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Arabic language, cultural continuity, and national identity in Saudi literature

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ABSTRACT

Arabic literature occupies official, religious, historical, and everyday roles in Saudi Arabia, yet those roles are distributed across Modern Standard Arabic, local varieties, Classical or Qur'anic registers, and multilingual practices that include English. The 2026 National Policy for the Arabic Language makes a population-level baseline especially timely, but existing Saudi research has concentrated largely on policy documents and linguistic landscapes rather than citizens' domain-specific practices and interpretations. This protocol describes a study of how language repertoire, family language socialisation, institutional experience, and bilingual compatibility relate to Arabic identity centrality and broader cultural attachment among Saudi adults. Methods: The study will use a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase targets 1,700 Saudi citizens aged 18 years or older across the Kingdom's 13 administrative regions through a stratified multistage probability design, subject to access to an appropriate sampling frame. An Arabic survey will be developed through expert review, cognitive interviews, and a separate pilot. Planned analyses include survey-weighted estimates, ordinal confirmatory factor analysis, measurement-invariance testing, and preregistered association models with effect sizes and uncertainty intervals. A nested maximum-variation sample of approximately 36-45 survey participants will then complete Arabic semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be examined through critical-realist reflexive thematic analysis, and the two phases will be integrated through connecting, building, joint displays, and meta-inference. Discussion: The protocol avoids treating language and identity as a zero-sum contest or inferring cultural preservation from symbolic endorsement alone. It is designed to distinguish practical multilingualism from language displacement and to provide a transparent baseline for policy, education, family language planning, and future longitudinal research.

KEYWORDS: Arabic language, Saudi Arabia, national identity, cultural continuity, language policy, family language policy, bilingualism, mixed methods

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1. Introduction

Language can carry memory, religious knowledge, family histories, institutional authority, humour, and ordinary ways of recognising one another. It does not, however, preserve a culture automatically. People may value a language without using it regularly, use several languages without experiencing divided loyalties, or shift between language varieties as they move from home to university, worship, work, public services, and digital life. The relationship between language and identity is therefore best treated as an empirical question about practices, meanings, and social conditions rather than as a conclusion built into the title of a study.

This distinction is particularly important in Saudi Arabia. Arabic is the official language and is closely connected with the Kingdom's history, public institutions, religious life, and national self-understanding. At the same time, English has a practical role in higher education, medicine, technology, aviation, tourism, finance, research, and international business. These roles need not be mutually exclusive. A Saudi professional may prepare an English presentation, speak a local Arabic variety with family members, write formal correspondence in Modern Standard Arabic, and engage a Classical or Qur'anic register in religious contexts. Treating one of these choices as the person's entire linguistic identity would misrepresent the repertoire through which contemporary life is organised.

The policy context has recently become more explicit. The Saudi Council of Ministers approved the National Policy for the Arabic Language on 3 February 2026, and the official text was published in Umm Al-Qura on 13 February 2026 (Umm Al-Qura, 2026). The policy identifies Arabic as an element of sovereignty, cultural security, and national identity, and it calls for stronger Arabic presence in education, public life, scientific research, media, business, international communication, and cultural production. Its scope is broad, but the existence of a policy does not establish its implementation, public reception, or effects. A study conducted soon after adoption can offer a baseline; it cannot yet demonstrate long-term policy impact.

Saudi sociolinguistic research already shows that public language choices are domain-sensitive. Studies of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, commercial signs, Najran, coffee-shop branding, and online promotional materials reveal different configurations of Arabic, English, bilingual display, transliteration, and visual prominence (Al-Athwary, 2022; Alkhalil, 2025; Alotaibi & Alamri, 2022; Alsaif & Starks, 2019; Hazaea & Qassem, 2025). These studies are valuable because public signs make language hierarchies visible. Yet signs are produced by institutions, businesses, designers, and regulators; they do not directly reveal how citizens use language at home, how parents transmit cultural knowledge, whether bilingual practice is experienced as loss or competence, or how language attitudes differ from actual behaviour.

The proposed study addresses that gap through a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. It will estimate patterns of language use and attitude in a national adult sample and then investigate the meanings behind those patterns through interviews. The study does not seek to prove that Arabic alone preserves Saudi identity. Instead, it asks when Arabic is used, which Arabic varieties are involved, what participants believe those practices mean, how English and other languages are accommodated, and which social and institutional conditions support or constrain cultural continuity. This framing allows strong Arabic attachment and extensive multilingual practice to coexist analytically rather than forcing participants into a binary choice.

