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Life Stories of Saudi Deaf Individuals

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Abstract

Little research exists about Saudi deaf education and Saudi Deaf culture. Using an emic qualitative design, two deaf male Saudis were interviewed and asked to share their life stories. These individuals had grown up in hearing families and the goal was to investigate their life experiences. The interviews were conducted in their first language, SASL, to ensure their comprehension of the questions as most deaf Saudis have low levels of literacy. Participants were from two different cities with two different educational backgrounds. A qualitative narrative analysis captured a more detailed description of how these individuals recalled growing up as a deaf person in a hearing family and later being exposed to sign language and Deaf culture. Both stories highlighted the importance of communication in both positive and negative ways. Results found that Saudi deaf individuals face many challenges in their life, such as language deprivation, poor quality education, and a poor work environment.

Keywords

Deaf Life Stories, Saudi Deaf Community, Deaf Culture, Deaf Community

1. Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has not had the advantage of an extensive documented history of deaf education; this limitation has impacted Deaf culture within KSA. In the Western world, the use of a capital D in the word "Deaf" refers to culturally Deaf individuals who share Deaf culture, sign language, and participate in the Deaf community. In contrast, the small d refers to the audiological condition of being deaf with limited or no contact with other deaf individuals (Holcomb, 2013; Moores, 2001). In this study, the small d refers to deaf individuals in KSA as the Arabic language cannot differentiate between the two terms. Also, the differences between these two terms have not been discussed in

the Saudi deaf community. Another issue that has limited the spread of Deaf culture is that there are few deaf families with deaf children in KSA. The majority of deaf children are born to hearing families with no prior knowledge of deaf people, their language, and their culture. Therefore, Saudi deaf children are likely to experiences language delays and to have limited exposure to Saudi Arabian Sign Language (SASL) and Deaf culture until they are school aged. As in other nations, Deaf culture tends to be learned in residential schools and Deaf clubs (Holcomb, 2013), which becomes the source of Deaf culture.

Deaf culture has been investigated in the United States (US) and other western countries (Holcomb, 2013; Humphries, 1991; Ladd, 2007; Leigh, Andrews, & Harris, 2018; Padden & Humphries, 1988) since the 1960s when American Sign Language (ASL) was identified as a language (Stokoe, 1980). These investigations led to research using a Deaf-centric perspective in contrast to a clinical pathological view (Humphries, 2008) that sees Deaf people as broken and needing to be "fixed". This cultural view positions deaf individuals as part of a minority cultural linguistic group that has its own culture and language (Ladd, 2003; Leigh et al., 2018). The term Deaf culture became widespread in the 1980s and was defined as a set of beliefs, morals, traditions, artistic expressions, social forms, rules for behavior, and language expressions used by deaf individuals (Holcomb, 2013; Leigh et al., 2018; Padden & Humphries, 1988). These values can be seen in the comment by the first deaf president of Gallaudet University, I. King Jordan, who said, "Deaf people can do anything hearing people do, except hear" (Christiansen & Barnartt, 2003).

Therefore, Deaf culture has been around since the founding of deaf schools where communications and interactions among deaf students occurred in natural environments; these schools helped to create the foundation of Deaf culture and the spread of sign language. The first permanent school in the US was the American School for the Deaf, established in 1817. There, deaf students congregated for the first time, which provided an opportunity to spread Deaf culture due to the large number of deaf students and deaf role models in close proximity (Holcomb, 2013). Like other cultures, Deaf culture is passed down from generation to generation through language, material objects, rituals, and arts. Deaf role models are a significant factor in identity formation and also an essential tool in language exposure. Deaf teachers and deaf administrators at deaf schools teach students how to navigate in the hearing world by modelling and providing life skills. The everyday interactions with deaf peers and deaf adults allow deaf children to gain knowledge of their culture (Leigh et al., 2018). Deaf students create solutions for effective living, such as communication and interaction strategies.

However, residential deaf schools have not played a role in promoting Deaf culture in Saudi Arabia. The first two Saudi schools for the deaf were established in 1964 in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, one institution for boys only and the other institution for girls only due to gender segregation in Saudi education (Almousa, 1999; Alothman, 2014). Today, there are at least 15 deaf schools

in Saudi Arabia; none of those schools have deaf teachers, administrators, and staff, which explicitly show the absence of deaf professionals and deaf role models in Saudi deaf education. At the beginning of establishing deaf schools, there were no teachers specializing in teaching deaf students due to the delay of establishing Special Education programs at Saudi universities. In 1984, the first department of Special Education found at the King Saud University (KSU) offered a Bachelor of Arts degree in Special Education with a minor in deaf education (Alzahrani, 2005). During the first 20 years of teaching deaf students, the Saudi Ministry of Education hired teachers from other Arab countries (Almousa, 1999). The hearing teachers from Jordan and Egypt created significant impacts on the nature of SASL and Saudi Deaf culture by using their country's sign language and culture (Alamri, 2017b). The lack of exposure to Saudi Deaf culture and language at an early age could negatively influence the identity formation of Saudi deaf individuals.

