Division or integration of labor: An exploration of four L2 students' experiences in separated and integrated undergraduate composition courses

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This study explores the narrated experiences of four L2 students enrolled in required undergraduate composition courses, ENG 101 and ENG 202. It pursues two primary purposes: first, to enrich and deepen our understanding of the participants' narratives; and second, to draw upon these narratives to develop pedagogical implications for writing program administrators regarding the two major structures of First Year Composition (FYC) programs; integration and separation. Conducted at public university in the northeastern United States, the study employed a narrative research methodology, in which the four participants were interviewed and asked to share study materials and artifacts. The findings are presented through five salient themes that reflect the participants' experiences in ENG 101 and ENG 202. These themes are: 1) factors influencing the participants' section selection, 2) L1 classmates as both a resource and a challenge, 3) the impact of section type on student engagement, 4) how participants' perception of the curriculum influenced their performance, and 5) the negotiation of student identity. The study concludes that writing programs should not impose a single structure on L2 students but should offer both options, thereby supporting students' agency in making informed choices.

Keywords: Integration, Separation, FYC, L2 writing, writing program structures, international students

INTRODUCTION

Although required undergraduate composition courses are essential for students' academic development and experiences (Garrett, Bridgewater, & Feinstein, 2017), writing programs adopt varying practices and philosophies regarding the placement of multilingual students in these courses. Some institutions integrate L2 students with their L1 peers in the same sections, while others place them in separate sections. The separation of L1 and L2 students is often based on belief that multilingual students have distinct writing needs compared to domestic (L1) student (Silva & Leki, 2004). L2 writers are perceived to face a range of complex challenges that distinguish their writing development. As Raimes (1985) said that L2 writers require "more of everything" (p. 250). Research by Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) found that L2 writers struggle with critical thinking, peer review activities, and

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a sense of writing ownership. Norris and Ortega (2000) emphasize the need for more targeted feedback on linguistic errors. Similarly, Huster (2012) and Kwon (2009) highlight vocabulary-related challenges among L2 writers. Eckstein, Chariton, and McCollum (2011) found that L2 writers often face difficulties in understanding writing as a process. More recent studies have identified challenges related to vocabulary proficiency, structural complexity, coherence, and the logical development of arguments (Alavi, Nemati, & Dorri kafrani, 2020; Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Casal & Lee, 2019; Higginbotham & Reid, 2019; Larsson & Kaatari 2020). Based on such findings, many writing programs opt to place L2 writers in dedicated composition course sections.

On the other hand, scholars who advocate for the integration of L2 and L1 students in required undergraduate composition courses argue that L2 writing is not a temporary phenomenon that can be addressed by placing L2 students in separate sections for a semester or two. Rather, L2 writing is a long-term developmental process that may extend over several years of undergraduate and even graduate coursework (Ferris & Thaiss, 2011). Ferris and Thaiss (2011) also argue that L2 student population is highly diverse, making it unrealistic to assume that a single writing section or program can accommodate their varied linguistic, cultural, and racial backgrounds. There is no one-size-fits-all policy or program capable of fully addressing these students' complex needs.

What has not yet been given enough attention in this academic discourse surrounding integration versus separation is the focus on L2 writers' perspectives and their narrated experiences. This article seeks to address that gap by examining the narratives of four L2 students enrolled in both integrated and separated undergraduate composition courses.

The historical development of program structures in composition studies is rooted in earlier discussions about the differences between writings of L2 students and that of their L1 peers. These discussions have given rise to various labels and theoretical framework within the field of composition and have contributed to the establishment of second language writing as a distinct discipline. When L1 students write, their work is typically categorized as composition, whereas the writing multilingual students is classified as second language writing (Silva & Leki, 2004). Multilingual students often face complex challenges in their writings (Alavi, Nemati, & Dorri kafrani, 2020; Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Casal & Lee, 2019; Higginbotham & Reid, 2019; Larsson & Kaatari 2020). These challenges include limited proficiency in reading and writing, difficulties with accurate vocabulary use, grammar complexity, effective argumentation, cultural awareness, and self-confidence (Eckstein, Chariton, & McCollum, 2011; Huster, 2012; Kwon, 2009; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Raimes, 1985; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). Leki, Cumming, and Silva (2008) found 35 categories in which the writings of L2 students differs from that of L1 students. These differences include issues related to cohesion, essay organization, and sentence structure. Similarly, Staples and Reppen (2016)

found that L2 writers often lack vocabulary complexity, resulting in the use of less sophisticated language and greater redundancy.