The protocol also responds to a measurement problem in language-and-identity research. If identity is measured only by statements such as 'Arabic is central to Saudi identity,' then a positive association between Arabic and identity is almost guaranteed. The present design therefore separates Arabic identity centrality from a broader measure of Saudi cultural attachment that does not mention language. It also measures family transmission, domain-specific use, self-rated proficiency, perceived institutional expectations, and bilingual compatibility. This separation makes it possible to ask whether Arabic practices are associated with broader attachment without defining the outcome in linguistic terms.

2. Conceptual Framework and Evidence Base

2.1 Language and Identity as Situated and Relational

Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic framework treats identity as emergent in interaction, positioned at several social levels, indexed through semiotic choices, produced relationally, and always partial. This approach discourages the assumption that a person possesses one fixed identity that can be read directly from one language choice. Language may index authority in one setting, intimacy in another, professional

expertise in a third, and religious continuity in a fourth. The same English expression can signal necessity, aspiration, institutional compliance, humour, or exclusion depending on who uses it, with whom, and for what purpose.

For the present study, identity is divided into analytically distinct constructs. Arabic identity centrality refers to the personal and symbolic importance participants attach to Arabic within their sense of self and community. Broader Saudi cultural attachment refers to belonging, connection with traditions and histories, and concern for intergenerational continuity without requiring agreement that language is the only or principal carrier of those attachments. Policy support concerns views about institutional language arrangements. Religious language practice is measured in relevant domains rather than treated as identical to national identity. These distinctions do not deny overlap; they make the overlap testable.

2.2 Repertoire, Diglossia, and Domains of Use

Arabic-speaking societies have long been central to discussions of diglossia, although contemporary repertoires are more fluid than a simple high-low division suggests (Ferguson, 1959). Modern Standard Arabic is prominent in formal education, official writing, news, and many institutional contexts. Local Saudi varieties organise much everyday conversation and carry regional, familial, and interpersonal meanings. Classical or Qur'anic registers have particular religious and textual significance. English and other languages enter unevenly through education, employment, tourism, media, migration, and digital platforms.

Fishman's (1965) question - who speaks what language to whom and when - remains methodologically useful because language choice is domain-specific. The protocol therefore rejects a single global question such as 'How often do you use Arabic?' Participants will report language and variety use across home, friendship, religious learning, education, employment, public services, commerce and tourism, private digital communication, public content creation, and cultural participation. This design permits the same participant to show strong Arabic use in some domains and extensive English use in others without converting that pattern into an internally inconsistent score.

The distinction between repertoire and proficiency is also essential. A person may understand formal Arabic well but prefer a local variety in speech; another may use English frequently because a workplace requires it rather than because English is personally preferred. Self-rated speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension will therefore be recorded separately for relevant languages and varieties. Frequency, competence, preference, prestige, and institutional pressure will not be treated as interchangeable indicators.

2.3 Family Language Policy and Intergenerational Continuity

Families are important sites of language socialisation because they connect routine interaction with memory, emotion, moral explanation, storytelling, and expectations for children. Family language policy includes explicit decisions, habitual practices, and underlying beliefs about which language should be used, taught, corrected, or valued (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009). Research in multilingual families shows that parental practices and opportunities for use can be associated with heritage-language knowledge, although family agency is constrained by schooling, labour markets, media, peer networks, and the status of languages outside the home (Schwartz, 2008).

Saudi Arabic is not a minority language in the Kingdom, so findings from migrant and minority settings cannot be transferred without qualification. The relevant parallel is narrower: cultural knowledge is transmitted through repeated interaction, and families make choices about which linguistic resources children encounter. Pagel's (2009) account of language as culturally transmitted underscores the importance of repetition across generations, but the present study does not reduce culture to a replicator or assume that unchanged transmission is desirable. Cultural continuity may involve adaptation, new terminology, bilingual mediation, and movement between standard and local varieties.

2.4 Globalisation, Linguistic Capital, and Bilingual Compatibility

Globalisation changes the social and economic value attached to languages. Heller (2003) shows how language can become a resource in new economies, while Tong and Cheung (2011) argue that globalisation may reshape cultural identity through selective incorporation rather than simple erasure. In Saudi Arabia, English can provide

access to specialised knowledge and transnational networks. It can also be experienced as an institutional gatekeeping device, a prestige code, or an unnecessary default where clear Arabic would be sufficient. These possibilities should be measured rather than assumed.

