003b) pointed out that there are differences among different cultures’ ways of writing. He said that the writing activities that are common and practiced in the western classrooms are not necessarily known or practiced everywhere else. Therefore, it is not helpful to ask students to write, and then judge their writing style based on the common norms of English writing style. In saying this, Hyland (2003b) asserted that writing is a reflection of how particular members of a certain culture think. Hyland (2003b) further justified conducting studies on different cultures to investigate the usability of implementing new pedagogical methodologies in these contexts. This section studies the Saudi English teaching classrooms culture to establish a better understanding of beliefs and values of literacy-related issues that are unique in that specific context.

Shukri (2014) claimed that the evidence suggests that Saudi learners “perceive writing in the traditional style where it abides by rules, and a certain structure” (p. 191). She pointed out that the educational system fosters writing drills and structured writing styles rather than encourages students to write freely. Furthermore, Shukri (2014) said that teachers in English teaching classrooms are asked to use textbooks, which is made mandatory in the majority of educational institutions. Using these textbooks leave “teachers with insufficient time to implement creative writing activities” (Shukri, 2014, p. 192). She also listed some other factors that discourage free writing, such as “cultural resistance to self-expression, fulfilment of teacher expectation based on stereotyping and the rote learning background that is embedded in Saudi culture” (Shukri, 2014, p. 191). To justify this way of perceiving writing in Arabic, Shukri (2014) argued that while
English is a global language that is related to commerce and education, classical Arabic reflects the language of Quran, which makes it tightly linked to Islam. Consequently, these forms of writing have inherited the sacredness of Islamic teachings and are memorized rather than modified and criticized. Hence, classical Arabic is the language of religion, government, and formal education. She extended her argument and claimed that free writing could be a threat to teachers who are asked to avoid taboo, religious, and political issues in language classrooms. As a result, “Some instructors are willing to carefully approach boundaries while others limit expression and discourse due to their own thinking and fears” (Shukri, 2014, p. 195). She concluded the article by asking both teachers and students of English to enjoy meaningful writing activities and to overcome “the obstacles that Saudi writers face” (Shukri, 2014, p.201). The following section discusses how poetry writing can help ESL learners express their emotions.

**Poetry and Emotions**

Kim (2004) pointed out that when students read personal texts, they are more inclined to participate with the teacher and typically enjoy reading in the target language. This implies that learners enjoy activities that are related to the students’ life in one way or another. It makes them feel engaged in the learning process when compared to normal textbook activities, which therefore appear less appealing. Hanauer (2004) presented the use of poetry in second language teaching and learning. He claimed that writing poetry to express one’s feelings would engage ESL/EFL learners’ experiences and thoughts. This would make language learners share these inner emotions in a form of creative writing. Hanauer (2010) advocated this view and said, “There is initial evidence to suggest that literature may elicit emotional responses in second language readers” (p. 36). He also
noted that second language writers tend to present their close relationships with friends and family in their poems. Although these findings seem encouraging for ESL/EFL teachers who want to introduce poetry writing in their contexts, there are also some challenges that need to be considered when applying this activity with second or foreign language learners.

Chamcharatsri (2012) said that second language learners might feel frustrated and lost when they try to express their feelings in another language due to a lack of sufficient vocabulary. Their expressions, due to language proficiency, are not always fully understood by readers and/or listeners. In addition, the choice of words, as noted by Pavlenko and Driagina (2007), might not be the correct equivalent to the emotions that second language learners really have in mind and want to express. The authors said, “Each language also has some words that lack translation equivalents in the other language” (Pavlenko and Driagina, 2007, p. 217). Therefore, expressing emotions in poetry can be a challenging task for second language learners. Expressing emotions in itself is not an easy task even when it is practiced in one’s own language. If we add the lack of vocabulary items that the writer needs to the challenging nature of expressing emotions, we would understand exactly the challenges that would face ESL/EFL learners. Dewaele (2008), Chamcharatsri (2012), and Pavlenko and Driagina (2007) agreed that expressing emotions in the first language is different from expressing the same emotions in the second language. Dewaele (2008) claimed that “communicating love and recognizing an emotional script of love in a foreign language is therefore extra challenging if it has to be channeled through narrow and imperfect linguistic translations” (p. 1754). His study revealed that participants prefer to use their first language to express
their emotions because of the clear connection between the language they are using and the feelings that they are experiencing. To clarify, he said that part of the difficulty lies in the linguistic translations learners are engaged in. This translation would not make the final product (the poem) an original work because it would be a mere translation from learners’ L1 to L2.

To sum up, this literature review starts by addressing the importance of implementing meaningful literacy in language classrooms’ activities. It states that learning becomes more productive and appealing when it is related to learners’ personal lives and experiences. It suggests poetry writing as an option that enhances expressing emotions. Based on the design and aims of this study, the researcher discusses two claims in detail. The first point is how poetry writing could be perceived by Arabs considering that the participants in this study are from Saudi Arabia. The second point is about the potential ways in which self-identified Saudi men in language classrooms potentially engage with emotional writing. The study focuses on one particular emotion, namely fear. The findings of this study would help researchers understand how Saudi English speakers perceive and think of expressing fear using poetry writing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate participants’ perceptions of expressing the emotion of fear in Arabic and in English. The study discusses in depth how participants write poetry to express fear. Moreover, it touches upon the reasons why Arabic or English is easier/harder for the participants to express fear. The findings of this study contribute to the fields of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. Second language acquisition and learning also benefit from studies about the relation between emotions.

**Research Questions**

Based on this, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. In what ways do ESL Saudi students express fear using poetry writing in Arabic?
2. In what ways do ESL Saudi students express fear using poetry writing in English?
3. What are the differences in ESL Saudi male students’ perceptions of expressing fear in Arabic and English?
4. What are the cultural constraints, cultural characteristics, and culturally located perceptions of poetry writing within the Saudi context?

**Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

This literature review contributes to our knowledge of how speakers of English as a second or foreign language, specifically Saudi learners in this study, use poetry to express their emotions. It studied participants’ perceptions of the difficulty of expressing emotions in their first or second language. If this is true, the following issue would be how and why it is similar or different. Although different scholars in the field have supported this area of study, it is still a relatively new trend to study how non-native speakers of English use poetry writing that involve expressing their emotions. Writing poetry in Arabic is a challenge in itself for Arabic speakers with the strict forms that have been considered a model for poets to follow for centuries. It is a live debate now in the Middle East whether these forms should be followed or if poets can have their own new and creative forms. The novelty of this area of study in applied linguistics shows a lack of
sources and prior studies for researchers who like to build upon what is there in the literature. It is a challenging task for these researchers to explore this phenomenon and contribute to the building of this recent framework. The next step in this research is to examine new cultures and languages with the change of writing genres and emotions. The more variables that are studied (writing genres, emotions, and languages) build up a better understanding of engaging students’ personal lives in using literature to compose creative pieces of writing.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study was to develop a better understanding of the connection between participants' poetry writing perceptions and their reported poetry writing experiences to express their fear. Another goal of the study was to encourage policy makers, teachers of English, and educational institutions to consider poetry writing as a pedagogical activity within English teaching classrooms in the Saudi context. To achieve this objective, the participants were assigned two writing tasks: to write a poem in Arabic, then in English. The inquiry included semi-structured interviews with four open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted after each task to explore participants’ perspectives on the experience.

Research Questions

The central focus of this study investigated the nature of the relationship between one's self, as a Saudi who speaks English, and poetry writing to express a negative emotion, namely fear. The aim behind conducting such a study was to suggest poetry writing activities as a way to enhance language learning in the EFL Saudi context. The study recommends repositioning language learners to be the center of the learning/teaching process through the meaningful literacy approach. Based on the work of Hanauer (2012) about conceptualizing poetry writing in ESL/EFL classrooms, and Hyland's (2003b) claim that the existence of "an asocial view of the writer, and its ideology of individualism may disadvantage second language students from cultures that place a different value on self-expression” (p. 9), this study examined some Saudi men’s perception of poetry writing in English and Arabic. The next issue focused on
investigating the Saudi participants’ perception of how they expressed fear through writing poems in the first and second language and whether it is similar or different. To reach a better understanding of these issues, the researcher gave participants two tasks to do along with interviews that would add qualitative data to the participants’ poems. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. In what ways do ESL Saudi students express fear using poetry writing in Arabic?
2. In what ways do ESL Saudi students express fear using poetry writing in English?
3. What are the differences in ESL Saudi students’ perceptions of expressing fear in Arabic and English?
4. What are the cultural constraints, cultural characteristics, and culturally located perceptions of poetry writing within the Saudi context?

**Research Design**

The study was designed to gain a better understanding of the participants' thoughts, opinions, and experiences on expressing emotions using poetry writing in two different languages. Davis (2007) stated the latest trend in education has changed and many scholars value qualitative research. He claimed that “Many contemporary scholars maintain that good qualitative research has equaled, if not exceeded, quantitative research in status, relevance, and methodological rigor” (Davis, 2007, p. 574). He stated that although well-designed quantitative research has value, “legitimate concerns [have arisen] regarding the ability of [quantitative] research to effectively capture the nuances of human interactions and program effects, differences in environmental contexts, and depth of understanding” (Davis, 2007, p. 574). For him, regardless of the method and
design a researcher uses, it is essential to examine the results “with a critical eye” (Davis, 2007, p. 574).

This study used the qualitative research design to understand how Saudi Arabian males perceive and express their fear differently or similarly in English and Arabic. Merriam (2009) contended that “there is almost no consistency across writers in how [the philosophical] aspect of qualitative research is discussed” (p. 8). In true qualitative research fashion, writers make sense of the studied issues in the field in a socially constructed way that reveals the writers’ personal understanding. Although the qualitative research has complex designs and methods of data analysis, its practicality is strong enough to understand the complex multiple realities that participants experienced throughout the assigned tasks. Merriam (2009) pointed this out and said that:

Interpretive research, which is where qualitative research is most often located, assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event. Researchers do not “find” knowledge, they construct it. (p. 8-9)

To understand the studied phenomenon, participants were assigned two poetry-writing tasks to express fear in Arabic and English. Writing poetry helps people connect to themselves and others because poetry writing encourages expressing emotions (Kim, 2004; Hanauer, 2004, 2010). Our emotions are related tightly to experiences in life that we have gone through. The importance of using poetic inquiries in this study and the alike, as claimed by Prendergast (2009) “is to do as poetry does, that is to synthesize experience in a direct and affective way” (p. xxii). Cahnmann (2003) added, “Using elements of poetry in our data collection, analysis and write-up has the potential to make
our thinking clearer, fresher, and more accessible and to render the richness and complexity of the observed world” (p. 34) . Accordingly, the participants in this study were asked to write a poem in Arabic (all of the participants’ first language) and another one in English. In these two experiences, the participants had the chance to be engaged emotionally and cognitively in the process of writing poetry while choosing the linguistic expressions that reflect their inner emotions, feelings, and thoughts. The written prompts, which were given to the participants, had identical content but were in the two languages:

Task 1: First writing prompt (Arabic)

فكر في لحظة من حياةك شعرت فيها بالخوف. أغلق عينيك واستريح وتفصيل ذاك الموقف.
أرجو منك الآن وصف هذا المشهد بتفاصيله عن طريق كتابة قصيدة تحكي هذه التجربة بكل جوائها.

Task 2: second writing prompt (English)

Think about a moment in your life when you were fearful. Close your eyes and imagine this event. What I would like you to do now is write a poem (in any form you would like) about this experience. Please try to express the whole experience.

Each participant was sent an email that had the first prompt, which was writing an Arabic poem. The participant then was asked to choose a time in which he preferred to have the Skype interview with the researcher. The participants in the study were asked to write the poem right before the interview if that was possible. All participants were asked to write without any time, page or word limit. They were also told that they could write according to the rules if they want but this was not required. In other words, they were asked to write whatever they perceive a poem to be. The only required element in this task was to write a poem about fear. What the participants were asked to complete in the first task was exactly the same with the second task in which they wrote an English
poem. They were asked to choose a time for the meeting right after they wrote the English poem. They were also told that there were no restrictions on what or how they wanted to write their English poem.