Casal and Lee (2019) reported that L2 writers have challenges with syntactic complexities in their writing and require explicit instruction on how to construct syntactically complex texts. Higginbotham and Reid (2019) analyzed essays written by 472 L2 students to evaluate vocabulary sophistication. Their findings indicated that less proficient L2 writers tended to rely heavily on high-frequency words, whereas more advanced L2 writers used such words less frequently. Similarly, Eckstein and Ferris (2018), in their analysis of texts from 115 participants, found that L2 writers accounted for 93% of all verb errors, 89% of all noun errors, 80% of all word form errors, 78% of all word choice errors, 77% of all sentence boundary errors, 70% of all the run-on sentence errors, and 64% of all fragment errors.

While the differences in writings between L1 and L2 students are well-documented, Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) argued that no "developmental or remedial L2 program or a first-year writing program can meet all of these students' needs as they progress through various levels of their studies and face increasingly difficult academic literacy demands" (p. 30). In the same vein, Wolfe-Quintero and Segade (1999) argued that a single course cannot adequately address the diverse needs of L2 students. In fact, their writing skills continue to develop throughout the entirety of their higher education, requiring ongoing attention and support as they work toward earning their degree.

Regarding instructional design for L2 students, Preto-Bay and Hansen (2006) argued that it is neither responsible nor "advisable to conceive and design instruction without taking into account the learners for whom that instruction is being designed" (pp. 42-43). Friedrich (2006) identified three primary groups of students for whom such instruction is typically designed. Drawing upon the works of Leki (1992), Blumenthal (2002), Blanton (1999), Harklau, Losey, and Siegal (1999), and Thonus (2003), Friedrich categorized First-Year Composition (FYC) students as follows: (1) Monolingual Basic Writers (i.e., L1 students), (2) Resident ESL students (those who have completed K–12 education in the United States), and (3) International ESL students. According to Friedrich, the instructional needs of each group can vary significantly.

Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) argue that L2 students possess diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, life experiences, demographics, skills, abilities, parental educational levels. Therefore, it is unrealistic to assume that these students' "abilities or their instructional needs will be identical," and it is also inaccurate if writing program administrators and teachers generalize any policy that stereotypes these diverse students (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Indeed, providing a single, comprehensive definition of this student group is challenging (Roberge, Siegal, & Harklau, 2009). Schwartz (2004) noted that some of the labels used to describe the L2 population have "become diluted so that [they] no longer serve to be very useful in identifying, describing, and placing such students".

Similarly, Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) argued that "[t]he wide range of origins, immigration status, prior education, prior experience with ESL courses, feelings about home language and culture make these students difficult to box into a single definition" (p. 392). She further stated that "ESL" label is often problematic for students, not simply because of placement concerns, but also because the term is linked to a student's institutional experience with the term." (p. 392). This article, therefore, explores the narrated experiences of four L2 students enrolled in required undergraduate composition courses, ENG 101 and ENG 202, in hopes of better understanding how composition program structures affect L2 students' experiences.

This study is committed to exploring possible answers to the following questions:

RQ1: What are the narrated academic experiences of four L2 students in separated and integrated composition courses, ENG 101 and ENG 202?

RQ2: What pedagogical implications can be drawn from the participants' narrated experiences, and what, if any, do these experiences reveal about undergraduate composition program structures?

METHODS

In this study, the researcher employed narrative research to guide the design, analysis, and discussion of findings. The research was conducted at the main campus of a public research university located in the Northeastern United States. According to the university's English Department website, all undergraduate students were required to complete three Liberal Studies English (LSE) courses: ENG 101, ENG 121, and ENG 202 (Liberal Studies English, 2019). For L2 students, the program website stated: "All of our LSE courses are offered in separate sections designated as 'MLW' for international students. These sections have fewer students and were taught with attention toward global awareness and cultural sensitivity, while still presenting the same academic rigor and challenge as our other sections of composition and literature" (Liberal Studies English, 2019). Regarding instructors, some of these sections were taught by temporary teaching assistants (TAs), who were typically PhD candidates in the English Department and had completed their two-year coursework requirements (LSE Annual Report, 2019).