The protocol introduces bilingual compatibility as a distinct orientation: the belief that practical competence in English or another language can coexist with strong Arabic attachment and that institutional multilingualism can be designed without making Arabic invisible or non-functional. This construct is not an argument that all bilingual arrangements are balanced. It enables the study to distinguish participants who view languages as complementary from those who experience domain expansion of English as displacement. It also prevents high English use from being interpreted automatically as weak identity.

2.5 Saudi Language Policy and Linguistic-Landscape Evidence

Language planning in Saudi Arabia has developed through education, administration, public communication, and regulation over many decades (Al Zumor, 2019). The 2026 National Policy brings these strands into a single national framework and explicitly extends Arabic promotion to scientific research, media, business, and international settings (Umm Al-Qura, 2026). The policy also allows another language to be used where needed, which makes the practical question one of functional design rather than absolute monolingualism.

Linguistic-landscape research provides a partial view of that design. At the Grand Mosque in Mecca, medium and domain shape multilingual display (Alsaif & Starks, 2019). Shop signs in Saudi settings show varied ordering, translation, transliteration, and symbolic uses of Arabic and English (Al-Athwary, 2022; Alotaibi & Alamri, 2022). Coffee-shop signage on the road to Mecca and in Najran displays both local and global branding practices (Hazaea & Qassem, 2025; Hazaea et al., 2025). Promotional images for Saudi entertainment events similarly show coexistence rather than a single national pattern (Alkhalil, 2025). Together, these studies caution against describing the Kingdom as uniformly Arabic-dominant or English-dominant across all settings.

What remains missing is a national, person-centred account that links reported practice to family transmission, symbolic attachment, institutional experience, and interpretations of multilingualism. The proposed study will not replace ethnography or linguistic-landscape analysis. It will provide a complementary baseline that can identify patterns requiring deeper local investigation and later longitudinal follow-up.

2.6 Conceptual Model and Boundaries of Inference

The conceptual model contains four groups of variables. Background conditions include age, gender, region, urban-rural residence, education, occupation, medium of education, travel or international exposure, and self-rated Arabic and English proficiency. Socialisation and institutional variables include family language practices, perceived workplace or educational expectations, policy awareness, and perceived access to high-quality Arabic terminology and services. Language-practice variables record the use of Modern Standard Arabic, local Arabic varieties, Classical or Qur'anic registers where relevant, English, and other languages across domains. Interpretive outcomes include Arabic identity centrality, bilingual compatibility, perceived institutional support, and broader cultural attachment.

The cross-sectional survey will estimate associations among these variables; it will not establish temporal ordering or prove that language use causes identity. The interviews will clarify how participants interpret the associations and why apparently contradictory profiles occur. For example, high English use at work may coexist with strong Arabic identity centrality because participants compartmentalise domains, translate professional knowledge, or regard multilingual competence as a means of representing Saudi culture internationally. Such an explanation would be an integrated inference grounded in both phases, not a result presumed in advance.

3. Aim, Research Questions, and Hypotheses

The study aims to examine how Arabic practices, multilingual repertoires, family language socialisation, and institutional experiences are associated with language-identity centrality and broader cultural attachment among Saudi adults, and to explain how participants make sense of these relationships in everyday life.

Question	Focus	Evidence	Primary analysis
RQ1	How do Saudi adults describe the place of Arabic - across standard, local, and religiously relevant registers - in their national, cultural, familial, and personal self-understanding?	Survey scales and interviews	Weighted distributions; qualitative thematic analysis
RQ2	How does the use of Arabic, English, and other languages vary across home, friendship, education, work, public services, commerce, religious learning, and digital domains?	Domain-use matrix	Weighted domain profiles; prespecified domain contrasts
RQ3	Which demographic, educational, proficiency, family, and institutional factors are associated with domain-specific Arabic use, Arabic identity centrality, and broader cultural attachment?	Survey	Survey-weighted regression or latent-variable models
RQ4	Does bilingual compatibility help explain why intensive English use in globalised domains may coexist with strong Arabic attachment?	Survey and interviews	Interaction or moderation models; explanatory case selection
RQ5	How do participants explain convergent, divergent, and unexpected quantitative profiles, including generational and regional differences?	Nested interviews	Critical-realist reflexive thematic analysis and joint displays