In this study, each writing task was followed by a semi-structured interview in which the participants talked about the experience that they had gone through. The first interview was right after the participants sent their Arabic poem. The interview question was:

1. You have just finished writing a poem in Arabic. Could you describe this experience?

The second interview was after sending the second poem, which was in English. The interview had three questions:

1. You have just finished writing a poem in English. Could you describe this experience?
2. Think about the two writing experiences. Do you think there is a difference in writing poetry in English and Arabic?
3. Good thank you. Specifically, do you think there is a difference in expressing fear in the English poem or in the Arabic poem?

According to Nunan (1992), in semi-structured interviews the topics under investigation guide how the interviews are shaped. He said that in this type of interviews, “The interviewer has a general idea of where he or she wants the interview to go, and what should come out of it, but does not enter the interview with a list of predetermined questions” (Nunan, 1992, p. 149). The importance of these interviews is, as put by
Merriam (2009), that “The experience a person has includes the ways in which the experience is interpreted. There is no ‘objective’ experience that stands outside its interpretation” (p. 9). Nunan (1992) added that the semi-structured interviews enable interviewees to have a “degree of power and control over the course of the interview” (p. 150). As for the interviewer, he or she would have “a great deal of flexibility” (p. 150).

The final and most important advantage is to have access to the interviewees’ personal lives (Nunan, 1992). Therefore, the researcher interviewed his participants to further investigate the questions that this study raised. Each participant was expected to comment on the experience of writing poetry and expressing fear in his mother tongue and second language. The interview method of data collection and analysis “is guided by the philosophical assumptions of qualitative inquiry: To understand a complex phenomenon, you must consider the multiple ‘realities’ experienced by the participants themselves—the ‘insider’ perspectives” (Suter, 2012, p. 344). Participants’ poems and interviews were compared with the researcher’s interpretations and then analyzed by the researcher.

**Participants**

The proposed study required the researcher to choose a sampling strategy, employing a variety of criteria, to attain the quality assurance that is necessary for this study. All recruited participants were Saudi males who identified as being proficient in English. The purpose of limiting the study to Saudis and not all Arabs was because Saudi Arabia is recognized as its own subculture within the Middle East. Thus, the researcher contacted thirty-two people who fall within the chosen criteria. Only thirteen people responded to the invitation emails while the rest refused to participate. Later, three people withdrew and did not participate in the study. One participant sent his poems but later
decided to withdraw from the study. Therefore, the total number of participants was nine people. The participants in the study chose their pseudonyms and briefly introduced themselves as follows:

1. Ishmael: At the time of the interviews, Ishmael was doing his graduate studies in law at an American university. He had been using English as a medium of instruction for more than four years.

2. Abdol: At the time of the interviews, Abdol was a graduate student in an MA in TESOL program at an American university. He had been teaching English at a Saudi high school for one year and then at a university for two years.

3. Abo Met’eb: At the time of the interviews, Abo Met’eb was a CEO of a web designing company in Saudi Arabia. In his company, English had been used as a medium of communication among employees and customers. His BA was in computer science, which was strictly taught in English.

4. Fares: At the time of the interviews, Fares was an English major who worked for a university in Saudi Arabia as a teaching assistant. He was in the United States pursuing his graduate studies in TESOL. He had been teaching English for four years in a middle school and a university.

5. Tayeb: At the time of the interviews, Tayeb was an engineer who worked for a petroleum company in Saudi Arabia. The medium of communication in the company is English only, though the majority of employees are Saudis. He held a PhD in Petroleum Engineering from the UK and an MA in the same field from the United States. Tayeb had more than 25 years of experience in English after his graduation from high school.
6. Snake: At the time of the interviews, Snake was a Saudi graduate student at an American university. His major was computer science. He said that his English, when he first came to the United States, was low intermediate and he needed one year to improve his language. He had three years of experience learning English when he was interviewed.

7. Hamad: At the time of the interviews, Hamad was learning English at an American language institute. He worked for a Saudi university at the Department of Business as a teaching assistant. The medium of instruction in his department is Arabic.

8. Fahad: At the time of the interviews, Fahad was a teacher of English in a Saudi Arabian public high school. He had been teaching English for four years. He graduated from an English department in a university in Saudi Arabia.

9. Waleed: At the time of the interviews, Waleed was a graduate student in the business school at an American university. He had lived four years in the United States.

All participants in the study were males because the researcher wanted to control the diversity of the Saudi context in order to have more control on the findings, as well as the difficulty of access. Based on the conservative Islamic Saudi culture, it is unacceptable for many females to be interviewed by a stranger at a public place, by Skype or even over the phone (Glasze, 2006; Le Renard, 2008; Vidyasagar; Rea, 2004).

Participants were invited to participate via emails sent to them individually. A consent form was attached to each email for participants to read and sign. They all replied and expressed their willingness to participate in the study. This step was repeated at the
beginning of all interviews to make sure that each participant agreed to be recorded during the interview. They were also told that participating in the study was optional; therefore, they could withdraw at any point if they wanted. Each participant was interviewed two times. Participants preferred using Skype, and they sent the times and dates when they could be contacted.

**Data Collection**

To serve the purpose of this study, the elicitation technique was utilized. By using this technique, as stated by Nunan (1992), researchers “obtain their data by means of a stimulus, such as a picture, diagram, or standardized test, as well as those based on questionnaire, survey, and interview data” (p. 136). That is to say, researchers who use elicitation techniques know beforehand what and how to investigate the issue they are studying (Nunan, 1992). Therefore, the nine participants in this study were asked to compose two poems in which they expressed their fear. The first poem was written in Arabic while the second was written in English. There were no restrictions on the poems' length or form. Each poem was followed by an interview in which participants were asked to talk about their experiences in writing the poetry. These interviews worked as thick descriptions of the lived experiences of these participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Figure 1 clarifies the steps that were followed in the study.

*Figure 1. Methodological procedures.*
Data Analysis

As stated by Suter, interviews give researchers a wealth of information that requires “critical examination, careful interpretation, and challenging synthesis” (Suter, 2012, p. 352). Suter (2012) added that sound qualitative analysis should discover “patterns, coherent themes, meaningful categories, and new ideas” (p. 352). The process of data analysis included transcribing participants’ interviews, translating them from Arabic to English, reading the scripts, and finding themes to code data. As for the interviews, they were separated into two sets, the interviews concerning writing poetry in Arabic and interviews about the experience in writing poetry in English. Each set was read thoroughly and analyzed separately. The second step was to combine each participant’s two interviews and two poems to study each participant’s individual work. The interviews and poems were thoroughly analyzed for each individual’s expression of fear through writing in both the Arabic and English poems. The goal of this step was to use participants’ ideas and thoughts to have a better understanding of the studied experience. Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that “Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader - another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner - than pages of summarized numbers” (p. 1).

All translated texts were sent to two Arabic speakers who identified as being highly proficient in English – both of them were assistant professors in the English Department in two different universities in Saudi Arabia. Each translator was given a separate set of translated texts. They were asked to read and give their feedback on the translation. The last step was to meet via Skype with the professors to discuss word
choice and structure within the translated versions. All disagreements in the three translated versions were resolved and the researcher built all data analysis on the approved version. The last step was to rewrite the selected quotes after taking out the pauses, laughter, repeated words and phrases, and other distractors. Some of the pauses and unclear or coherent words and phrases were not changed when they serve the goal of the study. In other words, the selected quotes were rephrased unless it was crucial to not doing so.

**Research Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed the term trustworthiness in qualitative research. For them, it is very essential to evaluate qualitative data analysis to the extent that supports the argument that the findings of this study are important and it adds knowledge to the field of inquiry. The question they asked was “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). To obtain these criteria, the researcher applied different strategies that would support him during this study. The validity was assured by consulting two professors who reviewed the translated versions of the interviews to make sure that they match with the researcher's translated versions. Reliability and objectivity were obtained by providing rich descriptions of the assumptions and theory behind the study.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter presents the participants’ perceptions of expressing their emotions through poetry writing in Arabic and English. The participants’ interviews (a total of 18 interviews) were analyzed as well. All participants in this study chose their pseudonyms. This chapter contains translated English excerpts from all nine participants; and because they were originally expressed in Arabic, some of the quotes are followed by explanations for clarification.

Perception of Writing Arabic Poetry

This section reports the different opinions the participants showed about writing Arabic poems. It presents the ways in which the participants understand the role of rules when writing Arabic poems. It also reports the participants’ challenges and opportunities before, after, and throughout the writing process. Lastly, this section shows how participants perceived their Arabic poems.

Poetry Writing Is a Natural Gift

Some participants reported that writing Arabic poetry is a gift that some people have and others do not. For example, Ishmael said that poetry writing is a talent that cannot be learned or acquired. When asked to comment on writing Arabic poetry, he said, "I feel it is a gift and not a thing that you can acquire or learn. Therefore, you either have this gift or you do not have it" (Interview, June 6, 2014). Abdol has a similar understanding of who has the privilege to write Arabic poetry. He said that he felt writing a poem is challenging for him and he would not feel the same difficulty if he was asked
to write in prose because “Some people have this poetic ability” (Interview, May 26, 2014). Tayeb also mentioned that writing poetry is a privilege that some people have:

I believe the people, who write poetry, the poets, have this gift. I guess when a poet starts a poem, the words come to his mind without even thinking of them. The poet writes the verses so smoothly. It is not like my case, the words were not coming to my mind easily. I mean, I am not a poet that can easily write poetry. (Interview, June 4, 2014)

Tayeb further explained that poets have the privilege not just to write poems but also to understand it. He said, “Yes, poetry needs, let me say, a certain level of understanding and recognition in order to reach the level that a poet reaches” (Interview, June 4, 2014). Waleed mentioned the difficulty he faced in writing a poem. He said that because he is not a poet, “I was writing a line then deleting it. It went like this, writing lines and then deleting them, for more than a week, I was trying and trying to write” (Interview, June 8, 2014).

Hamad said although he was not a poet and it was not easy for him to write a poem, he liked expressing emotions using poetry. He said, “The difficulty is always there. Basically, I am not a poet (...) I told you I am not a poet but when I write a poem, even if it is just verses, I feel relieved” (Interview, June 22, 2014).

Some participants asserted that writing poems should follow certain rules and forms. For some participants, these rules can be learned and then applied in writing poems. In this sense, poetry writing is not a mere innate gift and it cannot be claimed that poetry writing is limited to people who identify as poets. However, for the remaining participants, poetry writing is not only a natural gift that some people have and others do
not, it is understood as being further complicated due to the conventions of poetry writing.