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher started with a familiarization phase. Prior to data collection, he reviewed the website of the English department and read all available information about the writing program and the required composition courses for undergraduate students. He also contacted the program director via email to request additional information not provided on the website. In response, she shared two annual reports, which included comprehensive details about the curriculum, placement procedures, enrollment statistics, pedagogical initiatives, instructor training, and other relevant aspects of the program. The researcher collected data from participants using a semi-structured interview approach. As Riessman (2008) noted, this style resembles a conversation in which both the researcher and the participants took turns, while maintaining systematic questioning to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' narratives and experiences. In addition to interview, the researcher gathered data from syllabi, writing materials, and pictures. These artifacts served as stimuli to support and enrich the discussion during the interviews. Data collection began with the first round of interviews in the first week of April 2019 and continued until the last week of the month, spanning approximately four weeks (see Appendix I). The timing of the interviews was intentional. They were not conducted too early in the semester – which began on January 21, 2019—to ensure that participants were able to share more reflective and authentic insights into their experiences.

The follow-up interviews took place five months later. One participant, Mohamed, did not respond to the invitation to participate in the follow-up interview. During the follow-up sessions, the researcher reminded the participants of the topics discussed in the initial interviews and invited them to continue their narratives. The researcher also asked them to reflect on their experiences as L2 writers, particularly in relation to the ENG 101 and ENG 202 courses, now that they had completed both. The researcher revisited my original interview questions (see Appendix I) to examine whether their perspectives had changed over time. This step was essential to the narrative research methodology, as Narayan and George (2003) argued that narratives involve processes of storying and re-storying. The participants listened to excerpts of their earlier narratives as the researcher integrated and re-framed them. This allowed them to view their experiences with greater clarity and to elaborate on or refine previously shared details. For data analysis and theme development, I employed Riessman's thematic narrative analysis. This analytical approach is applied to narratives that emerge from interview conversations and focuses primarily on what is said, rather than how it is said, to whom, or for what purpose (Riessman, 2008, pp. 53–54).

For the analysis, the researcher began by listening to the audio recordings and engaging in multiple readings of the interview transcripts. After several rounds of reading and re-reading, the researcher annotated the margins of the printed transcripts. Following Riessman's (2008) guidance, open-ended comments were made, such as identifying and categorizing narratives into distinct stories and providing reflective notes on each. At times, the researcher focused on language use or noted linguistic and non-linguistic features captured in the transcripts, including laughter, hesitations, and pauses. As the transcripts were explored, interpretive connections were made, and relationships across the narratives were identified. Recurring patterns were grouped into emerging themes, which gradually became more coherent as narratives converged around central ideas. Subsequently, the researcher began clustering related themes

and engaged in a reflexive process – a kind of negotiation – between the transcripts and the researcher's interpretations. A word processor was used to document the superordinate themes, while maintaining attentiveness to the differences, complexities, and struggles that made each participant's narrative unique. Finally, the researcher grouped the codes into thematic categories and guided by the research questions, developed five overarching themes, which were then discussed in relation to each participant's experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants

After the study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; Log No. 19-090), an invitation to participate was distributed via a WhatsApp group for international students. In addition, instructors were asked to email the invitation to their students. The following provides contextual information to help interpret the participants' responses.

TABLE 1 | Participants Description

Participant	Gender	Age	Country	L1	Major	Type of section*
Malek	Male	34	Saudi Arabia	Arabic	Marketing	ENG 101: MWL ENG 202: Regular
Shahd	Female	18	Saudi Arabia	Arabic	Criminology & Psychology	ENG 101: Regular ENG 202: Regular
Mohamed	Male	25	Saudi Arabia	Arabic	Accounting	ENG 101: MWL ENG 202: MWL
Khalaf	Male	23	Egypt	Arabic	English	ENG 101: Regular ENG 202: Regular

MWL is multilingual/international section, and Regular is the mainstream section.

This study identified five salient themes that emerged from the participants' narrated experiences: 1) factors influencing participants' section selection, 2) L1 classmates as both a source of support and a burden, 3) the impact of section type on participants' engagement, 4) participants' perceptions of the curriculum, and 5) participants' identity negotiation.

Theme 1: Factors Influencing Participants' Section Selection

Not all participants were aware of section distinction within the composition courses – that is, some did not know that the courses were offered in both mainstream and multilingual sections. The following sub-themes illustrate the key factors related to this theme.

Impact of Academic Advising on Section Selection

Each first-year student at the research site was assigned an academic advisor responsible for helping students select their courses. As Malek noted, "My advisor told me I have to take it, it is mandatory." Both Malek and Khalaf reported that they were not presented with a choice regarding which section of ENG 101 to enroll in; they simply followed their advisor's recommendation. In contrast, Mohamed, who completed both ENG 101 and ENG 202 in the multilingual (MLW) sections, stated, "In ENG 101, I did not know I could take the American section." For ENG 202, the participants followed three distinct enrollment patterns:

    a. Continuing in the same mainstream section,

    b. Continuing in the same multilingual section, or

    c. Transitioning from a multilingual section to a mainstream section.