The confirmatory hypotheses are:

- H1. More frequent Arabic family socialisation will be positively associated with current Arabic use in family, cultural, and private digital domains after adjustment for age, education, region, and self-rated proficiency.
- H2. Arabic identity centrality and domain-specific Arabic use will each show positive associations with broader Saudi cultural attachment, but the magnitude of the associations will differ by domain and will not be interpreted causally.
- H3. English use in education and employment will not necessarily show a negative association with Arabic identity centrality; any negative association is expected to be weaker among participants with higher bilingual-compatibility scores.
- H4. Younger age and higher English proficiency will be associated with more English use in education, work, and public digital content, while age differences in Arabic identity centrality may be smaller than differences in observed domain use.

The hypotheses will be preregistered before the main dataset is examined. Subgroup comparisons not named in the preregistration will be labelled exploratory, and interpretation will emphasise effect sizes and uncertainty rather than significance alone.

4. Methods

4.1 Design and Protocol Status

The study will use a QUAN -> qual sequential explanatory design in which the survey has initial priority and the interview phase is deliberately connected to survey results (Ivankova et al., 2006). Quantitative data will establish the distribution and covariation of language practices and attitudes. Qualitative data will then examine mechanisms, meanings, and exceptions that cannot be inferred from scale scores. Integration will occur when interview participants are selected, when the interview guide is built, when findings are displayed together, and when final meta-inferences are developed (Fetters et al., 2013).

This manuscript is a protocol. No participant recruitment, survey responses, interview data, statistical results, themes, or policy effects are reported. Any future empirical article will provide fieldwork dates, response

rates, exclusions, final item wording, analysis code, estimates, interview evidence, and integrated interpretation. The protocol will not be retroactively presented as though its hypotheses were findings.

4.2 Setting, Population, and Eligibility

The target population is Saudi citizens aged 18 years or older who are usual residents of the Kingdom's 13 administrative regions. Citizens temporarily away for travel or study may be included only if they remain usual residents and can complete the survey under the same verification procedures. The citizen-only scope is justified by the study's focus on national identity, not by an assumption that non-citizen residents are sociolinguistically unimportant. The Kingdom's multilingual migrant ecology is a major contextual factor and a limitation of the proposed sampling boundary.

Participants must be able to provide informed consent and complete the survey in Arabic independently or through a trained interviewer who reads items without interpretation. The survey will be developed primarily in clear Modern Standard Arabic, with examples or interviewer guidance refined through cognitive testing. Eligibility, region of residence, and age will be verified through non-intrusive screening questions. No national identification number will be collected in the research dataset.

4.3 Quantitative Sampling Strategy

The preferred design is a stratified multistage probability sample. The primary strata will be administrative region and urban-rural settlement type where the sampling frame permits. Primary sampling units will be selected with probability proportional to size from an official or professionally maintained enumeration frame. Within selected units, households will be chosen systematically, and one eligible adult will be selected using a documented within-household procedure rather than interviewer convenience. A minimum regional allocation will protect analytic coverage of less populous regions, with the remaining sample distributed proportionally. Unequal selection probabilities will be corrected through design weights.

Nonresponse will be documented at each stage. The fieldwork plan will specify the number and timing of contact attempts, refusal conversion rules, replacement restrictions, interviewer language training, and safety procedures. Post-stratification or raking may calibrate weights to authoritative population margins for age, gender, region, and settlement type, provided those variables are available and measured comparably. Variance estimation will reflect stratification, clustering, and weights.

The original proposal contemplated online, telephone, and face-to-face modes. The revision does not assume that simply combining these modes improves representativeness. A probability-selected participant may be offered an accessible completion mode, but recruitment must remain tied to the sampling design. Mode will be recorded and tested for differential measurement. If access to a probability frame is not secured, the design will be reclassified before recruitment as a calibrated non-probability panel or quota sample; the study will not use the terms 'random,' 'representative,' or 'national prevalence' without defensible design support.