As well as at deaf schools, Deaf clubs in the US transmit Deaf culture, and this situation is the same in KSA. The Deaf Club of Riyadh was the first Deaf club in the country, and it was established in the 1980s and a few more Deaf clubs were established afterwards (Alamri, 2017a). Within Saudi, the Deaf clubs are the only place that Saudi deaf people can call their own, while other places where deaf people gather for education or socialization purposes are controlled by hearing individuals. Deaf Saudis gather every night at the Deaf clubs to participate in a variety of activities, including athletic competition, religious lectures, and social meetings (Saudi Deaf Sports Federation, 2017). These deaf clubs strongly support SASL and Deaf culture. Young Saudi deaf individuals are not allowed to participate in the Deaf club events due to the age restriction, as they must be at least 18 to join. Also, young deaf individuals face more challenges due to the absence of transportation services (Alyami, 2015). Being dependent on others to attend deaf events and activities reduces their interest to practice and be exposed to sign language and Deaf culture. Also, hearing parents and other hearing family members do not value the importance of acquiring sign language and an association with the Deaf community for their deaf family member.

A Deaf cultural explosion has not occurred in the Kingdom, where people tend to continue to hold a medical perspective about deaf individuals, (Alamri, 2017b; Alqarni, 2017; Baker, 2011). This belief is supported because, as in most countries, the majority of deaf children are born to hearing families (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2005) who initially contact medical professionals to learn how to raise their deaf child. This issue is important in Saudi as Alqarni (2017) found that families who have never met a deaf person are more likely to educate their deaf children to use spoken Arabic while neglecting sign language and Deaf culture. However, he found that if the family knew a deaf person who signed, they were likely to encourage their deaf child to sign and attend a deaf school. Therefore, Saudi attitudes and beliefs about deaf individuals are critical for the growth of a healthy deaf identify in KSA.

Another critical factor in supporting these beliefs that deaf children need to be "fixed" is that most of the research studies in KSA has been conducted by Saudi hearing researchers without any input from deaf individuals. Saudi hearing researchers compare deaf individuals to hearing peers to understand their challenges outside of the cultural values of the Deaf community. Moreover, these researchers tend to get their degrees outside of KSA because most Saudi universities do not offer higher degrees in deaf education. Currently, the only program offering a Ph.D. in deaf education is at KSU; other Saudi universities only offer undergraduate degrees in special education with some courses about deaf education.

Like early research in the US, these researchers in KSA are not only hearing but they are not fluent in a sign language (Benedict & Sass-Lehrer, 2007; Wolsey et al., 2017). Therefore, the Saudi Deaf community has been investigated through the lens of the dominant hearing community unfamiliar with SASL and Deaf culture. Unlike Wolsey et al. (2017), who investigated the necessary components of a successful deaf and hearing research partnership in the US, there are few deaf researchers in Saudi Arabia who can conduct research from a Deaf-centric perspective because Saudi universities did not accept deaf students into their undergraduate and graduate programs. In 2012, KSU established an undergraduate program for deaf students in both the language and translation departments. However, many deaf students when leaving high school still lack the academic and literacy skills need to succeed in these programs (Alamri, 2017b).

Researchers who have a Deaf-centric perspective, like Wolsey et al. (2017), propose reframing deaf individuals as members of a minority linguistic group with their own culture and language. This reframing sees deaf people as different rather than as having a deficit. This situation is slowing changing as Bader Alomary is a Gallaudet University alumnus who became the first and only deaf person to hold a faculty position at KSU in Riyadh. Mr. Alomary has a bachelor's degree in Deaf education and a master's degree in sign language education (Alomary, 2013). Unfortunately, many other Saudi deaf individuals who graduated from the universities in the US have not been allowed to even work at residential deaf schools. Just like in other countries, deaf education has been dominated and controlled nationally and internationally by hearing educators (Benedict & Sass-Lehrer, 2007; Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan, 1996).