Mohamed continued in the multilingual section, while Khalaf and Shahd remained in the mainstream sections.

Malek, however, chose to move from the multilingual section in ENG 101 to the mainstream section in ENG 202. Notably, no participant moved from a mainstream section to a multilingual one for ENG 202. This decision-making process appeared to reflect the participants' growing confidence. For example, after completing ENG 101 in a separated (multilingual) section, Malek voluntarily enrolled in the integrated (mainstream) ENG 202 course.

Participants' Perception of the MWL Section as Less Challenging

Another factor that impacted the participants' section selection was their perception that the Multilingual (MWL) sections were less academically demanding than the mainstream sections. Khalaf, for example, described the international section, "it would be slower, and the teachers would talk slowly … He would also go over something multiple times more than he would do in a regular class." Khalaf continued, "it is because English is not the first language for international students." According to Khalaf, this perceived linguistic barrier led instructors to modify their teaching by slowing down their speech and simplifying instruction, which contributed to the belief that MWL sections were less challenging.

Mohamed, a participant who enrolled in both MWL sections, expressed the belief that "if the level of the student high, he can take it with the Americans, and a low, I think it's better to take it with international." He supported this view by referencing a friend who had found the mainstream section difficult. Mohamed stated, "for 202, I know a Korean friend who suggested I take the class with international because American was hard." His decision was also influenced by his desire to achieve a high grade, noting, "I may not get the A I want in American section."

Impact of Peer or Friend on the Selection Process

While advisor often have a significant influence on the participants' course selection, the advice of experienced friends appears to be taken more seriously. Mohamed voiced that his friend recommended he choose the MWL section for ENG 202. Similarly, Malek shared a comparable experience, stating, "I took the international section because I had a friend that told me that it was easier, and I did not feel comfortable taking it [i.e., ENG 101] in the section with American classmates. You know, I did not have enough confidence for doing that."

Previous Experience as a Selection Factor

Previous experience plays a significant role in influencing international students' decisions regarding the type of composition section they select. This impact was particularly evident among the international participants who had prior experience in American pre-college education, namely Khalaf and Shahd. Their previous exposure to English classes with American classmates did not seem to negatively affect their decision-making process. For example, Shahd, who obtained her high school diploma in the United States, expressed that a regular section was more rigorous and better suited for her.

Having the Same Teacher as a Selection Factor

When participants have a chance to enroll in a section taught by the same professor with whom they had a positive previous experience, they tend to choose that professor again, table 2.

TABLE 2 | The Participants' Reasons for Selecting a Particular Section Type

Participants	Type of ENG 101	Selection Reason	Type of ENG 202	Selection Reasons
Malek	MWL	Less challenging, friend, advisor, lack of confidence	Regular	Confidence
Mohamed	MWL	Less challenging, advisor, lack of info. that Regular ENG 101 is an option	MWL	Easier, friend
Shahd	Regular	Confidence	Regular	Confidence
Khalaf	Regular	Advisor, lack of knowledge of the int'l section.	Regular	Confidence, lack of knowledge of the int'l section.

Theme 2: L1 Classmates as a Source and/or a Burden

This finding indicates that some MWL students perceive L1 classmates as a hinderance to their engagement and participation, while others view them as valuable source for language development.

Perception of L1 Classmates as Better Writers

All participants, except Malek, expressed the belief that American classmates were stronger writers than their multilingual peers. This perception was particularly evident in the responses of Mohamed, an MWL participant who had never taken a section with L1 classmates, and Khalaf and Shahd, who had not taken sections with MWL classmates. For instance, Shahd stated,

Americans … have a deeper understanding of the language. So, they are more able to express their thoughts. It's not like, it's not that the international students is not able to do that, but it just that they don't have a full grasp of the language to be really to express their ideas.

The same perception was held by Khalaf. However, this finding did not apply to Malek—the only participant who took ENG 101 with international classmates and ENG 202 with American classmates. Malek stated:

I used to think, think that American students write better than international students, but, you know, after I took the course with American students, I, you know, realized that some international students write better than some American students.

Malek refuted the myth that L1 students represent the standard for academic writing, demonstrating that an international student can write more professionally and academically than an L1 peer.