4.4 Quantitative Sample Size

The target is 1,700 completed surveys. This is a precision target rather than a claim that large samples compensate for weak measurement or selection bias. Under simple random sampling, a proportion near .50 would have an approximate 95% margin of error of +/-2.4 percentage points. Under an illustrative design effect of 1.5, the margin would be about +/-2.9 points. For a chi-square association with four degrees of freedom and a small effect of $w = .10$, 1,700 independent observations provide approximately 93% power at alpha = .05; an effective sample of about 1,417 after a design effect of 1.2 provides approximately 87% power. These calculations are illustrative because actual category frequencies, clustering, missingness, and unequal weights are not yet known. After the pilot, simulation-based power and precision checks will be conducted for the primary latent-variable and regression models using the planned weighting structure and observed response distributions. The number of confirmatory parameters will be reduced if the target cannot support them reliably. Subgroup analyses will be reported only where effective sample sizes and cell counts are adequate. The study will distinguish a target of 1,700 completed cases from the larger number of households or invitees needed to achieve that total.

4.5 Survey Development

The instrument will be developed in Arabic rather than translated mechanically from an English master questionnaire. Development will follow an iterative process: conceptual definition; review of relevant measures; item generation; expert assessment; cognitive interviewing; pilot administration; psychometric evaluation; and revision (Boateng et al., 2018). An interdisciplinary panel of approximately 6-10 Saudi specialists in sociolinguistics, Arabic language, survey methods, psychometrics, education, and cultural studies will assess relevance, clarity, construct coverage, sensitivity, and potential ideological loading.

Approximately 20-25 adults with varied ages, regions, education levels, and language profiles will participate in cognitive interviews. They will be asked how they interpret key terms such as 'Arabic,' 'formal Arabic,' 'local dialect,' 'identity,' 'culture,' 'use,' and 'preference.' Think-aloud and probing techniques will identify items that invite socially desirable agreement, confuse actual practice with aspiration, or imply that English use is disloyal. The cognitive phase will also test whether participants can meaningfully report Classical or Qur'anic registers separately from Modern Standard Arabic in relevant domains.

4.6 Constructs and Planned Measures

Construct	Definition	Planned operationalisation
Language repertoire and proficiency	Self-rated speaking, listening, reading, and writing ability in Modern Standard Arabic, local Arabic variety, English, and other languages.	Separate 5-point proficiency items; language-learning and medium-of-education history.
Domain-specific use	Frequency of using each language or variety with particular interlocutors and for particular activities.	Matrix covering home, friends, religious learning, education, work, public services, commerce/tourism, private digital communication, public content, and cultural participation.
Arabic identity centrality	The personal and symbolic importance of Arabic to self-understanding and community connection.	Provisional multi-item 5-point agreement scale; wording avoids claims about policy effectiveness.
Broader cultural attachment	Belonging, connection with Saudi histories and traditions, and concern for intergenerational continuity without mentioning language.	Provisional multi-item 5-point agreement scale used to reduce criterion contamination.
Family language socialisation	Past and current family practices through which stories, values, emotion, literacy, and expectations are communicated.	Items on interaction, storytelling, reading, correction, encouragement, and language choices with children or younger relatives.
Bilingual compatibility	The view that multilingual competence can coexist with strong Arabic attachment and that additional languages can be used without making Arabic non-functional.	Balanced items, including reverse-worded zero-sum statements if cognitive testing supports them.
Institutional experience and policy support	Perceived expectations, accessibility of Arabic terminology and services, awareness of the 2026 policy, and preferences for public language arrangements.	Items separated into experience, awareness, perceived implementation, and normative support.
Contextual variables	Demographic, educational, occupational, regional, mobility, and digital-exposure characteristics relevant to language use.	Age, gender, region, settlement type, education, occupation, household composition, travel or study exposure, and media practices.

All scale labels will be described verbally, and 'not applicable' will be available for domain questions where

appropriate. Attitude agreement, behaviour frequency, proficiency, and perceived pressure will use different response instructions so that participants are not encouraged to treat them as the same kind of judgement. The final instrument, scoring rules, and all exclusions will be archived before main analysis.

4.7 Pilot Study and Psychometric Evaluation

A separate heterogeneous pilot of approximately 150 adults will test recruitment, completion time, item distributions, mode feasibility, missingness, and preliminary factor structure. Pilot respondents will not be included in the confirmatory main sample. Items with severe ambiguity, floor or ceiling concentration, local dependence, or redundant wording will be revised or removed on conceptual as well as statistical grounds.