Yet another factor is the belief that spoken language is necessary due to the fact that there is limited knowledge of SASL linguistics among researchers and educators (Alamri, 2017b; Almotiri, 2017) as research in KSA has not focused on Deaf identity, culture, and literature. This gap leaves the Saudi community lacking knowledge and empirical studies of SASL and Deaf culture (Alqarni, 2017; Alzahrani, 2017). The common belief is that SASL is not a true language and that Deaf culture does not exist, unlike beliefs in many other countries. Despite Stokoe's (1980) ground-breaking research in American Sign Language (ASL) that

recognized ASL as a bon fide language, SASL has a long way to go before being accepted as a language by the Saudi society. Next, we look at how cultural norms impact deaf individuals through the internalization of cultural norms, expressed in what has been called life scripts (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002).

2. Life Scripts and Stories

The importance of cultural norms for understanding life scripts and life stories have been mentioned in many studies (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002, 2004; Bluck & Habermas, 2000; Luborsky, 1993; Rubin & Berntsen, 2003). Life scripts are defined as culturally shared expectations (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002, 2004; Rubin & Berntsen, 2003) that affect the way individuals think about themselves, the world around them, and the decisions they make. Furthermore, life scripts form the expectations of particular events that are bound to occur in one's lifetime, and the timing of those events are based on cultural norms (Rubin, Berntsen, & Hutson, 2009). Hence, it can be argued that life scripts are of utmost importance in an individual's life because they lay out the expectations of specific events, such as the age an individual should get married or have children (Scherman, 2013). The life scripts shape the content of autobiographical memory which is defined as an episode recollected from an individual's life (Williams, Conway, & Cohen, 2008). Berntsen and Rubin (2004) investigated the existence of life scripts as a theoretical framework that explains the dissociation between positive and negative memories. In other words, life script's content tends to demonstrate more positive events that an individual recalls from their memory.

In conjunction with life scripts are life stories that are defined as personal experiences and life events within one's own life (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002, 2004; Rubin et al., 2009). Before being used in autobiographical theories, life stories were used as a research method and theoretical model in fields such as gerontology (Coleman, 1999), personality studies (McAdams, 1998; Nasby & Read, 1997), cognitive studies (Fitzgerald, 1996), and clinical psychology (Schafer, 1983). In recent research, life stories have been widely used in the research of cultural life scripts. Furthermore, Schank and Abelson (1977; as cited in Clark & Daggett, 2015) stated that life scripts are used to process life stories. This process assists in the organization of life stories by establishing a framework for expected events and their timing (Rubin & Berntsen, 2003).

Therefore, life stories represent an individual's lifetime memories as experienced through ongoing events. Life stories are based on personal experiences that reflect the autobiographical memories that include the following components; episodic memory, cultural traditions, important events, major life transitions, and emotionally positive events. Thus, an individual's life story follows a life script that determines transitional events taking place, especially in adolescence and young adulthood (Hatiboğlu & Habermas, 2016). However, when a life story differs from the cultural norms, it is often associated with emotional distress due to different expectations of the culture in which one lives (Rubin et

al., 2009). This relationship between the life story and life scripts help to understand individual's mental health.

Positive mental health occurs when there is a notable overlapping between cultural life scripts and life story events (Bohn, 2010; Clark & Daggett, 2015; Glück & Bluck, 2007; Rubin et al., 2009; Thomsen & Berntsen, 2008). For instance, when individuals were asked for important life events, they tend to remember positive events mostly from early adulthood which are the content of life scripts within their community (Schroots & Assink, 2005). Findings in autobiographical memory studies suggest that individuals are likely to recall events from the second and third decades of their life; this period is called the reminiscence bump—during the adolescences and early adulthood period (Rubin et al., 2009; Thomsen & Berntsen, 2008).

From this observation, it can be argued that age is an important factor for corresponding with both life scripts and stories. In another study, Bohn (2010) found that the overlaps between life scripts and life stories are more prevalent in older adults than those in their younger years. However, the contrast may be because the younger adults have not yet experienced all the events in the cultural life script, unlike older adults. Therefore, age plays an important role in the overlapping of life stories and life scripts because the events that take place in one's life occur systematically throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Additionally, cultural diversity can be a determinant of the overlap. In their cross-cultural study, Rubin et al. (2009) found that the overlap between life script and life events was higher among the Danes (70%) as compared to Americans (46%). The differences in the overlap was attributed to the cultural diversity between the two countries. In Danes' life scripts, there are 35 events; in the United States, the American group has only 24 events; therefore, less homogeneity in the US makes fewer overlapping events between American life scripts and stories. Given these findings, what are the overlap between life scripts and life stories for deaf individuals becomes an important question to investigate.