Conventions of Arabic Poetry

Some participants said that Arabic poetry writing should follow certain rules. The main rules are rhyme, rhythm, meter, and form. Ishmael held a very strict point of view of who is eligible to write poetry and how poems should look. He said that “Arabic poetry has rules and techniques” (Interview, June 6, 2014). He also said, “We have two different notions. Writing what is scientifically called a poem or poetry following the rules is difficult. However, writing a beautiful prose is easy” (Interview, June 6, 2014). When asked to comment on free verse poetry writing, Ishmael said that free verse is not a respectable way of poetry writing. He expressed his standpoint by saying:

This is not poetry. It can be called wasting time or maybe messing around, I do not know. Arabic poetry writing is not my major and I do not know what poetry really is, but if free verse is a type of poetry, what can we call the poems of our great poets? Bullshit? Poetry is what we know and already have and it is not this new way of writing poems. We can give free verse a nice new name but no, it is not poetry. If you want to call it poetry, you can add a word to it to differentiate it from our respected poetry. (Interview, June 6, 2014)

Ishmael justified his standpoint of the necessity to follow the old rules of poetry writing by saying:

Poetry is our way to know how to speak classical and formal Arabic well, know the syntax, word choice, usage, etc. of our language. So, when we are in doubt,
we should refer to our classical poets to see how they used the language and then we follow them, but these new poems? No way. (Interview, June 6, 2014)

Fares agreed that writing a poem is not an easy task unless you are a poet. He also mentioned that poetry writing is a skill and it has features that qualify your piece as a poem. When asked to comment on his Arabic poem, Fares showed his struggle and confusion in naming his piece by saying:

Sometimes when someone is sad, this person may write, I mean, the things that (s)he is thinking of, or the issues (s)he is feeling, in prose. I mean, or, or, or, in, I mean, we cannot say poetry, but yes, in a text, in a way, or in one way or another, organized text, but sometimes it is not a text or so. (Interview, June 1, 2014)

Tayeb agreed with Fares that poetry writing has rules and following these rules is crucial in considering a piece to be a poem. Tayeb said that “I feel that when I read some poems in WhatsApp groups, I feel some of them can be accepted but some of them, no, they are not poems, the writer thinks (s)he writes one but it is nothing” (Interview, June 4, 2014). Tayeb asserted his strict evaluation of Arabic poetry writing rules by saying that his wife read his poem and asked him if he was writing poetry. Tayeb said, “I told my wife I was just messing around and writing rubbish” (Interview, June 4, 2014). Fahad pointed out the importance of poetry writing rules when he said, “I can say if what I read is an Arabic poem just from a quick look at the piece, I know how the poem should look aesthetically, and I know the meters, rhyme, and rhythm” (Interview, June 11, 2014). Abdol also mentioned the rules, which are stricter in Arabic, when he said, “Writing a poem in Arabic requires you to be formal while in English there is that flexibility” (Interview, May 22, 2014).
Two participants said that the rules of writing Arabic poems had a negative effect on their writing. Fares mentioned this negative effect by saying “Exactly, poetry rules constrain my creativity. I cannot express what I feel in a poem because I cannot find words that have a specific rhyme” (Interview, June 1, 2014). Hamad said that the rules or writing Arabic poetry was an obstacle that he dealt with while writing his poem. He said, “Honestly speaking, the rules of writing a poem were an obstacle for me. Nevertheless, I tried to overcome this, some verses had rhythm, and some don’t. I think although some verses had no rhythm, they still describe my feelings” (Interview, June 22, 2014).

Tayeb agreed that writing poetry is not an easy task to do. He mentioned that poetry writing has strict rules and certain forms; however, these rules could be learned. Tayeb was hesitant to participate in the study because, as he said, he did not know these rules and forms. When Tayeb asked the researcher to send him the rules of writing poetry, the researcher told Tayeb that he could write whatever he considered a poem to be. Tayeb mentioned the importance of the rules as follows:

The task, writing an Arabic poem, was awkward for me. Of course, the fear I experienced was awful and I have never had it before. In addition, you want me to write it in a poem. I was attracted by the idea that you would send me the rules in which poems should be written. I want to learn how to write a poem. I want to know the rules, just in case I can write a poem. (Interview, June 4, 2014)

Waleed expressed the role of rules in an indirect way. The following quote contains his perception of Arabic poetry. When asked to comment on his Arabic poem, he showed his uncertainty in naming his piece by saying “while writing my po\(^3\), while

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\(^3\) Waleed started pronouncing the word ‘poem’ but he did not finish it. He stopped and then corrected himself. He used ‘flash prose’ and ‘text’ to refer to his piece of writing.
writing, the, the, this flash prose, amm, this text” (Interview, June 8, 2014). Fahad expressed a similar opinion about his poems. During the interview, he used the word ‘poem’ just once to describe the pieces he wrote, while he used the terms ‘flash prose’, ‘writing’, and ‘text’ more than ten times to refer to his English and Arabic poems. He also stated that he was unsure if the pieces would be accepted as poems. He said, “I was worried about the text after I wrote it and then sent it to you. I wanted to convey an idea but I was not sure if I attained this goal” (Interview, June 11, 2014).

The interviews also revealed that two participants have difficulty in creative or free writing. Ishmael mentioned that “The idea of free writing or writing without having certain rules in mind was difficult for me because I am not used to this type of writing” (Interview, June 6, 2014). Snake went further and said that expressing his fear in a poem was difficult because he does not like to write or express his emotions at all, neither in prose nor in poetry. He said that “I am not the type of a person who knows how to express, I mean, I could write about this topic in a word or two, sometimes I prefer to keep my emotions to myself” (Interview, May 26, 2014). He further elaborated that writing in itself was difficult and choosing words to express his fear was a challenge as well. He said that “It is possible that the way, expressing myself in writing, or choosing the words to form a poem was the source of difficulty I faced (...) so, any writing genre will be a problem for me” (Interview, May 26, 2014).

Some participants made a comparison between prose and poetry writing to show how they perceive the task of writing an Arabic poem. They claimed that writing in prose has fewer rules; therefore, it would be easier to express emotions. Fares said that he was
used to expressing his emotions in Arabic using prose. When asked if doing so in a poem is similar in difficulty, he said:

> Of course they are different because poetry constrains my ideas. In prose, I will not be constrained or limited to any specific rules even if I decide to have assonance in my writing. I can express my emotions more freely. However, in poetry, choosing words will be harder and more limited. The words I can use will not be as much as the ones I can use in prose because I am constrained by rules. Therefore, it is not just the ideas or words that I will be thinking of, it is also how to put them in the poetic forms. (Interview, June 1, 2014)

Tayeb and Waleed agreed with Fares that prose is easier to write, and that their writing would be better in prose than it was in poetry. Tayeb said, “I guess prose will be easier and clearer because I have a wider range, I can use more words and I will not be limited and constrained by how to start or end my verses” (Interview, June 4, 2014). However, he said, “I prefer to read something that has rhyme and meter. A poem plays with our emotions and feelings” (Interview, June 4, 2014). Waleed said, “It was difficult to write a poem, I mean, I have no problem writing an essay to express my emotions” (Interview, June 8, 2014).

The role of the rules in writing poetry is repeated in the participants’ responses. The responses showed that the struggle was not necessarily a result of having to produce emotional writing; it is rather because of the strong association between poetry writing and the rules, or the perception of how a poem should look (rhyme, meter, form, and rhythm). A few participants mentioned previous knowledge of creative writing as a barrier for poetry writing. They mentioned that they either do not like or do not know
how to write creatively. The following section is about the participants’ background knowledge and how it affected their poetry writing.

**Background Knowledge of Arabic Poetry**

Some participants said that they felt it was difficult for them to write a poem in Arabic because they knew nothing about poetry writing. For example, when Ishmael was asked about his feelings in regard to writing a poem in Arabic, he said, “Writing a poem is a hard task because I have not learned it, I know nothing about it, and I do not know how to write a poem. I do not master the conventions of forms and rhymes” (Interview, June 6, 2014). Ishmael also said:

> In writing courses when I was in school, Arabic textbooks activities are all about (write about…) and then they do not tell you how to write, how to start, how to end, what should be in between, and what should I include or exclude. I have no idea. This was my biggest concern when I was trying to write in Arabic. It was a new experience to me and this is why I was lost. (Interview, June 6, 2014)

Abdol expressed a similar perception of poetry writing. When asked about his feelings in regard to writing a poem, he said it was the first time ever for him to express his emotions in a poem; therefore:

> When I read your task, honestly speaking, I felt awkward; I did not know how I could write a poem. I was thinking of a certain incident, I chose it, and then I tried to write about it many times. In fact, it was difficult to write a poem. (Interview, May 22, 2014).

Tayeb mentioned a similar standpoint when he said:
The pieces I wrote, even though I tried my best to make them look nice, I still feel that they do not look like how they should be, in terms of meter and rhythm, etc. The reason is that I do not have a previous experience, or because I am not a specialist in this field. (Interview, June 3, 2014)

However, Hamad said that his prior knowledge of Arabic poems helped him write his own poem:

The other thing is listening to poems in that language [Arabic], I mean about any emotions, fear, love, definitely I listened to many poems in Arabic so I followed the same ways, styles, and forms in my Arabic poem. This is why Arabic was easy unlike the English poem. (Interview, June 22, 2014).

The responses in this section, in one way or another, support the notion that poetry writing should follow rules, which was repeated throughout the interviews of the nine participants. However, the responses contradicted the previously mentioned idea that writing poetry is a natural gift. This disagreement can be inferred from the participants’ claims that background knowledge would have helped them to more easily complete the two writing tasks because the rules of writing poetry can be learned through pedagogical activities in language (Arab/English) classrooms. If it were true that poetry writing is an innate ability, teaching poetry writing in language classrooms would be of no help. This theme is concluded by the participants’ perception of the product, the Arabic poem, after reporting their perception of the process of writing the poem.

**Participants’ Perception of the Arabic Poem**

The participants in the study showed different opinions when asked to comment on their final product. The variations in responses are reported in this section. Some
participants expressed their opinions clearly, while some preferred to express their opinions indirectly. In describing their poems, participants pointed out the difficulties they experienced and the audience’s potential expectations.

When asked to comment on his Arabic poem, Fares did not prefer to use the word poem, instead he used a more general word. Fares said, “My writing? I still do not feel that I wrote something that can be called a poem and verses” (Interview, June 1, 2014). Tayeb went further when asked about his Arabic poem. His perception of his final product was in this short excerpt from the interview:

- Tayeb: As for my poem, as I was telling you, in the first place I love poems and poetry. I had some ideas and I was trying to link them in a verse or so. I am poor in Arabic, I have not had a previous experience, I mean, I tried to write, or I pretend that I am writing a poem but it turned out to be rubbish.
- Interviewer: The one you sent was a beautiful poem.
- Tayeb: Anyways, thank you. (Interview, June 4, 2014)

Some participants were not specific and clear in describing their Arabic poems. As for Ishmael’s perception of his Arabic poem, he said that his writing “was a nice experience. My writing, ammm I believe it was good and not bad, not excellent, it was just average” (Interview, June 6, 2014). Waleed expressed a similar opinion to that of Ishmael. Waleed said:

I was able to express my emotions better than what I expected. Definitely, it was not, at least for me, it was not, when I read it later it was not good, I think it was average. However, for me, as this is my first time ever I express my emotions, it was excellent. (Interview, June 8, 2014)
Some participants preferred to talk about their pieces in terms of clarity of the incident. For example, Tayeb said that his poem was vague. He mentioned that his readers would not understand what really happened:

In the beginning, I was afraid that writing a poem about this incident would not help you in your study because it is written in a vague way. What made me scared? The results of my blood tests? Nothing was clear. Then I said to myself, whatever it is, this incident deserved to be written about because it affected me.

(Interview, June 4, 2014)

However, Fahad, whose poem also did not have details about the car accident he had, justified this by saying:

You read my poem and I think you noticed that most of the text was not about the accident itself or it was not a description of it. There were no details. It is common among writers of poems and flash prose, we do not discuss the incident or accident we had, we rather focus on the feelings we have that time. Therefore, when I finish writing my piece, I was reading it and then I told myself that I should rewrite it, I did not describe the car accident. Then, I told myself that I did the right thing because my feelings are more important than just describing a car accident. (Interview, June 11, 2014)

Some participants expressed that writing an Arabic poem was difficult and that they were surprised to have accomplished the task. Tayeb pointed out the difficulty of writing a poem by saying “Nevertheless, I managed to force myself for a while, come up with, write, try, try harder, and so, Subhan-Allah⁴ I came up with these verses”

⁴ Subhan-Allah is a religious expression Muslims often use to express something unbelievable has just happen. Usually it means I am astonished by God’s power. The literal meaning is: Glory to God.
Hamad expressed a similar perception by mentioning that writing a poem is a challenge. He said, “I mean, the words just came to my mind and I was saying to myself how could I think of this word in that place? How did this idea come to my mind?” (Interview, June 22, 2014).

The perception of poetry writing as a privilege was the main topic of discussion. The participants focused on the barriers and difficulties of writing Arabic poetry. This focus revealed how the culturally situated assumption of the rules is one of the reasons why the participants struggled during the process of writing and in describing their product. For example, there was a tendency for participants to use words such as ‘writing’, ‘flash prose’, or ‘text’ rather than describing their product as a poem. Although all participants conducted the task and wrote an Arabic poem, their responses and their word choices to describe their work did not give the impression that they disrupted their prior understanding of poetry writing. The following theme discusses the participants’ perception of writing an English poem to have a better understanding of the similarities and/or differences of writing poetry in Arabic and English.

**Perception of Writing English Poetry**

This section reports the participants’ perception of their English poems. It also touches upon their understanding of rules of poetry writing in English. Furthermore, this section discusses the effect of this perception on the participants’ poetry writing process and product.