Because agreement responses are ordinal, confirmatory factor analysis will use an estimator designed for categorical indicators, such as WLSMV, rather than treating all items as normally distributed continuous variables (Flora & Curran, 2004; Li, 2016). Reliability will be reported with coefficients appropriate to the fitted model, not Cronbach's alpha alone. Convergent and discriminant validity will be evaluated through factor loadings, factor correlations, theoretically plausible external associations, and, where applicable, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). Measurement invariance will be examined across major age and gender groups and across broader regional clusters when effective group sizes permit (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). Non-invariance will be reported rather than hidden through forced score comparison.

4.8 Recruitment and Survey Administration

Recruitment materials will describe the study as research on language use and cultural experience, not as a test of patriotism or linguistic correctness. Participants will be told that there are no preferred language profiles and that choosing English or a local Arabic variety in a particular domain is not a wrong answer. Interviewers will be trained to read items neutrally, avoid correcting participants' speech, and record mode and accessibility accommodations.

The survey is expected to require approximately 18-25 minutes after pilot refinement. Quality checks will include range checks, logically impossible combinations, duration flags, duplicate-contact controls that do not enter the analysis file, and interviewer monitoring. Cases will not be excluded merely because their answers are politically or linguistically unexpected. Exclusion rules will be preregistered and reported with a participant-flow diagram in the empirical article.

4.9 Quantitative Analysis Plan

Analysis will begin with a reproducible data dictionary, documented recoding, and a separation between design variables, confirmatory outcomes, and exploratory variables. Weighted frequencies, means or medians as appropriate, and 95% confidence intervals will describe language repertoire, domain use, policy awareness, and scale distributions. Unweighted counts will accompany weighted percentages. Survey design features will be incorporated in variance estimation.

The measurement model will be evaluated before substantive hypotheses. Ordinal CFA will test the planned factor structure, with model evaluation based on multiple indicators, residuals, theoretical coherence, and sensitivity to plausible alternatives rather than a mechanical pass-fail cutoff. If a scale is not sufficiently invariant, comparisons will use partial-invariance models, group-specific parameters, or item-level descriptions as justified.

Primary association models will be specified after pilot refinement but before main-data inspection. Survey-weighted regression or complex-survey latent-variable models will estimate associations between family socialisation and domain-specific Arabic use (H1), and between Arabic use, Arabic identity centrality, and broader cultural attachment (H2). H3 will be tested through an interaction between English use in globalised domains and bilingual compatibility when predicting Arabic identity centrality. H4 will compare age-related differences in language use with differences in identity centrality. Covariates will be limited to prespecified confounders supported by the conceptual model; indiscriminate stepwise selection will not be used.

Categorical or ordinal outcomes will use appropriate link functions. Continuous scale scores will be analysed only if their measurement and distribution support that treatment. Effect estimates, standard errors, 95% confidence intervals, and interpretable standardised effects will be reported. Chi-square tests and Cramer's

V may be used for descriptive bivariate tables, but they will not replace the primary models. Likert responses will not be dichotomised simply to create categories.

Patterns and mechanisms of missingness will be examined by item, mode, and participant characteristics. Where appropriate, regression analyses will use multiple imputation that includes design and auxiliary variables; complete-case and alternative-scoring analyses will be reported as sensitivity checks. Exploratory families of domain or subgroup tests will use false-discovery-rate control and will be labelled exploratory. Model code and a synthetic or disclosure-controlled example dataset will be shared so that the workflow can be audited even if confidentiality limits release of microdata.

4.10 Qualitative Sampling

At the end of the survey, participants may provide separate consent to be contacted for an interview. Contact details will be stored apart from survey responses. A nested maximum-variation sample of approximately 36-45 participants will be selected after preliminary quantitative analysis. The initial range is guided by information power rather than by a promise of universal saturation (Malterud et al., 2016). The final number will depend on the breadth of profiles, interview depth, and the ability of the sample to explain the quantitative results.

Selection dimensions will include age, gender, region, education, occupation, Arabic and English proficiency, family-socialisation score, Arabic identity centrality, bilingual compatibility, and contrasting domain-use profiles. Particular attention will be given to discrepant or theoretically informative cases: for example, participants with high English use and high Arabic attachment, low reported Arabic use but strong policy support, or strong family transmission but weak formal-Arabic confidence. The goal is explanatory range, not qualitative representativeness.

4.11 Interview Procedures

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted in Arabic by trained researchers and will last approximately 60-75 minutes. Participants may use the Arabic variety in which they are most comfortable. The guide will include common core questions and tailored probes derived from each participant's survey profile. Interviews will explore language histories, family memories, domains of use, emotions attached to varieties, experiences of inclusion or exclusion, workplace and educational expectations, digital practices, awareness of language policy, and participants' own definitions of cultural continuity.