L1 Classmates as a Burden on Participation and Engagement

Some participants expressed the view that the presence of L1 classmates posed a challenge to their participation and engagement in class. Malek, who took ENG 202 with American students after completing ENG 101 with international peers, stated, "I was more engaged in the international section because all students were international, and the teacher also was international, so, you know, I was more confident and was, you know, not afraid of my mistakes because I know everyone else in the class can make mistakes too, since we are in the same boat".

Preference of American or International Classmates

While the presence of L1 classmates can sometimes hinder participation and engagement, some participants expressed a preference for having American classmates. Mohamed stated, "I prefer American classmate because he, this will improve my language." Khalaf offered a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that both groups offer different advantages. He remarked that international classmates tend to be more serious, explaining, "[American] classmates did not take these classes as a serious matter." In his view, international students are more dedicated because they left their home countries specifically for academic purposes.

However, he also acknowledged the benefits of having American classmates, noting that their presence provides greater opportunities to learn about local culture and daily life. The following table 3 and table 4 summarizes the participants' perceptions regarding which section type they considered more beneficial.

TABLE 3 | Summary of the Participants' Perception of Which Section Type of ENG 101 is Better

Participant	Selection Type		Reasons
	Separation	**Integration**	
Malek		✓	More challenging, a chance to learn about American peers and their culture, and a chance for American peers to learn about international students' cultures, as well.
Mohamed	✓		Only if the level of the student in English is high, she/he can take the integrated section, but other than that, he/she should take the separated one.
Khalaf	✓		International students take it more seriously.
Shahd		✓	To avoid talking with the same background peers in their 1st language.

TABLE 4 | Summary of the Participants' Perception of Which Section Type of ENG 202 is Better

Participant	Selection Type		Reasons
	Separation	**Integration**	
Malek		✓	More challenging, a chance to learn about American peers and their culture, and a chance for American peers to learn about international students' cultures, as well.
Mohamed	✓		Only if the level of the student in English is high, she/he can take the integrated section, but other than that, he/she should take the separated one.
Khalaf		✓	Because MWL students can learn more about the culture of the Americans.
Shahd		✓	Because American classmates can benefit MWL students since American understands English.

Theme 3: The Impact of Section Type on Participants' Engagement

The type of section seems to affect students' level of engagement. During the interview, Malek shared that he was more engaged in the MWL section of ENG 101 than in the mainstream section of ENG 202. He remarked, "In the beginning [of ENG 202] I felt intimidated and afraid to talk or participate. I was afraid to make mistakes." Although Malek gradually became more active and participative as the semester progressed, his level of engagement remained lower than it had been in the MWL section of ENG 101. Sufficient responses could not be obtained from the other two participants who did not switch sections and took both ENG 101 and ENG 202 in the same format - either entirely separated or entirely integrated - since they did not experience both settings and therefore could not offer comparative reflections on their participation across section types.

Engagement in Composition vs. Major classes

One of the findings that emerged under this theme is that two participants compared their engagement in composition courses with that in their major-specific courses. The first, Malek, perceived the composition course as a distinct and valuable experience due to its focus on discussion and socially relevant topics. He explained that, unlike his business major courses, which have different content and teaching styles, the composition class encouraged him to engage critically with various issues and to develop his own stance. Malek expressed appreciation for the course, noting that it helped him broaden his perspectives and formulate positions on diverse matters.

In contrast, Mohamed regarded the composition course as significantly less important than his major courses. He stated that full comprehension of the material was not essential, as him main objective was simply to "pass" and "get an A." However, he emphasized that understanding every aspect of his major coursework was crucial, as it would directly impact his future employment opportunities.

Mohamed appeared to struggle with cognitive engagement in the composition course, demonstrating a more instrumental approach. While he may have participated behaviorally to earn participation points and achieve a high grade, his interest in deeply understanding the course content appeared limited.

Theme 4: The Participants' Perception of the Curriculum

Perception of the curriculum are central to the discussion of integrated versus separated composition course sections. The term curriculum is broad and encompasses a wide range of components; therefore, it is important to clarify its meaning within the context of this study. In this research, curriculum specifically refers to the reading materials and writing assignments used in the composition courses, as understood and discussed by the participants during the interviews.

Perception of Reading Materials

In composition classes, students are typically assigned readings and are expected to reflect upon or respond to them. Shahd expressed a lack of interest in some of the assigned readings, stating, "sometimes, the topics are just not interesting to me. Sometimes I find some of the readings to not be relevant to what we're talking about, or maybe the teacher sees it in another way." demonstrated a more positive perception of the materials. He noted, "we read an article about Martin Luther King and his speech, and we digested his speeches and I liked it because all what he said is everyone has a voice and people should not be done wrong and that was a very interesting topic. It was interesting to hear different opinions. I also learned some words that I did not know before."