**Conventions of English Poetry**

Two participants pointed out the importance of poetry writing rules in English. For example, Fahad said, “I have no idea of the rules of writing an English poem and I do
not dare to write one” (Interview, June 11, 2014). Ishmael stated that his English piece was not clear enough because he felt forced to break free from the rules of writing a poem. As he said, he prefers to follow certain rules that he can refer to rather than writing without having a reference that he can rely on:

At first, I was confused when I was writing my English piece because I wrote it without following any rules. Therefore, it was not clear, maybe because I broke free from the rules. (Interview, June 6, 2014)

Two participants also mentioned that creative or free writing is difficult for them. The reason behind this difficulty was that they needed rules to follow. For example, Ishmael said, “I am used to formal academic writing, in my major, which is law. Thus, switching to creative or free writing where I do not have rules to follow was relatively difficult” (Interview, June 6, 2014). Fares said, “When you asked me to write an English poem, I told myself that I would write just two lines. I felt it was very hard; I have not had any experience in English creative writing” (Interview, June 1, 2014). However, Tayeb concluded his opinion about writing an English poem by saying:

To summarize, I mean, the easiness of writing the English poem, there were no strict rules or guidelines to control you, you can break free from them. I mean, it is easy to think about it, write it, organize it, pull the ideas from your head and use them right away, without the need for the rules and regulations of writing Arabic poetry (...) it was smoother, easier, and more interesting to write an English poem because, I guess, the constrains were less. (Interview, June 4, 2014)

The quotes in this section reveals that the participants did not know whether or not the rules exist; however, they mentioned that one possible reason of the difficulty of
writing an English poem was either not knowing the rules or breaking free from the rules.

The following section discusses the prior knowledge of writing English poetry and its effect on the participants’ writing.

**Background Knowledge of English Poetry**

Some participants said that it would be beneficial for them if they had a prior knowledge about writing English poems. When Fahad was discussing how difficult it was to write an English poem and how he managed to complete the writing task, he said, “I tried to use my previous readings, the English literature I read in my BA” (Interview, June 11, 2014). Waleed said that he thought writing an English poem was difficult because “I have not written a poem in my life, so I felt I was not able to express my emotions using poetry” (Interview, June 8, 2014). As for the role of prior knowledge, Abo Met’eb said that his English poem was not of good quality because “I have not read much English literature. The lack of extensive access to English literature has a role in the English version to be not as strong as the Arabic poem” (Interview, June 3, 2014).

Hamad said that one of the difficulties he faced in writing the English poem was that he had not read English poems before; therefore, “I was writing, expressing, if I was able to write or express, but because I have not listened to English poems I was not able to write a poem” (Interview, June 22, 2014).

On the other hand, Ishmael said that, in general, writing in English was easier for him “Because I have been trained to do so; however, this is not the case in writing my Arabic poem” (Interview, June 6, 2014). In saying this, Ishmael suggested that it would be a good idea to train students how to write English poetry. Drawing on the discussion
of poetry conventions and the importance of prior knowledge, the following section
discusses participants’ perception of their poem in English.

Participants’ Perception of the English Poem

When asked to comment on their final product, participants varied in their
evaluation of the English poem. The participants’ comments are presented in this section.

For example, Tayeb was asked about his perception of the English poem he sent the researcher; he showed his perception in this excerpt:

- Tayeb: First, have you read my poem?
- Interviewer: Yes.
- Tayeb: Can you consider what I wrote as a poem?
- Interviewer: Yes, and it was a hard-to-write one.
- Tayeb: Are you kidding me?
- Interviewer: Because it has a rhyme and rhythm.
- Tayeb: Ok, anyways, this, I do not know. (Interview, June 4, 2014)

Fahad’s perception of his English poem is similar to Tayeb’s. He mentioned that it is not a poem and it is vague. He commented on his English poem as follows “I tried to organize my piece in a refined way, and Inshallah the idea, the flash prose can be understood clearly by whoever reads it” (Interview, June 11, 2014). Moreover, when Fahad was asked about his opinion of his English poem, he said:

Writing the English poem was not very difficult. Of course, it needs me to spend time. It did not take more than thirty minutes to write, or maybe forty-five

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5 Inshallah: a religious phrase used by Arabs to mean “God willing”. In addition, it means that one acknowledges that everything that would happen to him is within God’s plans. In this context, it was more likely used to mean that Fahad did his best in writing the poem but he wished that God would help him accomplish this difficult mission.
minutes. It was a short time. I mean, ammm, its difficulty is less than the average. I mean, I studied English and I had a BA in this major, so I have a good background. Therefore, it was easy, it did not take much time, I mean it was super easy to write. It was nothing. (Interview, June 11, 2014).

When asked about his feelings toward his English poem, Abdol said, “When I wrote the English poem, I felt it was better than the Arabic, at least I was able to sing it. It was like a song” (Interview, May 22, 2014). Fares provided two different perceptions of his English poem. As for his own perception, he said "I did not expect myself to write like this and I felt that I could add more lines, though I was not expecting that” (Interview, June 1, 2014). However, when he considered the audience's perspective, he came up with a different judgment “When I was done with the English poem, I felt it was nice. Maybe if a native speaker reads it, maybe (s)he would laugh, I don’t know” (Interview, June 1, 2014). Fahad was also concerned about the way his readers would perceive his English poem. He said, “I tried to form and organize it. The most difficult thing I faced was to form it in a beautiful way that made my readers think of it as a poem and not just a regular text” (Interview, June 11, 2014).

Three participants further problematized their emotional writing in poetry. Their standpoint was that they did not feel the desire to write and they completed the task because they wanted to participate in the study. For example, Abo Met’eb said, “As for the English poem, it was different from the Arabic poem. First, you asked me to write, I mean; you compelled me to write a poem” (Interview, June 3, 2014). Similarly, Hamad said, “Writing a poem will not be possible unless I feel that I am willing to write a poem. Nevertheless, it is difficult to write a poem just because someone asked me to write it”
Fares pointed out that writing the English poem was not a choice that he made. He said, “You made me write in English because usually I use Arabic to write poems. This made the experiment awkward to me” (Interview, June 1, 2014). In other words, completing the task did not mean that they had no difficulty in writing an Arabic poem, as discussed earlier; it rather meant that it was more difficult to write a poem when they did not feel the need to write one.

The main repeated principle of the rules of writing Arabic and English poems showed the opportunities and difficulties that the participant experienced when writing their poems. Writing an Arabic poem was perceived as an opportunity to use previous knowledge that a participant had. However, the lack of knowledge of the rules for writing a poem in English was an opportunity and an obstacle at the same time. For those who liked to follow rules, they felt lost and uncertain whether or not they were writing well. While for those who thought English poetry had fewer or no rules, writing an English poem was an opportunity to express their emotions rather than just looking for words that maintain the rhyme and rhythm of their poem. Another difference between Arabic and English poems, which were mentioned by a number of participants, was the level of expectation. Some participants said that because they were familiar with Arabic poetry, whatever they wrote would be less powerful and meaningful to them because of the comparison they were making between their pieces and the poems they knew. When speaking about the English poems, they said that because they had not read English poems, the poems they wrote were generally fine because they knew no poems with which to compare.
Challenges of Poetry Writing

The participants in the study expressed different opinions on which of the two poems, one being in Arabic and the other in English, was easier to write. In this section, the participants’ responses are reported. The participants also mentioned two main issues that were related to their first and second languages. The first one was the way in which some participants saw the English poem as a mere translation of the Arabic poem. The second issue was the lack of vocabulary in the second language.

Translating Emotions

Some participants mentioned that their poems did not reflect their real emotions. They said that they were translating from one language to the other. For example, Ishmael mentioned that one factor that affected his writing in Arabic was that he translated his English poem into Arabic. He said, “I was not successful in my Arabic poem. I wrote my English poem from my memory while I wrote my Arabic poem as a translation from English to Arabic” (Interview, June 6, 2014).

Waleed, Tayeb, Hamad, Abo Met’eb and Fares showed a similar perception about their English poem. Waleed said, “I feel my English writing has no emotions, probably because I started by writing the Arabic piece, then my emotions were there but not in the English text. This is why I felt it is not connected to me” (Interview, June 8, 2014). Tayeb said:

As for the English poem, because it is not my first language, I translated my Arabic feelings. I failed to reach the level of expression of my feelings that I aimed at. I felt that I was writing as if I was writing something that is not mine. (Interview, June 4, 2014)
He also said, “Without a doubt, the mother-tongue is the, I mean, it should be easier in writing because I am not going to think in Arabic and then translate to English” (Interview, June 4, 2014). Hamad said that writing a poem in English was not like expressing his emotions in an Arabic poem:

When I wrote my Arabic poem, I was really living the incident and I was expressing my emotions. It was easy to write. However, I consider my English poem as a translated version of the Arabic poem. It has no emotions and I was not living the experience during writing that English poem. It was just language without any emotions. (Interview, June 22, 2014)

When asked if translating the Arabic poem was an opportunity for him to learn new words, Hamad said:

Yes, I tried to learn new vocabulary, especially when I was looking for words that serve the rhyme of my English poem. I was looking for new words and I found some. I used these new words and memorized them. (Interview, June 22, 2014)

As for Abo Met’eb, he said, “The difference is that in Arabic I felt that I was expressing myself; however, in the English poem as if I was translating my feelings” (Interview, June 3, 2014). Fares compared the two languages and said:

The influence on the reader, it will be so effective because I am expressing in my native language, which has this connection between language, culture, and my emotions. All of them are connected and linked, while in English there is somehow a gap because you are trying to translate your ideas, or something like this. (Interview, June 1, 2014)
Although some participants perceived translating as a reason why the English poem had fewer emotions and was less connected to them, it was also stated that translating their poems might offer opportunities for second language learners to acquire new vocabulary. In doing this, learners themselves may learn the words they feel are needed to conduct the task; and at the same time, they may use the new words meaningfully. The lack of English vocabulary as an obstacle of writing English poems is discussed in the following section.

**Lack of English Vocabulary**

Some participants mentioned that their limited number of English vocabulary made it difficult for them to write their English poem. For example, Hamad said that his limited English vocabulary was a problem for him and this did not enable him to express himself the way he wanted. He said, “My English vocabulary was indeed limited, therefore my English poem was somehow very poor” (Interview, June 22, 2014). A limited English vocabulary, which proved to be an obstacle when writing the English poem, appeared in Fahad’s response when he said that writing an Arabic poem was easier. He said, “In Arabic, I can even have my own forms and ways to express myself because of my rich vocabulary. However, my English vocabulary is limited because I studied the language for a few years” (Interview, June 11, 2014). Fares pointed out that expressing emotions in English was not a reflection of his true feelings. He referred to his limited vocabulary, which made him struggle to find suitable words that allowed him to express his emotions. He said “In English? No, these were not my real emotions. Writing the poem was not easy because of my limited vocabulary” (Interview, June 1, 2014).
Snake has a similar opinion about the difference between expressing fear in Arabic and English:

It could be said that expressing emotions in Arabic is deeper because of vocabulary, because it is the mother-tongue, because when one is scared (s)he is not expected to remember his second language, this person will express his immediate fear using the first language. (Interview, May 26, 2014)

Waleed also stated that he did not have a sufficient English vocabulary to express himself the way he did in the Arabic piece. He said, “I could not use meaningful words. Because it is my second language, I repeated my words in my writing” (Interview, June 8, 2014).

On the other hand, Ishmael pointed out one disadvantage of writing in Arabic. He said:

In English, I do not know that much vocabulary and I used the language the best way I could. I even do not know if what I wrote is very good or very bad. Therefore, this is the best thing that I can do. However, in Arabic I have read a lot to people who had great works, which makes me know that there is a better level than my writing style. In English, I do not know any better standards and my writing is the best thing according to my knowledge. (Interview, June 6, 2014)

The difficulty in choosing the best lexical items to express emotions was a barrier that most participants were concerned about. Some participants said that they did not know the exact word in English that described fully what they wanted to say because the feeling could not be described in English. Others said that because their vocabulary was limited, they struggled to choose words that conveyed their emotions in English. This lack of vocabulary knowledge could be an opportunity for language teachers who want to
use poetry writing as a means of developing students’ vocabulary. The differences between expressing emotion through writing Arabic and English poems are discussed in detail in the following section.