With consent, interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed in Arabic. Transcription conventions will preserve meaningful code-switching and variety shifts without overstandardising participants' speech. English translations used in publication will be prepared by a bilingual researcher and checked by another team member against the audio and Arabic transcript. Translation choices that affect interpretation will be discussed in analytic memos. Quotations will be lightly edited only for readability and never to make participants sound more formally educated than they were.

4.12 Qualitative Analysis

The interview material will be analysed through critical-realist reflexive thematic analysis. This approach is suitable because participants' accounts are treated both as meaningful experiences and as interpretations shaped by social conditions, language ideologies, and institutional arrangements. Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) distinction among experiential, inferential, and dispositional themes will guide analytic depth without requiring a fixed number of themes. No theme is specified in advance as a finding.

Analysis will involve repeated reading, initial coding, development of candidate patterns, examination of variation and negative cases, refinement of themes, and construction of an interpretive account. At least two bilingual researchers will engage in collaborative analytic dialogue, but agreement percentages will not be used as a substitute for reflexivity. Each analyst will maintain memos about disciplinary position, assumptions concerning Arabic and English, regional familiarity, and reactions to politically or emotionally charged material. Decisions will be documented in an audit trail. Quality will be judged through rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, ethical care, and meaningful coherence rather than a checklist detached from the chosen analytic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Tracy, 2010).

4.13 Mixed-Methods Integration

Integration will occur in four linked operations. First, connecting will use survey profiles to select interview participants. Second, building will use quantitative patterns and anomalies to tailor interview probes. Third, merging will place weighted estimates, model results, qualitative themes, and representative or disconfirming accounts in joint displays. Fourth, meta-inference will explain where the phases converge, where one adds context to the other, and where they remain in tension.

The qualitative phase will not be used merely to decorate statistically significant results. A small quantitative association may have important institutional meaning, while a large association may be explained by measurement overlap or domain composition. Likewise, interview accounts will not override population estimates simply because they are vivid. The integrated report will state the evidential contribution and limitation of each phase. Appendix C provides the planned joint-display structure.

4.14 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

Researchers studying Arabic in Saudi Arabia may themselves be teachers, language specialists, multilingual professionals, or supporters of language policy. These positions can enrich interpretation but also make some conclusions feel self-evident before evidence is collected. Before fieldwork, team members will prepare positionality statements describing their relationships to Arabic varieties, English, institutional policy, region, and educational background. Reflexive meetings will examine whether item wording or analysis frames multilingual practice as deficiency, equates formal Arabic with all Arabic, or treats policy agreement as evidence of actual behaviour.

The team will actively search for accounts that challenge its preferred narrative. A participant who sees English as compatible with cultural belonging, a participant who values Arabic symbolically but rarely reads it, and a participant who experiences formal-Arabic expectations as exclusionary are all analytically relevant. The study's purpose is not to rank participants' authenticity but to understand the conditions under which linguistic resources acquire cultural meaning.

4.15 Ethics and Data Governance

No recruitment or data collection will begin until approval has been obtained from an appropriate institutional research ethics committee. The final submission must name the committee and provide the approval number and date; these details are not supplied in the source manuscript and are not invented here. Participants will receive information about purpose, procedures, voluntary participation, withdrawal, confidentiality, recording, foreseeable discomfort, and data use. Separate consent will be obtained for survey participation, recontact, interview recording, and use of anonymised quotations.

Questions about national identity and language may create pressure to provide socially approved answers. Recruitment and consent materials will therefore emphasise that the study is independent research, that services or employment are unaffected, and that disagreement with language policy is permissible. Direct identifiers will be stored separately from research data. Region, occupation, rare language background, and distinctive quotations will be reviewed together to reduce deductive identification. Audio files will be encrypted, access restricted, and retention and destruction dates defined in the approved data-management plan.

De-identified survey data and code will be shared where consent, ethics approval, and disclosure risk permit. Full interview transcripts are unlikely to be openly released because combinations of region, occupation, biography, and phrasing may identify participants. A qualitative codebook, analytic memos suitable for sharing, joint-display templates, and carefully anonymised excerpts may be deposited instead. Any access-controlled archive will state the criteria and process for secondary use.