3. Deaf Life Scripts and Stories

Recent work on American Deaf cultural life scripts (Clark & Daggett, 2015; Wolsey, Clark, van der Mark, & Suggs, 2016) found that there are many overlapping events within the US for deaf and hearing citizens. Regarding differences between culturally Deaf and hearing Americans, they seem to be in the details of various events such as access to a visual language through attaching the idea of being deaf to the event; for example, attending a *Deaf* school, marriage to a *Deaf* spouse, and having *Deaf* children. Including the concept of *Deaf* to an event makes the use of a visual language central to the event.

However, within the deaf population, life scripts had more or fewer overlapping themes, depending on whether the participants had grown up as native signers in a *Deaf* home (Clark & Daggett, 2015) or grown up in a hearing family that did not adopt or include *Deaf* culture into their everyday lives (Wolsey et

al., 2016). According to Clark & Daggett (2015), the overlaps occurred with different events, such as acquiring language, going to school, finding a job, getting married, and having children.

In contrast, the life scripts of oral deaf individuals have other events that overlap with life scripts of Deaf individuals who grew up in a deaf family. The overlapping events include being a bilingual person, having a healthy identity, and experiencing discrimination. While the perspectives regarding discrimination emerged for both oral deaf individuals and native signers, the native signers see the discrimination as the hearing world's issue of how they perceive Deaf people which is considered a positive life script event, while the oral deaf individuals see the discrimination as their own issues which is considered a negative life script event (Wolsey et al., 2016).

As mentioned previously, there is a direct connection between culture and life scripts. Also, this connection among deaf individuals develops based on a society's views about deaf people. For example, those who grow up as members of a culturally Deaf community in the US see themselves in ways that are more similar to hearing individuals in America. American culturally Deaf individuals share many of the same themes such as having children and going to school but simply add a "deaf tag". For example, *Deaf* couples want to get married and have children, preferably *Deaf* children. This group of Deaf people receives positive cultural affirmation from the Deaf community, and in some cases, Deaf parents. These experiences form a positive perception of being deaf; they are normal, and it is others who have the problem when they perceive deaf people as "abnormal."

In contrast, the orally deaf participants' life scripts in Wolsey et al. (2016) included more negative themes as the hearing community responded to them as if they were "broken" and needed to be fixed. They were frequently bullied and had few friends outside of their families. Hence, one can see societies' values being projected on these young deaf children, which is influential. Wolsey et al. (2016) they found their oral deaf individual's life scripts are closer to the American hearing life scripts than to culturally Deaf individuals.

In KSA there has been no research regarding the life scripts and stories of deaf Saudis, so it is unknown how the culture of KSA impacts these deaf individuals. Also, the delay of exposure to a visual language and Deaf culture could influence deaf identity formation (Bat-Chava, 2000; McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011). It is essential to understand that life scripts and stories are based on the cultures where individuals live and are raised. Life scripts will not be included in this study as they have not been studies in the Saudi hearing community; therefore, there is nothing with which to compare deaf Saudis' life scripts.

Here, the focus was on life stories to get a better understand of Saudi deaf individuals' experiences. When comparing cultures, there may be systematic differences beyond specific rituals and cultural norms. For instance, individualistic cultures in comparison to collectivistic cultures display an extensive variety of social expectations and lifestyles. For instance, the US culture which is an indi-

vidualistic culture, emphasizes autonomy and liberty rather than the idea of relatedness to others. In contrast, other cultures stress collectiveness and that the needs of one individual are dependent on those of others, such as the KSA community paying more attention to the needs of the group or family than those of individuals (Hatiboglu & Habermas, 2016). It is unknown what the impact of these attitudes and beliefs are on the survival strategies of deaf Saudis as they navigate through the hearing community. Thus, it is essential to explore life stories of Saudi deaf individuals recalling their memories growing up in the hearing family and society.

4. Methodology

This study explores deaf Saudis' life stories. Herein, the researcher used a qualitative narrative method to conduct the investigation. "Narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (Czarniawska, 2004: p. 17). The pilot study consisted of a small sample of two Saudi deaf males, in order to identify the significant events in their life. The narrative research design was subjected to a thematic analysis. This methodology included analysing and coding the data from the participants' stories into themes. Themes provided a deep understanding of the participants' experiences. The goal of this study is to capture a more detailed description of how these individuals recalled growing up as a deaf person in their hearing family and society. Given that there is no research in this area and that deaf Saudis are not used to being asked to share this type of information within a research frame, we reached out to two men who were willing to trust us to begin this dialogue. These two stories share overlapping themes, so saturation was reached with these two individuals.