**Differences in Perceptions of Expressing Fear in Arabic and English**

Some participants reported that writing a poem in Arabic, their first language, was easier. For example, Fahad said that although writing a poem in English was not that difficult, he reported that writing his Arabic poem was easier. In addition, Fahad showed how difficult it was to write the English poem directly and indirectly. He said that the English free verse gave him more freedom in writing, but that writing an Arabic poem with its strict writing rules and forms was easier. He said, “Honestly, I do not know. I still prefer writing an Arabic poem. I feel it is more enjoyable and easier than writing an English poem that is not constrained by any rules” (Interview, June 11, 2014). Fahad also pointed out how difficult it was to write the English poem indirectly. He used the word ‘try’ twelve times when he was speaking about his English poem. However, Fahad just mentioned ‘try’ once when he was asked about his Arabic poem. Following are some examples that appeared in his interview, “a try to write”, "a literary try", "a try to write a flash prose", "I tried to imitate poems I read in the university", "I tried to form it following the literary rules", and "I tried to organize my piece” (Interview, June 11, 2014). Fahad stated that it is a risk if the writer does not follow the rules, by stating, “I prefer to write an Arabic poem following the rules that I know more than taking the risk in writing in English. This is because I do not know the rules of writing English poetry” (Interview, June 11, 2014).
Ishmael said that expressing emotions was easier in Arabic because it is his first language. He said, “Expressing emotions in the Arabic poem was easier because I feel in Arabic. It is my language and it is the language I think in” (Interview, June 6, 2014). Hamad expressed the same standpoint and said, “Speaking Arabic, I can convey my messages or ideas in one way or another. The same goes to expressing my emotions. Therefore, when I expressed my emotions in Arabic I noticed it was much easier than English” (Interview, June 22, 2014). As for Fares, he explained that writing the Arabic poem was easier because:

You are used to your language and culture, so you can use them to express yourself easily. However, when you write in another language, you feel you are culturally constrained in your freedom of writing; it is not like your freedom in writing in Arabic. (Interview, June 1, 2014)

Some participants reported that the English poem was easier to write. For example, when asked why he felt writing in his second language was easier, Ishmael justified his opinion by saying that:

Recently my Arabic vocabulary becomes limited; I have not been exposed to Arabic recently, to the extent that sometimes I cannot recall an Arabic word. This is because I have been reading and writing in English for long and not in Arabic. (Interview, June 6, 2014)

As for Snake, he mentioned that writing the English poem was easier than writing the Arabic one. He said, “The difference between my first and second experiences is that I somehow felt that I was able to express more in English, honestly, I don’t know why” (Interview, May 26, 2014). Later in the interview, Snake mentioned, “When I started
thinking of the topic, I needed some time to prepare myself for it in Arabic. Then, when I switched to English, everything was there in my mind” (Interview, May 26, 2014). As for Tayeb, the English poem was easier to write and it took him a shorter amount of time to complete. He said, “I don’t know, I felt it went smoothly. I mean, the words come to my mind easily. Any word I want comes so fast and easy” (Interview, June 4, 2014). When asked why writing in English was easier, Tayeb referred to his job in which the medium of instruction is English only. He also said that writing the two poems was an achievement. However, “writing the Arabic poem, I think, I felt that I accomplished something harder and bigger because it is harder that writing English poems” (Interview, June 4, 2014). Tayeb said that he intentionally finished the English poem although he could have written more; whereas with the Arabic poem, he could not by any means add more lines. He stated, “As for my English poem, I could have written more lines (…) however, in Arabic, I was not able to add more” (Interview, June 4, 2014).

Some participants elaborated on what they found difficult in their experiences. For example, Ishmael summarized his writing experience in Arabic and English by saying that in general, it was easier for him to write in Arabic because it is his first language. It is a rich language, and the sentence structure is easier for him. However, when Ishmael talked about poetry writing, he said poetry writing was more difficult in Arabic even though he admitted that he does not have enough knowledge to talk about English poetry. He said, “If it is about Arabic poetry, it is more difficult to write than English although I do not know how to write English poetry and I do not know if it has rules” (Interview, June 6, 2014).
Abdol pointed out that expressing emotions using poetry writing in Arabic and English is the same. For him, the difference is whether or not you can be creative in expressing your emotions:

Expressing emotions in Arabic and English is almost the same because you have the same incident in mind, then you write about it. I think the problem is with the language and whether or not you can use the language creatively to convey your feelings. (Interview, May 22, 2014)

This theme discussed the potential challenges that the participants experienced during the process of writing their poems. It also presented their perceptions of the poems they wrote in terms of naming the product and the level of difficulty when writing them.

The challenges listed in this section shed light on the potential difficulties that might appear when applying this pedagogical activity in language classrooms. The following section discusses the participants’ perceptions of expressing fear through poetry writing.

Expressing Emotions through Poetry Writing

The participants had different perceptions regarding expressing their emotions using poetry. The participants’ perceptions covered different issues and were expressed using different strategies. This section will discuss these areas and present short explanations to participants’ responses for clarification.

Difficulty of Expressing Emotions

Some participants said that expressing their emotions in a poem was difficult. For example, Fahad discussed the difficulty of expressing his emotions using English poetry writing throughout the interview. He said, “Expressing your emotions in both languages depends on your language knowledge or mastery. For me, I am more knowledgeable in
Arabic. I know how to write well in English but it cannot be like writing in Arabic” (Interview, June 11, 2014). This justified his use of the word ‘try’ more than ten times to point out that writing a poem was challenging. Here are some examples of how he linked the word ‘try’ to his pieces during the interview, “tried to write/ it was a try to write/ try to write creatively/ try to write a poem/ I tried my best to express my fear/ I tried to follow the rules/ I tried to organize my poem” (Interview, June 11, 2014). Hamad also said that writing a poem about fear was difficult because it required “describing a real feeling, the emotion of fear, in a poem. You can talk to someone without thinking of rhyme and rhythm. But expressing your fear following the rules of writing poems was difficult for the first time” (Interview, June 22, 2014).

Ishmael and Waleed referred to the difficulty of expressing their emotions due to a lack of previous experience. Ishmael said, “Even if I was theoretically trained and given writing guidelines, I don’t think there would be any difference at all. It was my first time ever to share, express, and write about my emotions” (Interview, June 6, 2014). When asked about why it was difficult to express his fear in a poem, Ishmael said, “I think that we are used to expressing some emotions which makes writing about them easier than the emotions that we are not used to sharing with others” (Interview, June 6, 2014). Waleed had a similar opinion. He stated, “While writing my pieces, I noticed that I had the ability to write; however, I need some training to improve my writing. I did not describe many things because I did not know how to express myself” (Interview, June 8, 2014).

As for the difficulty level, Snake did not specify a language to be easier or more difficult to express fear when he stated, “If the task is to write in Arabic, I will write in Arabic; I have no problem. If it is to write in English, I will write in English. However, I
prefer to write in Arabic” (Interview, May 26, 2014). Tayeb also mentioned that expressing fear in Arabic and English is similar, “I think they are similar and there is no big difference between them” (Interview, June 4, 2014).

Some participants in the study reported that there is a significant difference between expressing positive and negative emotions. For example, Ishmael said:

I believe negative emotions are expressed easily because they are stronger, more drastic, and they have more lasting effect on us. As for positive and nice emotions, they can be expressed but you forget them later and you no more feel them while negative emotions usually stay longer in your memory. (Interview, June 6, 2014)

Abo Met’eb pointed out that if he were to express a positive emotion in poetry writing, the product would be better. He said, “Definitely, to me, if it were a positive emotion, I would probably have written in a smoother and more comfortable way” (Interview, June 3, 2014). Waleed said, “Expressing your self-confidence or happiness will be better; it will be encouraging to write. However, negative emotions might be deeper because they go out from the depth of your heart” (Interview, June 8, 2014). Fahad also pointed out this distinction between positive and negative emotions. He said:

Expressing emotions is a good thing in general and it is not difficult. For example, courage makes you proud of yourself but it does not encourage you to express that you are brave. However, the emotions of fear, sadness, and longing are the ones we like to express and write about more than the emotion of courage. (Interview, June 11, 2014)

Fahad also said:
It is the best method, when one shares and expresses his/her emotions. One does not feel the need to express positive emotions, these emotions are lived and enjoyed. However, negative emotions, sadness and fear, sharing them makes one relieved. I felt from my inside that I felt better after writing my poem. (Interview, June 11, 2014)

The interviews showed that some participants struggled to write their poems because they felt that their emotions could not be reflected in the writing. For example, Ishmael pointed out the mismatch between the emotion that was felt and the reflection of that emotion when writing. He problematized this by stating:

Writing my poems was hard, because when you write you have the feeling that there is a mismatch between what you wanted to say and the product that you had. It is not easy to make your readers feel the same way you felt or to present them with the whole picture of the incident. (Interview, June 6, 2014)

To make the point that emotions are difficult to express, Waleed compared academic writing to emotional writing. He said that with academic writing, you have sources for the information that should help with writing, but this is not necessarily the case in emotional writing. Waleed said that he felt expressing emotions was hard because “You do not have sources to cite your emotions. They are your emotions, they are inside you and expressing them is difficult” (Interview, June 8, 2014). Fares said that writing a poem was challenging; however, reflecting his emotions the way he wanted was even more difficult. Fares said, “I mean, I wanted to express my fear but it was somehow hard. When I was done, I felt that I was able to add more lines but I was not able to express what I really wanted to say” (Interview, June 1, 2014). Tayeb said that because the
English poem was a translation of the Arabic one, “I was reading it after I was done with it; I read for the second time, I felt that these are not my real emotions that I was feeling” (Interview, June 4, 2014).

Abo Met’eb disagreed with Ishmael, Waleed, Fares, and Tayeb’s point of view regarding how emotions can be reflected in creative writing. Abo Met’eb said:

I was not just describing the accident or the incident, no, I was, my inner emotions, some phrases, oh, I mean, when you say a phrase you feel it means something to you, a word can dramatically express your emotions more than merely describing the incident itself. I mean the words express your inner emotions. (Interview, June 3, 2014)

The nine participants reiterated similar difficulties in regard to expressing fear, which they mentioned when asked about their perceptions of poetry writing. It seemed from their responses that the role of this particular emotion on their writing was secondary. The main concern for most participants was still the previously mentioned barriers, which are the rules of poetry writing, lack of lexical items, lack of previous knowledge, and the difficulty of reflecting the inner emotions into written texts. The analysis of the participants’ interviews asserted that perhaps the greatest difficulty was to meet the expectations of the audience who would read the participants’ poems. This section also revealed a disagreement among participants on the preference to expressing negative or positive emotions in poetry writing. The following section focuses on whether or not the participants enjoyed the experiment of expressing emotions and why they did so.
Perception of Expressing Emotions

Some participants valued the experiment, whereas others reported negative impressions. Ishmael mentioned that he liked expressing his fear using poetry because “I feel relieved when I write about my feelings. I am relieved because I am sharing the moments when I felt scared, happy, or whatever. Sharing my emotions makes me feel better” (Interview, June 6, 2014). Waleed said, “I was relieved; I was tranquil after I was done with my poem. My fear from that incident left my mind completely” (Interview, June 8, 2014). Fares said, “It is a chance to share your emotions. When you express your emotions, you feel that you want to continue writing. When you are done, it stays forever as something you can look at even after so many years” (Interview, June 1, 2014). Fares then mentioned that one factor that helped him express fear was that nobody would critique what he wrote. He said, “You talk to this paper, express your emotions, it is something special just for you, and nobody can ever read it, which makes you free to write everything that makes you scared. This will somehow relieve your fear” (Interview, June 1, 2014). Hamad said, “When I express my emotions in a poem, even a short one, I often feel relieved. Expressing my negative emotions using poetry is like crying for me” (Interview, June 22, 2014).