4.16 Preregistration and Reproducibility

Before main recruitment or, at the latest, before the research team accesses main-outcome data, the protocol will be time-stamped in a recognised repository. The record will include the final questionnaire, hypotheses, primary outcomes, exclusions, weighting plan, factor model, analysis code skeleton, missing-data strategy, and rules distinguishing confirmatory from exploratory work. Amendments will be dated and justified rather than overwritten. The repository link will be inserted only after a record actually exists.

The empirical article will report software and version numbers, packages, random seeds where relevant, convergence decisions, and all deviations from the protocol. Tables will include unweighted denominators, weighted estimates, and uncertainty intervals. The qualitative report will preserve enough procedural detail to show how claims were developed without pretending that interpretive analysis can be reproduced as an identical mechanical output.

5. Planned Interpretation and Policy Relevance

The study is designed to resist two symmetrical overinterpretations. The first would treat any use of English as evidence that Arabic and national identity are weakening. The second would treat high symbolic endorsement of Arabic as proof that cultural continuity is secure. Neither conclusion follows from one survey item. Interpretation will consider the alignment or mismatch among reported behaviour, proficiency, emotional attachment, family practices, institutional conditions, and broader cultural belonging.

Domain specificity will be central. Reduced Modern Standard Arabic use in a technical workplace may reflect missing terminology, organisational policy, international clients, or employee preference; these explanations have different implications. High use of local Arabic in family and digital communication may support continuity while coexisting with anxiety about formal writing. Strong policy support may be motivated by accessibility and consumer rights rather than by opposition to multilingual services. The interviews will help distinguish these pathways.

Policy recommendations will be proportional to the evidence. A cross-sectional baseline can identify populations and domains in which participants report difficulty, pressure, or opportunity. It cannot determine whether the 2026 policy caused those patterns. Recommendations may concern clear Arabic in public services and contracts, development of specialist terminology, teacher and professional support, family literacy resources, balanced bilingual signage, or digital content. Any recommendation will state which survey estimate and qualitative explanation supports it and which alternative explanations remain.

The protocol also aligns with the cultural and human-capability ambitions of Saudi Vision 2030 (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016) without assuming that global engagement and cultural continuity are opposites. Evidence of bilingual compatibility could support policies that strengthen Arabic functionality while preserving access to international knowledge. Evidence of domain-specific displacement, by contrast, could justify targeted intervention. The value of the study lies in learning which condition exists where, for whom, and why.

6. Anticipated Strengths and Limitations

The design has several strengths. It separates related constructs that are often collapsed; measures language by variety and domain; plans a national probability sample rather than relying solely on university students; validates the Arabic instrument before substantive testing; embeds interviews within the survey; selects explanatory and discrepant cases; and specifies integration before data collection. The explicit protocol status also prevents anticipated results from being mistaken for observations.

Important limitations remain. Cross-sectional data cannot establish preservation, decline, or causal direction. Self-reports may differ from observed practice and may be influenced by social desirability, especially after a prominent national policy. Even a probability sample may experience nonresponse and mode effects. Broad regional comparisons may hide local variation, while detailed categories may create small cells and disclosure risk. The citizen-only population does not represent the Kingdom's full multilingual ecology. Self-rated proficiency is not a substitute for performance assessment. Finally, scales can quantify patterns but cannot exhaust the historical, religious, emotional, and aesthetic meanings of Arabic.

These limitations shape the future research programme. Repeated cross-sections or panels would be needed to examine change after the 2026 policy. Observational studies could compare reported and actual language use. Ethnographies could examine families, schools, workplaces, or digital communities. Experiments or quasi-experiments could evaluate specific interventions, such as terminology resources or bilingual service design. Linguistic-landscape studies could document whether official and commercial practices change over time. The present protocol is a baseline architecture, not a final account of language and identity in Saudi Arabia.

7. Conclusion

Arabic is central to many dimensions of Saudi life, but its relationship with culture and identity cannot be established through assertion. It must be studied across varieties, domains, generations, and institutions, alongside the multilingual resources through which citizens participate in contemporary society. This protocol provides a transparent plan for doing so without treating English as automatic cultural loss, symbolic support as behavioural evidence, or cross-sectional association as preservation. Its contribution will depend on faithful implementation, ethical approval, preregistration, rigorous measurement, and an eventual results paper that reports what participants actually say and do rather than what the researchers expect to find.

Declarations

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