4.1. Research Questions

The study addressed these flowing questions:

1) When given the opportunity to provide an autobiography of their lives, what will deaf Saudis report?
   a) What do they remember about growing up in their family?
   b) What educational experiences did deaf Saudi individuals have?
   c) What is their adult life like?

4.2. Participants

Saudi deaf men, aged 18 - 40, were invited to participate in a project to investigate their life stories. The participation was limited to men due to the gender segregation in the Saudi education system (Almousa, 1999; Alothman, 2014). Participants were recruited through the Riyadh Saudi Deaf club. Flyers (see Figure 1) and an online video clip in SASL (Figure 2) were used to encourage participants to join the project. Participants were required to have a moderate to profound hearing loss and be raised in a hearing family. The demographic questions

Figure 1. Recruitment flyer.

Figure 2. Still clip form SASL Video.

include age, school (residential or mainstreaming program), current job, having deaf relatives, and their preferred method of communication (SASL, Arabic Sign (SA), Spoken Arabic, or other). Both participants lived in different cities and had different education experiences; one graduated from a Deaf school and the other graduated from a mainstreaming program. The diverse educational experiences have allowed for a deep examination of the similarities and differences in their experiences.

4.3. Procedures

After receiving IRB approval, participants were recruited, selected, and contacted based on meeting the requirements. They were given an informed consent form prior to the interview and were assured that complete confidentiality was in place. They were asked to complete the demographic questions. The researcher conducted an open-ended interview to explore the participants' life stories. The study was conducted by a hearing individual who is fluent in SASL. The researcher had worked as a teacher in the Riyadh residential school for the deaf for 15 years and worked eight years as a coordinator in Riyadh Deaf club. The experiences of working with deaf students and adults provided advantages to the researcher who is proficient in SASL and knows the Saudi Deaf culture well.

4.4. Data Analytic Plan

Qualitative data from the participants' narratives were analysed to identify themes.

This analysis was framed using a narrative theory approach (Creswell 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2016). Data analysis included the following: review, coding, identify shared themes, review and categorize themes. The process of analysing examined the raw data, organized the story themes, and presented the story of the individuals' experiences.

5. Results

The results of this study reveal some of Saudi deaf individuals' stories regarding their experiences growing up in hearing families. The results explore challenging and complexities that deaf people in KSA have in their everyday life. Based on study participants' experiences, they attempted to balance affiliation to the Deaf community while at the same time accommodating expectations that are placed on them by their parents, teachers, and the whole hearing community. The narratives focused on what Saudi deaf individuals' life experiences were with non-signing families, at school, works, and within the hearing community.

The data analysis resulted in five themes: *family experiences, education experiences, sign language status, community affiliation, and work experiences*.

5.1. Family Experiences

Family experiences was the first theme, as both participants grew up in non-signing families. The first participant Ahmed (pseudonym) has an older deaf sister that his parents decided to enroll in a Deaf residential school in a different city. That enrollment reduced effective interaction between the deaf siblings. Ahmed acquired SASL when he was 19 years old. He said, "My parents did not know sign language, also Deaf culture. They are getting too old to learn a second language. I do not remember anyone offering to teach them sign language." When asked about his deaf sister, Ahmed stated: "Yes, she is deaf, but she was in a residential school for the Deaf in a different city. She visited us only during school holidays." Ahmed continued and explained that after her graduation from the deaf school "She got married and moved to another city right after she graduated." In terms of knowing SASL, Ahmed said,

Honestly, I struggled with that, because no one taught me SASL. There was no communication at home and school. I couldn't understand my teachers' signs; their signs were so bad. I only remember a deaf guy who visited me in high school, and he taught me some signs. I was really thankful for him. I started learning sign language when I was 19 years old.

For Ahmed issues with sign language exposure were obvious in hearing families and remained problematic at school with hearing teachers and staff.

The other participant Salim (pseudonym) had not met another deaf person until he enrolled in a Deaf school when he was 7 years old. He narrated,

I struggled with lip-reading, my parents did not know sign language, and they tried to talk to me or trained me to use lip-reading. I could not understand them. When I enrolled in a Deaf preschool, a preschool hearing teacher taught me

some signs. *After that I learned more signs from my peers in elementary school.* Salim explained that, "Most of time, we (his family) communicated either using gestures or lip-reading. They told me that I must always wear my hearing aids." Again, as seen with Ahmed, families did not make accommodations in their communications with their deaf sons.