On the other hand, Abo Met’eb did not feel confident about expressing his fear using poetry. He reported two points of view regarding his experience. Commenting on expressing fear before he wrote his poems, Abo Met’eb said:

When you sent me the task, honestly speaking, it was, I felt a little, scared. I felt as if I was recalling and living these fearful moments for a second time. Talking
about fear, you know, is scary, we always try to avoid fear, get away from even thinking about the moments that we were terrified in. (Interview, June 3, 2014)

When asked about his feelings after he wrote the poems, Abo Met’eb said:

God, after I lived this experience, I feel that I have no interest in repeating or doing it again, I mean expressing something bad happened in the past. Because while writing, I felt that, I mean, probably if I write once, a second and third time, I will live my annoying past that I went through. (Interview, June 3, 2014)

Fahad felt the same when he was thinking of the incident and writing about it. He said that he relived those emotions of sadness and fear he experienced in the car accident:

When I started writing my poem, I felt as if I was living the accident I had, when it started, I remembered the look, the people who were in my car, the accident, blood, things like that. You know, the sorrow I felt that time, fear, sadness, pain, stress, as if, when I was writing, as if I went back in time to that car accident. They were not exactly the same emotions but they were similar. (Interview, June 11, 2014)

The interviews with the participants showed that they do not agree on their willingness to express their fear. The experiment was described as a negative experience for some and a somewhat positive experience for the other participants. For example, Abo Met’eb, whose poem was about a death due to a car accident, faced a serious problem when he tried to express his fear using poetry writing. He said:

While trying to write a poem, I felt that I could not express myself. Why? Because I was expressing, or I mean, I was writing about a feeling that I lived. I got more depressed and I was so upset. I got more scared. I was trying to escape
from writing about this experience as if I was trying to escape from the real incident that I had. (Interview, June 3, 2014)

When asked why he wanted to escape from expressing his fear, Abo Met’eb said “This incident is an old memorial, and it was over, I forgot it and its consequences, I don’t have the desire to share or talk about that incident. I want to forget about it. It is already over” (Interview, June 3, 2014).

Snake, Hamad, and Waleed shared with Abo Met’eb the same unwillingness to recall the fearful moments that they had lived. For example, Snake said that remembering the incident he wrote about made him happy and sad at the same time. He was sad because he remembered the scary moments and happy because he had overcome them:

I mean, as an emotion, fear, I mean, these are memories, ok, you overcame this incident that made you scared, thank God it had no bad ramifications, I mean, it is mixture of, you know, trying to recall the fear you lived and the happiness that you overcame this fear. (Interview, May 26, 2014)

Hamad expressed that his writing made him feel uncomfortable by saying:

The emotion of fear? When you live the experience especially that I do not like to recall something scary that I had in the past. I do not like this memory so it was hard to think about that incident and then write a poem about it. (Interview, June 22, 2014)

Waleed expressed his discomfort with writing about an incident that scared him. He said, “I felt that my fears were in the past and I overcame that incident. I do not know why if I overcame this fear, why can’t I just forget it?” (Interview, June 8, 2014).
For many participants, the emotion of fear was discouraging to write about in their poems because of its nature. They said that this emotion reminded them of moments of their lives that they want to forget. However, some participants reported that recalling these scary moments helped them feel relieved because they shared these moments with the readers. The following section discussed a culturally situated assumption, within a small sample of nine Saudi participants, of the perceived gendered identities when expressing fear through poetry.

‘Masculinity’ in the Saudi Context and Expressing Emotions

The participants in this study discussed the role of their gender on expressing fear. They were not discussing it based on the biological differences between men and women; they were rather telling what and how the entire Saudi culture (schools, parents, peers, literature, etc.) has shaped the two gender's identities. Ishmael said that his gender does not prevent him from expressing his emotions. He said, “In general, I don’t feel that I have a problem in expressing my emotions” (Interview, June 6, 2014). Nevertheless, during the interview, Ishmael related being an adult to having fewer emotions, “I was a kid and a teacher beat me. I had been in tears for long whenever I remember this teacher and this painful experience. However, when I get older, a lot of my emotions decline” (Interview, June 6, 2014). Fahad said that one’s gender is not a real factor that helps or prevents one to express his/her emotions. For him, expressing oneself depends on his/her personality and whether (s)he finds someone trustworthy:

Usually men and women from the same culture and context express their emotions similarly. We all like to share and express our emotions. However, there are people who are more introvert, people who are more selective and
conservative because they are scared of people who use the personal stories they share against them. People are different. In general, if one finds a person who can be trusted, (s)he will feel it is safe to share his/her emotions. This would make one feel endless relief. (Interview, June 11, 2014)

Tayeb said that choosing the emotion of fear was felicitous. However, he reported that not many people within the Saudi conservative culture like to share this emotion because of two factors:

Because, probably, it is your personal life, and it includes expressing being weak. We do not like to express our weakness, so we show others the good things and hide the bad ones. One does not express and tell others that I was broken at that particular time and this incident happened then I was scared. (Interview, June 4, 2014)

Other participants reported different points of view. For example, Abo Met’eb mentioned that the Saudi culture pressures men to conceal their emotions. He pointed out that although the car accident made him terrified, he could not write this fact. Abo Met’eb said:

I, I, indeed, I felt this cultural pressure while I was writing my poem. I mean, I felt something within myself, I mean, yes, I admit that I was scared. However, for sure I did not reach that level at which I can convey this feeling while writing and say I was totally horrified, which was what really happened to me, I was really scared, and my feelings of fear and the experience were not easy. (Interview, June 11, 2014)
Abo Met’eb elaborated on his own perception of the image of masculinity and femininity within the Saudi culture and said:

I think females are different in expressing emotions in writing. Females are associated to emotional things more than males. Men can overcome emotional things, and they get busy with life then they forget. However, I believe females are more capable of recalling emotions and incidents, especially incidents that have remarkable effects on them. I believe it is not the personality, I mean yes it depends on your personality but still it is different between males and females. (Interview, June 11, 2014)

Abo Met’eb summarized his standpoint on the role of gendered identities in expressing one’s emotions by saying:

Females are more capable of recalling the emotion of sadness, and indeed tears, I mean, for men it is different from females’ tears. Females cry because of normal things and it is relatively a routine for them. However, for men it means something huge, or, I mean something awful. Fear also, the emotion of fear for men they should, or, the people in your society supposes that men are not scared of anything. They are the ones who remove the feeling of fear, but for females, fear is normal. (Interview, June 11, 2014)

Ishmael referenced the difficulty that Saudi men have in expressing or sharing emotions, verbally or in written forms, to the conservative culture of Saudi Arabia and to the educational system. In other words, he reported that males and females express emotions differently not because of their biological differences, but rather because of how the culture had shaped each gender in certain ways, which has now become the
norm. He said that in an American school, his six-year child was asked to express and share his personal stories whereas Ishmael himself did not have the chance to do so until he studied English in the United States. For Ishmael, the Saudi culture puts restrictions on men while these restrictions on expressing emotions are not necessarily fostered on Saudi women. Ishmael said:

I believe it is not only because we were born men or women. The way we were raised, our society as a whole is engaged. Our Saudi society fosters hiding your emotions. It is not a good thing to express or share your emotions. Especially men, in fact, in our society, expressing emotions for men is girlish. Therefore, and generally speaking, sharing your emotions in our Saudi culture is no good. (Interview, June 6, 2014)

Waleed mentioned that, from his experiences in Saudi Arabia and the United States, women from both cultures find it easier to express their emotions. He said:

Women express their emotions better than men do. They find it easier to express their emotions. Usually, it takes my male friends two years or more to say ‘I love you’, this if they say it, while with girls it usually takes two or three months to say the same. (Interview, June 8, 2014)

Although the number of participants in this qualitative study cannot be used to generalize their perception of the Saudi culture and how it shapes each gender’s identity, the participants’ responses served in realizing the cultural dichotomies in Saudi Arabia in regard to expressing emotions. On a pedagogical level, the participants reported challenges that male students potentially face when the task contradicts their own perceived masculine image. However, selecting emotions that are culturally associated to
one gender (for example, courage for men) might be an opportunity to write with confidence.

To summarize, this chapter reported on nine Saudi participants’ experiences in expressing their fear through writing poetry. The most repeated notion was the difficulty to meet the perceived level of expectations of the audience. Furthermore, considering the audience affected the participants’ perception of their written pieces, specifically in regard to naming them. Another repeated concern was in regard to the rules of poetry writing, which resulted in barriers throughout the writing process for several participants. Overall, the perceived Saudi culture norms, concerning emotional writing, were presented in this chapter. The following chapter discusses these findings in detail.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to investigate in depth the perception of nine Saudi participants' poetry writing experiences to express their emotion. The goal of the study was to ask teachers of English and educational institutions to consider emotional writing as a pedagogical activity in English teaching classrooms in Saudi Arabia. The study presented the responses of nine Saudi participants in regard to emotional writing and the participants’ concerns and suggestions to implement this method in language teaching in Saudi classrooms.

To reach these goals, the study was guided by three research questions:

1. In what ways do ESL Saudi students express fear using poetry writing in Arabic?
2. In what ways do ESL Saudi students express fear using poetry writing in English?
3. What are the differences in ESL Saudi students’ perceptions of expressing fear in Arabic and English?
4. What are the cultural constraints, cultural characteristics, and culturally located perceptions of poetry writing within the Saudi context?

Based on these questions, this chapter presents the main themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants in the study. Each theme is discussed based on the literature and the collected data. Following this is the implication of this study regarding teacher education and the pedagogical ramifications. Lastly, some suggestions for future research and limitations of the study are provided.
Discussion of the Findings

The Perception of Poetry in Saudi Language Classrooms

The most common theme in this study is the participants’ hesitation to write poetry or to perceive what they wrote as poems. This resistance to try writing a poem can be understood based on the way in which many Saudis perceive poetry writing and its strict rules. This finding asserted Shukri’s (2014) claim that students in Saudi language classrooms write “in the traditional style where it abides by rules, and a certain structure” (p. 191). Language learners are part of their culture and they are affected by its main norms and beliefs. Chin (2014) said, “No creative writer writes in isolation” (p. 120). Chin added, “The writer carries within him/her a reservoir of lived experiences and knowledge that is rooted in the social practices and relationships formed within specific contexts” (p. 120). The perception, that is rooted in the Saudi context, about poetry is that it is “the chief art of the Arabs” (Al-Tami, 1988, p. 11) and it is governed by the rules of rhyme and meter (Ziadeh, 1986). As a result, practicing writing “poetry in ESL classes at Saudi universities has always been considered as a taboo” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 127).

Hanauer (2014) pointed out that many of his students came from educational backgrounds in which the focus in writing is on grammar and word choice. He also mentioned that poetry writing is completely new for the majority of ESL learners. Therefore, some of the participants’ responses showed in this study are not unique to Saudi learners of English. Hanauer (2014) said that he has not had any single ESL student who could not write an English poem. Although most participants in this study reported they could not write poetry, they did write two poems in their L1 and L2. In other words,
one difficulty of emotional writing lies in their beliefs regarding poetry and not in their linguistic abilities to write poems.

The literature, supported by the participants’ responses, reveals that the Arabic and English literature courses focus on the theory but not the practice. Teachers ask students to read poetry, short stories, and novels; however, they rarely “implement creative writing activities” (Shukri, 2014, p. 192). That is to say, students are exposed to these rules of poetry writing and learn them by heart but they are discouraged to use the rules to write poems. Students internalize the idea that writing poetry should be left to people who have this innate ability. It also fosters the strict definition of what a poem is and how it must be formatted to be considered a poem. This is why some of the participants, who wrote two poems each, did not feel confident to name their pieces of writing a poem, and chose other terms such as flash prose, text, and writing. Pennycook (2007a) pointed out, “Language use in any context is subject to the interpretation of those languages through local language ideologies” (p. 112). Therefore, using the term poetry constrains some participants’ willingness to practice emotional writing while changing the term to flash or prose poem would encourage students to express their emotions.