Perception of Writing Assignments

Regarding the perception of writing assignments, participants' responses varied in terms of their views on topic selection, the act of writing itself, and the workload or frequency of assignments. Malek's instructor assigned specific topics rather than allowing student choice. This aligns with Shahd's earlier comment: "maybe the teacher sees it in another way." If the teacher's perception of a topic diverges from that of the students, it may reduce students' motivation to engage meaningfully with the writing task.

In terms of assignment structure and frequency, Malek observed a difference between ENG 101 and ENG 202. In ENG 202, the course was centered on developing a single paper throughout the entire semester, whereas ENG 101 involved a variety of topics and multiple assignments. Malek expressed a preference for the ENG 101 format, finding it more engaging. Conversely, Mohamed criticized the curriculum, stating, "I think the curriculum is weak." While he acknowledged learning how to write a research paper, he felt that the pacing was too slow, "the things we take in 12 weeks we can study in 6 or 7 weeks only." For Mohamed, the extended timeline for breaking down research components across the semester contributed to a sense of monotony and disengagement.

Theme 5: The Participants' Identity Negotiation

Given that all participants self-identified as Muslims, it was necessary to explore whether identity negotiation played a role in their experiences within the composition program. Malek, who enrolled in the mainstream section of ENG 202, reported feeling uncomfortable during a classroom discussion in which some American classmates suggested that certain religions promote violence. He stated, "I felt like they were talking about Islam, and that did not make me feel comfortable at all" (Malek's interview). When asked whether he responded to those comments, Malek indicated that he did not. His reluctance to speak up may suggest a sense of discomfort in defending his religion alone, possibly preferring that someone else - ideally a non-Muslim peer - would intervene, thereby offering a sense of support and validation.

While discussing this situation, Malek recalled, "I remember another thing." He shared an incident involving one of his classmates who, whenever they worked together in a group, would refer to him as "you, whatever your name is." Malek noted that this occurred more than once. When he eventually decided to respond and asked her why she did not use his name, she replied, "sorry I cannot pronounce your name; it is hard." Malek reflected, "if she really, you know, does not know how to pronounce my name, she should ask me how to pronounce it, but calling me 'you, whatever your name is' is racist in my opinion" (Malek's interview, 2019). In contrast, Shahd, who completed high school in the United States and took both ENG101 and ENG202 in mainstream sections, appeared more able to respond to such situations and initiate discussions on topics she believed her classmates should be aware of. She explained the difficulty many Americans have in distinguishing between what is Islamic and what is cultural. In class discussions and group work, Shahd would share aspects of her Saudi Arabian culture, clarifying misconceptions about practices often perceived as religious. For instance, she mentioned "women driving cars and covering faces." She said, "they [her classmates] get excited to hear that, and like we get engaged in a conversation and it becomes interesting."

Similar to Shahd, Khalaf seems to initiate discussions about his religion and cultural backgrounds. He stated, "I think I stood out not only because I am a Muslim, but also because I look different from everyone else. My skin tone looks completely different from everyone else. For the most part, most of the students are White, except for two classes, there were two Black girls." Khalaf explained that being in classes with American classmates presents a valuable opportunity for him to share his beliefs so that others can gain a clearer understanding of what Islam is - and what it is not. He remarked, "most of the horrific acts or the hatred is because of people's lack of exposure to Muslims." He further noted that by sharing his personal experiences, he has become a point reference on Islam for his American peers. Khalaf strongly identifies with his Muslim identity in class. He is aware of the presence of anti-Muslim sentiment and rhetoric, which motivates him to help his classmate overcome stereotypes and misunderstandings about Muslims

and Islam. Notably, this concern in MWL sections, nor by Malek in his MWL ENG 1101 class. This contrast supports the argument that integrating Muslim L2 students with American classmates can yield mutual benefits for all students involved.

The debate on which structure is best suited for MWL students is contextually unresolved. Based on where the school is located and its international population, universities should decide how composition programs should be structured. These findings cannot speak to one of the two structures as "better" or "the best." However, when the issue of separation or integration is viewed from the angle of benefit, we can conclude that – in the context of my findings – integration is more beneficial for both MWL and L1 students. It is good for MWL students themselves because they can understand the stereotypes being perceived about them and can thus better correct the distorted image of themselves and their communities, as in the case of Muslim students. Integration is also beneficial for the L1 students, who have the opportunity to work with international students and gain a better understanding of them. In discussions of the integration vs. division debate, we usually find that the focus is on international students, while minimal to no attention is given to the L1 local students themselves, who are an indispensable part of the debate and cannot be ignored. The developed themes lead to the following pedagogical implications.