Both participants also narrated that they had not received any early intervention services. KSA still does not have a proper early intervention for deaf children. Only some hospitals in big cities provide auditory early intervention to focus on spoken language, hearing aids, and cochlear implants. The early intervention agencies lack sign language specialists or deaf mentors and do not provide parents with any information about Deaf culture and sign language. Both participants emphasized the importance of acquiring sign language at an early age. Salim narrated how sign language has helped him to be included and fully understand what is happening around him. He said, "I can discuss, participate, and interact when sign language is present." Also, Ahmed said, "Before I learned sign language, I felt I was lost." Both noted the difference in their life after they acquired SASL, which they were unable to share with the families.

5.2. Education Experiences

The second theme reported in both participants' life stories was education experiences. Both participants attended different education settings. One participant was enrolled in a residential Deaf school, while the other was enrolled in a mainstreamed program setting that was extremely different. Still they both experienced difficulties with understanding their teachers; all teachers and school staff in the Saudi deaf education system are hearing, and most of them have low skills in sign language, as reported by both of the participants. Ahmed mentioned that his teacher always said:

Sorry, I forget the sign of this word; I cannot explain it to you. You should try to understand the word yourself or just write it down as it is. As a student in K-12, none of my hearing teachers were proficient in SASL. I usually wrote down what they wrote on the board without understanding with no clear explanation. I remember most of my teachers spent time talking on their phones or chatting with other teachers during the class hours.

Such education quality means that deaf Saudis may have been receiving poor education quality as reported by the study participants due to their experiences. Mainstream schools often hire teachers with a general education background with no knowledge of SASL or Deaf culture. This context does not match that of their deaf students.

Deaf students struggle with their reading and writing skills because the teachers lack the proper teaching credentials to teach them. These teachers lack knowledge of a deaf education teaching curriculum. To compound this problem, they also lack sign language skills, especially SASL which is their deaf children's strongest language. Salim explained he had a bad experience when he was in first

grade;

I still remember my first-grade teacher punished me when I did not understand the lesson; he did not teach the class; he just wrote some words and sentences on the board then asked us to write them down in our notes without any explanation. When I got home, no one helped me with my homework because my family did not know sign language. The next day, my teacher got mad because I did not finish my homework, he then punished me. I had no idea why the teacher punished me this bad.

Most of the hearing teachers have low skills in SASL, and deaf students have to rely on copying and pasting the words and then memorizing them without understanding the meaning. Although most classrooms were limited to five students and every period lasted for forty-five minutes, most teachers did not invest time in teaching their students. For example, in elementary school, most of the time, their teachers would allow them to play soccer, which happened to be their favorite sport. Salim remembered when his father visited at his school and asked the teacher, "Why does my son have low skills in reading and writing?" This teacher responded, "No, your son has good literacy skills, but sometimes his abilities are low." Also, Ahmed remembers that he spent all day in the classroom watching SASL videos on YouTube or spent a lot of time chatting with other students.

The poor quality of education that Saudi deaf students received was not limited to K-12 level but also in higher education. In 2004, the first college started providing an associate degree in Office Implication that lasted for two and a half years. Both participants attended the College of Communication and Information in different cities. Most of the faculty members in both colleges were hearing without any specialization in Deaf education and knowledge about Deaf culture and SASL. Each college had one hearing sign language interpreter which was not enough to work with all instructors. For example, when the sign language interpreter was not available, the teacher asked one hard of hearing student to interpret the lesson to the class. Ahmed stated:

The interpreter often was absent, and one of my hard of hearing classmates had to interpret the lesson from spoken language to sign language. I felt like that deaf students were not important in the higher education level that the dean and our department chair did not pay attention to our accommodations.

Salim also had the same experience. He stated, "Our college had one hearing sign language interpreter; the interpreter had good sign language skills because his mother was deaf. The problem was that the interpreter was absent all the time." This lack of skilled interpreters highlights the lack of accommodations for deaf students within the Saudi school system.

Here one can see that the education system does is not Deaf-centric but rather seen as special education to focus on the best that deaf students can do with their "abilities". The underlying philosophy is that deaf education is a form of special education and that deaf students have deficits rather than that they are different.

Here the use of a visual language is overlooked and the need for skilled signing teachers is not seen as the problem. These deaf individuals are not assumed to have the abilities to be as successful as their hearing peers in SASL and in that way become skilled in written academic Arabic.