Changing the term from poetry to another one would be an example of localizing emotional writing to suit the Saudi culture. In other words, poetry writing as a pedagogical activity in language classrooms in the Saudi context should be “localized, indigenized, [and] re-created in the local” (Pennycook, 2007b, p. 8). In doing this, teachers will follow the bottom-up approach in meeting the classrooms teaching goals rather than the top-down approach. Appadurai (2001) said that the transferred pedagogies that are to be implemented in a new context should be constantly reshaped and
contextualized based on the local needs and norms. One way of reshaping and contextualizing poetry writing in a context that value writing according strict rules is to break free from the term that might be the barrier that prevents students from expressing their emotions.

**Early Implementing of Emotional Writing**

The participants in this study expressed that the task was difficult because it was their first time writing poems. Some of them said creative writing in general is not practiced in language classrooms. Others specified that they can write any genre except poetry and said they have not thought of writing poems in schools or after graduation. This coincides with Ahmed’s (2014) claim, “To introduce poetry in ESL classes at Saudi universities has always been considered as a taboo. It has never been tried and incorporated in ESL curriculum” (p. 127). Several participants mentioned the mastery of poetry rules and the lack of knowledge as a barrier that made expressing their emotions a difficult task to do. For example, Tayeb said that he found writing a poem difficult because he has no “previous experience, or because I am not a specialist in this field” (Interview, June 3, 2014). What Tayeb expressed correlates with Hyland’s (2003b) opinion that writing practices are reflections of how members of a certain culture think.

In fact, Hamad was the only participant who reported that writing the Arabic poem was easy because he has listened to many poems in Arabic. This familiarity made it easier for him to imitate the ways in which poets write poems (Interview, June 22, 2014).

The perception that poetry writing is an innate ability, which was reported by some participants in the study added to the claims of Shukri (2014) and Ahmed (2014) that creative writing in general and poetry writing in specific have not been practiced in
the Saudi language classrooms, made it difficult for the participants to feel confident to try writing their poems. The recruiting stage revealed this difficulty when 71% of the invited people (of whom are relatives and friends of the researcher) to the study refused to participate, saying that they are not poets and they could not complete the tasks. Most of them told the researcher that they were willing to participate if the study were to write in prose. Perceiving poetry writing as a natural gift was reported during the interviews as well. For example, Ishmael said, "I feel it is a gift and not a thing that you can acquire or learn. Therefore, you either have this gift or you do not have it” (Interview, June 6, 2014). Similarly, Tayeb said that poetry needs “a certain level of understanding and recognition in order to reach the level that a poet reaches” (Interview, June 4, 2014). The opinions that Ishmael and Tayeb expressed can be used to justify perceiving poetry writing as a taboo in the Saudi language classrooms. The local culture practices assign the privilege to write poetry to the people who have this innate ability and, at the same time, distance the others from practicing poetry writing. Based on this understanding of poetry writing exclusiveness to some people in the Saudi culture, language learners have little or no chance to acquire previous knowledge about writing poetry.

The Differences in Expressing Fear Using Arabic and English Poetry

The participants’ responses revealed that they did not agree on the difficulty of writing the poems. They reported different opinions regarding the similarities and differences between their emotional writing in Arabic and English. Some said that following the rules of Arabic poetry made it easier for them to express their fear in a poem. For these participants, not knowing the rules of English poetry writing made them feel lost and uncertain of what and how to write meaningfully.
Other participants said the Arabic poems were easier because Arabic is their first language. They know more vocabulary words and they have read and listened to many Arabic poems. Therefore, it was easy for them to express their emotions and convey the messages they wanted to tell the readers about. However, some participants reported that they had difficulties in writing the English poems due to their lack of knowledge of the best lexical item that describes their emotion. Some of them wanted to follow the Arabic rules of rhyme and rhythm; therefore, they found it difficult to find words that match the rhyme of the poems. Chamcharatsri (2012) said that ESL learners might feel frustrated and discouraged to write when they cannot find suitable words that best describe their emotions. It was reported more than once that even in Arabic (all participants’ first language) it was difficult to find meaningful words that would rhyme with the poems’ ending. However, for those participants who have listened or read poetry more often, it was easier for them to find emotive words that best describe their emotions and lexical items that rhyme better in their poems. For some participants, the recent exposure to one language, Arabic or English, was a reason why they could recall the lexical items faster and easier than the other language. In saying this, they refer to the idea that it is easier to recall the active vocabulary than recalling lexical items that have not been used recently. Moreover, some participants reported that the emotions in their poems did not reflect what they really wanted to say. They said their emotions were difficult to transform into poems that convey their real fears to their readers. For these participants, it does not matter which language they are using to write their poems. They reported that it is difficult to find emotive words that make the reader live the same or similar feelings that the writer experienced.
Other participants attributed the easiness of writing English poems to the training they had when they were learning English in the United States. They reported that they were taught in language institutes how to write creatively in English. However, they said they had never been trained to do so in Arabic. In saying this, the participants argued that teaching English in the United States is different from the teacher-centered teaching style in Saudi Arabian schools. In teacher-centered language classrooms, students have no or little chance to write creatively as said by Chick (1996). Shukri (2014) pointed out the lack of creative writing practices in Saudi language classrooms as well. She said teachers are required to use certain textbooks; therefore, they have no “time to implement creative writing activities” (Shukri, 2014, p. 192).

Some participants, when comparing their Arabic and English poems, said that the English poems were mere translations of the Arabic ones. In saying this, they meant they did not express their emotions while writing the English poems. They were rather translating word by word. For them, writing the English poem was easier and faster, but it was not enjoyable and it had no real emotions. This finding is similar to Dewaele’s (2008) study in which his participants reported that expressing emotions in L1 was easier than doing so in L2. Some participants pointed out that their emotions are related to their first language. They said that when they want to express the feelings, they use their L1. The relatedness between one’s emotions and the first language makes emotional writing real in L1 but not necessarily in his/her L2. For example, Tayeb commented on his English poem, “I felt that these are not my real emotions” (Interview, June 4, 2014). Therefore, it was easier to translate the poems from L1 to L2; however, this translation will affect the authenticity of expressing emotions. On the other hand, translating the
poems could be of pedagogical value not so much in terms of expressing emotion, but in
terms of language awareness, vocabulary acquisition, and perhaps other linguistic
elements such as pragmatics, syntax and semantics.

Participants’ Perception of Expressing Fear

The participants’ perception of expressing fear using poetry varied among them. Most of the participants said they were relieved and felt better because they shared their personal stories. They liked sharing their emotions and thought it was a useful way to overcome their fears. This finding asserts Hanauer’s (2012) standpoint, “on a deep level every human being wishes to express and explore the meaning of their own lives” (p. 112). Part of discovering oneself is knowing how to deal with our fears and how to overcome this feeling.

Few participants said they did not like the experiment because it made them recall the fearful moments of their lives that they have been trying to forget. These participants said they would be more interested in expressing their positive emotions than expressing negative emotions that made them recall difficult times they had in the past. Painful experiences might be the reason why some people refuse to recall these moments. They do not like to live the same horrible experiences for a second time. Many people in the Middle East, as well as other parts of the world, have gone through various terrifying experiences such as being tortured in prison. Others have relatives who were killed or forced to flee the country. In such cases, recalling these moments and writing about them is a risk that few teachers are willing to take. In other words, some meaningful literacy practices could affect the students and teachers’ lives because classrooms are not safe or free places to express ideas. Making classrooms safe places to express ideas is not a
decision that can necessarily be made by teachers or even institutions. There are many factors to consider, including the social roles of educational principles, dominant cultural norms and expectations, and most importantly the political atmosphere that is perceived as problematic in some countries in the world.

Finally, the role of gender and the assumption that men find it difficult to express their fear was supported by some participants and rejected by others. Those who found it difficult to express fear said they did not want to express their weakness at a certain time of their lives. For them, expressing emotions is related to being a child or a girl. This makes them vulnerable in the Saudi society, which has a certain assumption of what it means to be a man. This finding can be aligned with the findings of Corso (2006) who pointed out that her male students did not like expressing their emotions because of two reasons, “the fear of expression and the fear of failure” (p. 167). The others that reported their willingness to express fear said that part of being a human is to have emotions. They said we all are expected to live happy and sad moments regardless of our gender.

Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized on the Saudi context, although it can be a starting point to investigate the challenges, opportunities, similarities, and differences in emotional writing that are related to the gender of the writer. Thus, more sociocultural studies need to be conducted to understand the role of the Saudi cultural norms that make both genders “successfully fulfill their designated social roles” (Brody, 2000, p. 28).

**Methodological Implications**

Based on the findings of the current study, there are a number of pedagogical implications that are linked to teaching/learning English in the Saudi Arabian context.
The literature discussed earlier combined with the responses of the participants assert the need for repositioning language learners to be the center of the teaching and learning process following Hanauer’s (2012) strategy in situating “this living, thinking, experiencing and feeling person at the center of the language learning process” (p. 106). Teachers and language institutes need to discover the beauty of humanizing language classrooms. They should bring life to their pedagogical classroom activities and engage students’ lived experiences and personal stories as endless sources that stimulate students to write about concepts they like to share with their teacher and classmates. This methodology could help students enjoy language learning activities that are “connected to and built upon a student’s prior knowledge and real-life experiences” (Speigner-Littles and Anderson, 1999, p. 204).

There are, on the other hand, some challenges that should be considered prior to applying emotional writing in language classrooms in Saudi Arabia. Based on the interviews that the researcher conducted, the terms "poems", "poetry", and "poet" were the source of confusion and resistance to emotional writing. Of the 32 people asked to participate in the study, 23 declined to participate because they claimed to not be poets. Even those who did partake in this study did not feel comfortable describing their work as a poem. One way to overcome this obstacle is to ask students to express their emotions in writing without mentioning the term poem or poetry. Using other terms, such as 'writing', 'poetic prose', 'flash prose', and 'text', could help students ignore the transferred rules of Arabic poetry writing and not feeling marginalized because they are not poets according to the culturally assumed rules of who can write poems. As for other challenges that teachers might have with their students, teachers should use whatever
works in their local context to help them accomplish the strategic plans they have for their classrooms. In doing this, it is always helpful to put Kumaravadivelu’s (2003a) definition of macrostrategies in mind:

Guiding principles derived from historical, theoretical, empirical, and experimental insights related to L2 learning and teaching. A macrostrategy is thus a general plan, a broad guideline based on which teachers will be able to generate their own situation-specific, need-based microstrategies or classroom techniques. (p. 38)

Therefore, Saudi teachers of English should develop their pedagogical skills in teaching the language and “begin to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 43).

To move to a more humanized language classroom in the Saudi context, some steps need to be followed. Creative writing should be implemented in Arabic and English language classrooms. Using poetry to express emotions could be taught at an early stage of students’ lives. The cultural assumption is that poetry is an innate ability and that it has strict rules; however, students should be encouraged to write poetry without thinking about these rules. In doing this, students will feel the beauty of expressing their emotions and write about issues that they can relate to. Teachers can help students by giving examples of texts that are about real people’s stories and experiences and ask students to compare them to the texts they used to read and write. In other words, teachers should make students believe that there is a difference between a text that reflects their inner emotions and other texts found in textbooks. Hanauer (2014) talked about students’ possible resistance to write poetry. He mentioned that to encourage students to write, his
strategy is, “when reading my students’ poetry, I respond not so much as a teacher
directing change but rather as an interested and informed reader” (Hanauer, 2014, p. 21).
Kramsch (2004) talked about the classroom culture and said the language classrooms
have students from different backgrounds and beliefs. Teachers should be aware of the
dominant culture that is related to the new pedagogical approaches they want to
introduce. However, she pointed out that these new approaches should be investigated
and studied in order to provide a better understanding of how to implement them in
language classrooms. She noticed, “Many learners resist the self-evident and invisible
culture teachers try to impose” (Kramsch, 2004, p. 48). She agreed with Hanauer’s way
of introducing poetry writing in a new context. Kramsch (2004) pointed out writing
poetry in language classrooms enables language learners to transform their memories and
experiences into written words. She mentioned that teachers could clarify to their
students that writing poetry “is not intended to test their knowledge of literary forms and
traditions” (Kramsch, 2004, p. 171). Rather, poetry writing is a pedagogical activity that
enables students to bring the outside, their lived experiences, to the inside, the language
classrooms.