PI 1: Enhancing Students' Agency in Selecting Section Type

Participants' section selection was influenced by academic advisors, friends, or prior knowledge. The research suggests that programs implementing both integrated and separated, should types should create an introductory video that briefly presents the two structures, highlights their differences, and features interview with students from both types of sections. Academic advisors can then recommend that their advisees watch this video before deciding which section to join. In doing so, student would be better informed and can regain their agency in selecting the course type that best suits them. This approach may serve as one way to restore students' decision-making agency.

PI 2: Rethinking Placement Tests

My findings indicate that placement tests can be ineffective for several reasons. One of the most significant is that students' linguistic proficiency should not be the sole determining factor. Other important considerations should include students' sense of belonging, cultural and educational backgrounds, individual needs, and diverse abilities or intelligences. Some students may perform more effectively when placed with L1 peers, while others may thrive in L2-only environments. For example, Malek shared that his experience in the integrated section was particularly meaningful – not for linguistic reasons, but because it allowed him to learn more about American culture and provided his American classmates the opportunity to learn about his culture and religion.

PI 3: Creating and Supporting a Bridge Between the MWL Sections and the Mainstream Sections

According to these findings, none of the participants mentioned the presence of bridging activities between the different sections. This suggests that, at the institution where the data were collected, the two section types of function in complete isolation from one another. To address this, there should be intentional efforts to develop bridging activities that connect students across separated and mainstream sections. For example, students in MWL sections could collaborate on joint projects with those in mainstream sections. While such initiatives may present logistical challenges – such as scheduling conflicts, assessment alignment, and coordination between instructors – considering these possibilities could lead to innovative approaches that foster connections between the two groups. Matsuda and Silva (1999) proposed an idea they referred to as "cross-cultural composition as an alternative placement option," which could serve as a valuable model for creating such bridges.

PI 4: Valorizing Critical Pedagogy Practices

Critical pedagogy involves encouraging students to critically analyze and question texts (Beck, 2005). According to the participants, such practices were notably absent from their curriculum. When asked whether they engaged with complex topics such as race, diversity, or religious plurality, Shahd responded, "Issues of diversity and race are important to me, so I try to integrate them into my writing," although she was not required to do so. Malek expressed a desire for more classroom discussions on religion and free speech in First-Year Composition (FYC) courses. Similarly, Khalaf reported initiating conversations about religion with his peers. Instructors can support critical pedagogy by incorporating narrative assignments, encouraging self-reflection on personal biases, and promoting research on unfamiliar or challenging topics.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the narrated experiences of four L2 students enrolled in required undergraduate composition courses, ENG 101 and ENG 202. By analyzing participants' narratives, the study aimed to develop pedagogical implications for composition programs, particularly in relation to their two primary structural models: integration and separation. I recommend that further studies be conducted to deepen and broaden our understanding of this multilingual student population. This study included only one female participant, highlighting the need for future research to amplify the voices of more women and explore their unique experiences. Additionally, as all participants were of Arab descent, future studies should aim to include students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The question of whether integration or separation is more appropriate in First-Year Composition (FYC) courses cannot be resolved by the findings of a single study – or even several – because the issue is highly contextual. Factors such

as institutional location, student demographics, and broader sociopolitical dynamics all influence how these programs function. Therefore, continued research is essential to further examine and understand this complex issue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Appendix I
Interview Questions

Demographic Questions:
1. Choose a nickname (or I can assign you one?)
2. Which country do you come from?
3. How do you describe your ethnicity/race?
4. What is your gender?
5. What is your first language?
6. What is your age?
7. How long have you been in the States?
8. How long have you been learning English?
9. Do you consider English to be your first or second language?
10. What is your major?
11. Are you employed?
12. what visa are you on?
13. What is your marital status?

Course-related Questions:
1. Which course did you take? ENG 101, ENG 202, or ENG 121?
2. Which section of ENG 101, 202m or 121 are you taking now or did you take, Multilingual or mainstream?
3. When did you take it?
4. What grade did you take or expect to take?