5.3. SASL Status

The third theme is the status of SASL, which was clearly identified through the participants' life stories. SASL still is not recognized as a true language as mentioned previously. Salim stated:

When I try to communicate with hearing people, they do not pay attention to what I try to say, but when a SASL interpreter was present, they listened to him and respected him. I always noticed that hearing people look directly at the sign language interpreter instead of looking at me. My family, friends, and all of the community values spoken language over sign language. Most hearing people I have met encourage me to learn a spoken language; they said that I can keep learning.

Ahmed said in his story,

The entire community looks at sign language as a funny language, just for fun and laugh, and looks down at our language. Hearing people said you must learn to speak in Arabic language. When I met some hearing people for the first time, they just tried to sign to me and make fun of me.

These stories show that beliefs in KSA about deaf people and SASL are not positive or understood by hearing people in the country.

Saudi universities still do not have a sign language degree, signed linguistic research, or any faculty who specializes in sign language. KSA still looks at sign language as an inferior language that Deaf schools should not be teaching to deaf students. Instead, schools should be teaching them to speak Arabic.

5.4. Work Experiences

Challenges and issues related to the work environment were reported in both participants' stories, which is the fourth theme. After graduating from college, both participants had a difficult time finding a job. Ahmed reported he had many job interviews before he got his first job. Both Saudi deaf individuals had negative work experiences because of the low expectations that were placed upon them by their employers. Ahmed emphasized:

My director had low expectations on my capabilities. At first, he asked my hearing co-work to do all of my work. Then I set up a meeting with him to explain why I was not happy with my work and that my hearing co-worker did not need to do my job. I could do more than he did. My director gave me a chance to fill in all the information in the computer. A few weeks later, my director liked my work. Also, I remembered, I helped other employees to document our organization participation in The National Culture and Heritage Festival "Jenadriyah" by taking photos and videos. When my director saw my work, he was

surprised. Later, the director asked me to move to the media department to teach other employees how to take pictures professionally. That was good after my employer and employees gave me a chance to show them what I could do.

Low expectations toward deaf individuals' abilities in the workforce are consistently one of the significant obstacles in KSA.

Also, many young deaf individuals in KSA have a difficult time finding a job. This shows that the vast majority of employers in KSA lack the understanding of deaf people, their language, and their culture. They view them as undereducated, requiring high maintenance, and the need to be fixed to function in the same manner as hearing people. Salim said:

I had many job interviews, and most of the employers said they preferred to hire hearing applicants. When I was looking for a job, many hearing people I met did not know sign language. The question was how would we be able to communicate? Communication is really a big issue for all of us. Also, the big obstacle for me was a one-year experience requirement. Most of human resource managers told me that if I had at least one year of previous experience, they would hire me. I do not think deaf people can gain the experiences before obtaining first their job which is really disappointing.

Miscommunication is a significant issue in the workplaces as well as in schools, colleges, and families. Also, the need for interpreting services is a necessity, but there are no certified sign language interpreters in KSA.

5.5. Community Experiences

The final theme of community affiliation is viewed as a positive experience based on the participants' narratives. Sign language plays a significant role in this affiliation. Saudi deaf individuals prefer to participate in Deaf clubs, Deaf organizations, and Deaf events. In Deaf events and conferences, deaf people can take control of their events, and all participants can easily integrate because sign language and Deaf culture are incorporated. Salim emphasized how happy he was when he volunteered for the Deaf events:

I always participate in Deaf events and with deaf friends. Communication is vital in these events which makes it much easier for deaf people to communicate or participate without any barriers. In contrast, participating in hearing events is associated with many communication obstacles because SASL is not recognized as a language in our country. Even though, some hearing events provided sign language interpreters, many deaf people did not enjoy those events.

Also, Ahmed narrated, "I did not attend hearing events and festivals. Yes, some of these events had sign language interpreters, but I did not understand their signs. Many sign language interpreters lacked SASL skills." Here interactions with deaf individuals is an important component of these individuals' life stories.

About friendships, both participants reported that they have many deaf friends while they have few hearing friends. The limited friendship with hearing people is due to communication barriers. Hearing people tend to lip-read when

communicating with deaf individuals. Salim stated, "Many hearing people think they can communicate with me by lip-reading and that is why I don't like to go to these hearing events." Also, he added, "I have some close hearing friends; they know how to communicate with me, and they understand my signs pretty well. They are familiar with Deaf culture." Both participants stated that they prefer the friendship with who understood them when they interact, where they feel they will be able to find their identity and share their experiences with others who have experienced the same thing.