As for the responses that some participants provided with regard to translating
their poems, teachers should notice that translation is a type of creative writing.
According to Perteghella (2013), “All writers are translators. Creative writing is, above
all, a translational process” (p. 195). She argued, “Translators are, and have been
throughout history, innovators, bringing new forms of writing to their culture and
language” (p. 208). She also pointed out, “Translation is not just a linguistic,
transformative process involving two language signs” (p. 204). She mentioned that
translation happens in various contexts such as political, social, and geographical contexts. Therefore, the translation of poems can be creative and meaningful as well.

**Limitations**

One limitation of the study is the number of participants. As a qualitative study, this research does not aim at generalizing the findings to the Saudi context. It is a contribution to the field of sociolinguistics in which the researcher suggested implementing meaningful literacy in the Saudi Arabian context. In conducting such a study, the researcher followed Hanauer’s (2012) strategy that calls for humanizing language classrooms by positioning learners in the center of learning and teaching the language. Therefore, this study cannot stand alone and should be followed by other studies to have deeper understanding of the Saudi context.

The study focused on one emotion, namely fear. This focus limited the researcher from comparing participants’ emotional writing among different emotions and determining whether there would be differences and/or similarities when participants express more than one emotion. The participants in this study were also asked to use poetry writing as the only writing genre. The resistance to writing poetry could be overcome if participants could write personal stories, memoires, etc. Finally, because of the difficulty of access, the participants of the study were all males, which prevented the researcher from having a better understanding of the Saudi context.

**Future Studies**

As for future studies, the researcher suggests that more research be conducted using different emotions with different writing genres, such as personal essays/narratives, memoirs, and stories. Moreover, a study about emotional writing should also be
conducted on Saudi female English speakers to have a better understanding of this particular context regarding the use of meaningful literacy. It could be beneficial as well to ask participants to engage in emotional writing without specifying a particular language. Therefore, these participants have the opportunity to reflect on why they chose to write in either their native language, second language, or both.

**Conclusion**

Prior to conducting this study, I was one of the Saudi teachers of English who think that emotional writing through poems is not applicable by any means within Saudi English classrooms. I was constraining myself to rules that other people, just like us, established hundreds of years ago. Conducting this study has given me the courage and enthusiasm to go back to Saudi Arabia to apply this pedagogical practice in my classrooms. In doing this, I could problematize the culturally situated assumption that writing poetry is a natural gift some people have and the rest do not. Humanizing our language classrooms could help teachers and students to enjoy language teaching and learning. I am sure that this study will help me as a future teacher and researcher.


Duncan, V. (2012). *Teaching poetry to middle school students to improve writing proficiency*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Walden University, Minneapolis, MN.


Appendix A

RTAF Approval

May 21, 2014

Ahmed Mohammed Alharfi
200 Meridian Drive
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Mr. Alharfi:

Now that your research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, I have reviewed your Research Topic Approval Form and approved it.

The Thesis/Dissertation Manual, additional resources, and information to help you start writing can be found at http://www.iup.edu/graduatestudies/thesis/default.aspx

Your RTAF indicates your anticipated graduation date as May 2015. This means that you must defend by no later than April 1, 2015 and all necessary documents are due by this date. A description of the required documents can be accessed at http://www.iup.edu/psa/ads.aspx?did=118419. Your thesis or dissertation must be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies & Research by April 15, 2015 if you desire to graduate by your anticipated date. You must apply for graduation by May 1, 2015. For deadlines for subsequent graduation dates, please access http://www.iup.edu/psa/ads.aspx?did=15653.

Finally, if you change your topic, the scope or methodology of your project, or your committee, a new Research Topic Approval Form must be completed.

I wish you well and hope you find this experience to be rewarding.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean, School of Graduate Studies and Research

cc: Dr. Yaw Asamah, Dean
Dr. Gloria Park, Graduate Coordinator
Dr. Curtis Porter, Thesis Chair
Ms. Julie Bussard, Secretary
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

May 1, 2014

You are invited to participate in this study, Using Poetry to Express Emotions in Arabic and English as Second Language. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you prefer to participate in the study or not. If you have any questions before making your informed decision please ask. You are invited to participate because you are a Saudi male student who is intermediate or advanced in English.

I am interested in studying how Saudi male students express their fear in poetry writing. I would like this study to be a step forward in improving the Saudi English as second/foreign language classrooms teaching. In this study, I would like to know if there is a difference in expressing emotions in Arabic and English. This study will be a starting point for teachers and scholars in the Saudi context who would like to improve the way of teaching English in Saudi context.

Participation in this study requires participants to write two poems in English and Arabic followed by two separate interviews after poetry writing sessions.

I would like you kindly to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary. Please notice that you can withdraw at any time you want. All the information you give the researcher will be confidential and will be used for the purpose of this particular study. You have the right to see your transcribed text if you want to do so.

If you have any questions or additional information, please feel free to contact the researcher by email or cellphone. You can also contact the thesis chair for information or withdrawal.

I appreciate your time and cooperation and look forward to having you in my study.

Sincerely,

Project Director: Ahmed Alharfi
Candidate for MA TESOL
Email: jsgr@iup.edu
Phone: 206-596-6840

Thesis Chair: Dr. Curtis Porter
Professor of English Department
Email: curtis.porter@iup.edu
Phone: 724-357-3965
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>participant</th>
<th>Arabic poem (translated if it is different from the English poem)</th>
<th>English poem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tayeb</td>
<td>ضماق الصدر والهم زار الضلوع ليلة حزن مرّت ما حسبت حسابها بعد الكبر والعمر ليش الدموع ذنب(ن) حصل والنفس نالت عقابها دوام النعم والعز تطلب خضوع زيد الشكر والنعم تفتح بابها حار الطبيب وقال عندك اسبوع ريح النفس وارتاح تكسر نابها قلت الصبر بابي يهد المنوع واستغفر لذنوبك انت أدرى بها ثم الصلاة على النبي خير الدروع والتوية أحمد الله يوم انجبها</td>
<td>Is it real or it came by chance Life is easy encouraging you to enhance Wealthy healthy poor sick or whatever Temporary you are and not staying forever In one night your calculations went false Memories not responding to brain calls Am I getting old or something wrong? Headache is controlling mind so strong I believe my system entering infinite loop Please let me concentrate on the scoop Couldn’t sleep all day all night Leave me alone please don’t fight Doctor is saying don’t worry you will be fine Body Tests and examinations were all mine Thanks Allah for all the great bounties Forgive me and help me doing my duties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When someone forgets
And there is no time to do anything
In my school
There was an aggressive teacher
That beat students who did not do their homework
Students became fearful from that evil teacher
Once I was sad and crying
I forgot to do my homework
When the teacher saw me
He asked: what is wrong?
I told him the truth
He said: it’s fine, son
There would be no punishment for today

The officer asked me to prove that we are legal. I had a license but my wife and son had no documents.
I tried to explain in poor English that I can run home, and bring everything but "You will be deported" he was shouting
بشكل جيد، مما فهمته انه سيقوم بأخذنا لمركز التفتيش ومن ثم سنطرد من الولايات، وكانت إجابتي على فعله، جبنا على ذلك الحال لمدة 10 دقائق تقريباً، عندما تقدم ضابط آخر وتتحدث مع الضابط الأول لبرهة ثم طلب مني المغادرة على الفور، غادرت بسرعة ولم أعد بعدها لمركز المدينة خشية الوقوع في حدث مماثل طوال فترة إقامتي في المنطقة.

aggressively.

Finally, an African American officer approached, talked to the white angry officer, then asked me to leave immediately.

A horrible experience in my first month in the US that results in my decision not to drive even close to Detroit downtown ever again. I lived in the area for 18 months, and visited there only once

Abo Met’eb

كئيبة هي الحياة
ملمة مضجرة كريبة
ساعاتها قرون
دقائقها سنون
ثوانيها فترط بطلتها شهور
كأن عين الخوف ترقبني في لحظة مريبة
تضيق مساحة الطموح، ويخبو بريق الأحلام
ويزع القلب لما أصابه من علة حزينة
أنسى كل فرحة فرحتها، وكل ضحكة في حينها
مشينة

تصير موجات الخيال عاتية
كل الذي أرجو حينها أن ترسوا السفينة

Life is gloomy
Boring and distasteful
Its hours are like centuries
Its minutes are like years
Its seconds are as slow as months
As if the eye of fear was watching me
Chasing me in a suspicious way
Narrowing my hope
My dreams are not shiny anymore
My heart was horrified because of that sad incident
I forget all the happiness

when you looking at the death as the final way to get out
when you believe the most direct route to escape
when all the world is narrowing in your eyes
when you feel lonely
when you afraid of going forward
nothing can describe that horrible feeling
even the breaths interrupted
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Arabic Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All laughter</td>
<td>The waves of thoughts become eruptive At that time, all what I wish is my ship to berth</td>
<td>The worst thing could be Fear and worry after happiness It destroys a moment of gladness And paint tears and sadness Fears of losing my brother and cousin The most things increased my concern The Day of Judgment when stand in God's hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fahad</td>
<td>عَصَمَةٌ مَا قد يكون، هُمّ و خوف بعد سرور! تَزْمَرُ لْحَظُ السَّعَادَةِ وَالوَسْنِ، وَتَرْسَمُ الخَزْنَ وَتَشَكِّكُ التَّدْمِعُ! في خَوَفٍ فَقِدْ أَخٍ وَابن عم، ما زاد همي و أَنْقَل غمي، إلا حساب يوم الدين عند ربي.</td>
<td>Before I started my first final, I realize that I won't be able to get as good grades as I was hoping. I start to wonder if my decision to continue my studies was right or not? Am I able to reach it at all?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snake</td>
<td>قبل بداية الاختبارات النهائية، عندما تُقَتِّف أن النتائج لن تكون غالباً ضمن ما كنت أتهمنا، كنت أتساءل عما إذا كان قراراً بالدراسة صائباً من الأساس أم لا، هل هذه المغامرة التي بدأتها كانت تستحق؟ أم أنى تهورت بها؟</td>
<td>The sight comes to my mind frequently But I try to avoid it hard In the first night, out of my sky My heart, feel, and dreams went to die I reached my bed, I was so worried Because everything I used to see, I lost indeed The fright got more, so my heart became sore And the night passed through, but it was slow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamad</td>
<td>قبل عدة أيام من آخر رحلة لي من السعودية إلى أمريكياً، كنت قد أجريت عملية في القلب. خالجني شعور من الخوف لركوب طائرة لرحلة تستغرق عشرون ساعة. عزمت أمري وركبت الطائرة وفي</td>
<td>I got so scared when I knew that I have a plane to catch. I just had a surgery. I was not ready to fly back to the US. I encouraged myself to do it. The plane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have always felt that conducting a thesis is a daunting task and that there has to be a good advisor to ask. I thought the time is a big issue. And finding a topic is not like getting a

Fares

قبل القيام لأمريكا كنت خائفا، نسمع عن عنصرية وفتان...

بدأت الدراسة ولم أر إلا السلام، لذا كنت سعيداً، لأن ظني لم يكن سديداً.

خوفي انتقل من الشعب إلى الدراسة!!

دراسة أمريكا صعبة!! هل سأنجح أم لا!!

toke off, I start panicking. My heart hurt. It did not seem that things are going well. I had to call someone for help.

I was dragged to the back of flight. A doctor came for a diagnostician. I felt that death is near me. I remembered my mother. The doctor explained to me that my heart beat is diminished. I took a pill that the doctor said it will help. I faded; I felt that I was out. I did not feel anything. I woke up after 10 hours by a fly assistant, telling me that we arrived to the US.
Before arriving in the States I was scared
We heard about racism and sedition of women
School started and I see nothing but peace
I was happy that I was wrong
My fear moved, from people to studying
Studying is hard in America, will I succeed or not
Before I started school I was fearful
But I discovered that studying here is better than what it is back home
However, my fear from the future is still there,
Especially from the comprehensive exam,
And my thesis, would it be accepted?

How can I arrange the literature,
and come up with a connected overall picture,
were all new fears that had not been part of my nature.
Now I have started with an idea which was formed into a question..
but I am afraid I can’t deliver the work at the time of submission