Core Questions
1. Why did you sign up for this class?
2. What are some of the things you learned in this class?
3. Did/do you always attend the class or do you miss some days? How many days have you missed, if any?
4. Why do you miss or attend the class?
5. Why did you sign up for the mainstream/multilingual section of this class?
6. Did you have an option or were you asked to sign up for it?
7. Do you think international students/ESL/multilingual students have needs different from the needs of native speakers of English?
8. Do you think it is better for international students and domestic/native students to take the same sections of the course or is it better if they take it in different sections? Why? How?
9. Do you think if you have native speakers as your classmates, that will help you do better or add to your anxiety? Can you share situations or examples?
10. Do you think Americans (native speakers of English) write better than non-natives? How? Why?
11. Do you remember how you felt in the first day of this course? What kinds of thoughts did you have?
12. Do you still have these thoughts or do you have different ones now?
13. How did you think about English writing at that time?
14. What do you think of writing now?
15. From 1 to 10, rate your thoughts and beliefs about your writing ability before signing up for this class?
16. From 1 to 10, rate your thoughts and beliefs about your writing abilities and skill of writing now after taking the class? Why?
17. How do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
    - I get good grades in writing
    - When I come across a tough writing assignment, I work on it until I complete it
    - Most of my classmates are good/poor writers
    - My teacher often tells me that I am a good writer
    - My classmates believe that I am a good writer
    - Just thinking about writing makes me nervous
    - Writing makes me feel uneasy and confused
    - I can think of many ideas for my writing
    - I can put my ideas into writing
18. How do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
    - I can spell my words correctly
    - I can write complete sentences
    - I can punctuate my sentences correctly
    - I can write grammatically correct sentences

- I can begin my paragraphs in the right spots
19. Do you think being Muslim does not make you feel out of place or embarrassed?
20. Does your teacher make you read or write about topics that empower you or make you state your opinion with no worry? Can you share situations or examples?
21. Describe your feelings towards this composition class?
22. Are you engaged in the class? Do you always ask and answer questions? Have you ever visited your teacher in his/her office hours?
23. Do you think it is better to have a native speaker teacher or an international (non-native) teacher?
24. Do you prefer a teacher from the same gender, background, and religion? How? Why?
25. Do you engage in peer review activities? How do you feel about them? Do you choose your peer or does your teacher choose him/her for you? Do you prefer native or non-native?
26. In other classes of your major, you are with native speakers of English, in English, if you are not, how is this different?
27. How do you agree with the following statements?
    - I feel like a real part of my composition class.
    - My teacher in my composition class notice when I'm good at something.
    - It is hard for people like me to be accepted in my composition class.
    - Other students in my composition class take my opinions seriously.
    - My composition instructor is interested in me.
    - Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong in my composition class.
    - There's at least one classmate and/or my instructor I can talk to if I have a problem in my composition class.
    - People in my composition class are friendly to me.
    - My composition instructor is not interested in people like me.
    - I am included in lots of activities in my composition class.
    - I am treated with as much respect as other students in my composition class.
    - I feel very different from most other students in my composition class.
    - I can really be myself in the composition class.
    - The instructor in my composition class respects me.
    - People in my composition class know I can do good work.
    - I would not have taken this class if it was not required.
    - I feel proud of belonging to my composition class.
    - Other students here in my composition class like the way I am.
28. Describe your curriculum/syllabus. Such as how many major assignments are there? What are you required to do on a daily basis? Are you/were you required to read or only write?
29. Do you think the curriculum was designed in a certain way to meet the needs of your section as international students?
30. Do you think the course would be the same (goals, assignments, activities) if there were native students with you?
31. If you were the instructor, what changes would you do to the curriculum to meet your needs?
32. What do you think of the assignments?
33. What sources the program offer you and you use? (Writing center, Websites, Peers, Interaction with teachers, staff, Events, Others?)
34. What do you think of the feedback you received on your writing assignments?
35. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
    - I think what I learn in composition class is important
    - The assignments I take, regardless of their difficulty level, are relevant and teach me something I may need one day
    - In this class, I learn something new frequently
    - The materials I study for this class are of good quality
    - What I learn in this composition class is relevant to me, my future plans, major, and career. I highly rate the curriculum of my composition class.
    - Syllabus, goals of the class, and guidelines are presented clearly
    - The teaching method of my writing teacher suits me and is interesting
    - The composition curriculum is worth my attention, time, and tuition

Finally:

   - Can you share with me your first and last assignments and the feedback from your teacher?

Note: The questions about the statements in which participants agree or disagree or rate their performance based on and the shared assignments are there to open opportunities for discussions.