This final theme of interacting with deaf individuals within Deaf culture connects to the larger Deaf world. Here, one is seen as different but valued. One is not looked at as "broken" or "less than" those who are hearing. The Deaf world is limited in KSA but strong and vibrant providing a space that allows personhood to develop.

6. Discussion

This exploration of the intersection of families, schools, work, and community experiences influences both participants' life stories. Both narratives illustrate challenges for the deaf minority group in KSA that they encounter as they navigate through the hearing community. More specifically, by exploring the two participants' life experiences, they show what Saudi deaf people's life is like in the Saudi hearing society. These two narratives highlighted the most common obstacles that Saudi deaf individuals face in their life: language deprivation, communication, and empowerment. The language and culture deprivation at an early age needs to be addressed to maintain a positive personal identity of Saudi deaf individuals. Linguistic deprivation harms the child's cognitive capabilities and causes psychosocial issues such as isolation. When the child is linguistically deprived, this prevents the child from expressing himself and understanding others. Indeed, language deprivation impacts literacy skills, which are fundamental for learning (Humphries et al., 2012). Additionally, depression and frustration are caused by linguistic deprivation (Leigh & Andrews, 2017; Humphries et al., 2012). Moreover, some deaf people grew up in a deprived environment where they were not exposed to deaf role models and the positive characteristics of the deaf community; this experience can cause them not to participate in the Deaf culture (Holcomb, 2013).

Communication has a significant impact on the life stories of Saudi deaf individuals. The issue of communication emerges within their families and schools. Deaf Saudis seem to struggle to communicate with their hearing parents and their teachers when enrolled in school. The absence of sign language leads them to find other ways to communicate, such as lip-reading or spoken language.

Sign language deprivation impacts Deaf identity. It appears that Saudi deaf individuals feel stuck between a hearing and a Deaf identity. This block slowly recedes when Saudi deaf people are introduced to sign language and learn to interact with other deaf people in the Deaf community. Deaf Saudis individuals'

life experiences are similar to the life experiences of American oral deaf individuals because they both face similar communication barriers (Wolsey et al., 2016). American oral deaf individuals had a negative impact on their identity when they tried to communicate in spoken language in their early life, and then their self-confidence improved when they chose to communicate in both sign language and spoken language (Wolsey et al., 2016). Both Saudi deaf individuals felt lost before they learned SASL.

The concept of empowerment means giving power and authority to a person or a group of people (Munoz-Baell, 2000). Deaf culture and sign language play an important role in empowering deaf people in the hearing community (Hamill & Stein, 2011); however, this issue is not recognized in the Saudi hearing community. The Saudi deaf community struggles to find the same opportunities as are available to hearing people. By reading through two deaf participants' life stories, one can understand how deaf people in KSA were not able to acquire degrees in higher education, were not able to receive a high quality of education and were not able to find a job.

The Saudi community values spoken Arabic language for religious reason. Subsequently, the hearing community in KSA believes in teaching Saudi deaf people spoken language because it is an obligation. In contrast, deaf people in Saudi need to learn empowerment strategies to obtain their rights. To get the KSA society to invest in the deaf community, they need to find ways to educate the society by demonstrating to them that deaf people have the same capabilities as their hearing counterparts. They may have to start somewhere where they can get assistance from someone, especially a hearing person, who has power, influence or connection in politics (Holcomb, 2013).

7. Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that the sample used in this research was raised in hearing families where there were no SASL or Deaf culture exposure; leading to an inability to generalize this research to all Deaf Saudis, where some have deaf parents. Also, social censure, repression, or dissociation could impact the participants being unwilling to share their personal stories with us, therefore limiting their narratives (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002). The number of participants limits generalizability to the overall population of deaf Saudis.

8. Conclusion

Community support was a positive element in Saudi deaf individuals' life narrative. Deaf Saudis found their identity when they got together with other deaf people who share the same language and culture. Involvement and participation in deaf events and clubs reflect deaf people's confidence and self-esteem. Also, these activities support deaf identity formation. When a deaf child meets another deaf child, that child may realize that he/she is not alone. In contrast, integration in a hearing community is still an issue due to communication difficulties.

Homes, schools, and workplaces reported in deaf individuals' life stories show a series of miscommunications. Many deaf Saudis face communication barriers in their everyday life. As mentioned earlier, many negative aspects were reported in their life such as language deprivation and poor education which most Saudi deaf individuals experience. This study provides a glimpse into what some Saudi deaf individuals experience and provides evidence regarding the importance of SASL and deaf culture for these individuals.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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