



## OPEN ACCESS

## EDITED BY

Kealeboga Aiseng,  
Rhodes University, South Africa

## REVIEWED BY

Jamal Kaid Mohammad Ali,  
University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia  
Mubarak Alkhatnai,  
King Saud University, Saudi Arabia  
Uchenna Onuzulike,  
Bowie State University, United States

## \*CORRESPONDENCE

Oun Almesaar  
✉ omesaar@taibahu.edu.sa

RECEIVED 03 May 2023

ACCEPTED 03 June 2024

PUBLISHED 25 June 2024

## CITATION

Almesaar O (2024) English language in Saudi Arabia: vision 2030 in the historical prism of a clash between cultures. *Front. Commun.* 9:1205167. doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2024.1205167

## COPYRIGHT

© 2024 Almesaar. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

# English language in Saudi Arabia: vision 2030 in the historical prism of a clash between cultures

Oun Almesaar <sup>†</sup>

Taibah University, Madinah, Saudi Arabia

This article examines how the English language was and is today perceived within Saudi Arabia, with the help of a historical analysis and qualitative content analysis of the Human Capability Development Programme (HCDP) of the Saudi Vision 2030. Based on historical analysis of Saudi-British relations, and works of Tzvetan Todorov and Jacques Lacan, it is concluded that the English language, as a part of the Western culture, is potentially experienced in Saudi Arabia in the intersection of the mirroring dimensions of Idealisation-Demonisation and Mimicry-Disgust. The content analysis of the HCDP yielded the following conclusions: Islam has a place in the Saudi future as long as it is moderate and non-extreme; the preservation of Saudi culture will rely heavily on the preservation of Arabic language, and it will be a carrier of national identity. The Programme is for the most part silent with respect to the English language. It is hypothesised that this conflict is removed from the official discourse, but still might be present in the Saudi culture. Future studies should examine this issue by conducting interviews and analysing relevant social media content.

## KEYWORDS

vision 2030, Saudi Arabia, English language, intercultural relations, qualitative content analysis

## 1 Introduction

Saudi Arabia (SA) is a country where tradition and ultra-modernism coalesce. Modern-day aspirations of SA towards social reform (i.e., Saudi Vision 2030) and the historical path of SA towards the country's modern initiative can be looked at through the prism of the nation's relationship to the teaching of foreign languages, chiefly the English language. SA has a long-standing relationship with the United Kingdom (Sindi, 2013). The English language, as it does in so many other places in the world (Phillipson, 1994), here plays a very important role as it is one of the means through which power exerts itself. Namely, the English language and expansion of the English language in a foreign country can be a consequence of the Anglophone world reaching over to exert its power and influence. Conversely, the teaching of English language can also be a point where certain internal interest groups attempt to exert and assert their power, such as when conservatives are sharply opposing the teaching of English as a possible sign of the decreasing influence of Islam (Karmani, 2005).

However, the English language has another, equally important role in the Saudi context. It is a way to establish dialogue with the world; not only a way to be influenced by a specific culture, but also to allow other cultures to become acquainted with the Saudi culture. In this text, the change of Saudi relationship towards the teaching of English is explored, via a historical analysis of relevant literature, as well as the role of the historical Saudi-British relationship in the attempts to firmly retain traditional values and not allow dissipation of the

traditional Saudi culture. This will provide a basis for the qualitative content analysis of the part of the agenda for Saudi Vision 2030, namely the [Human Capability Development Program](#), (2022), which is an aspect of Vision 2030 dealing specifically with education. Looking into the HCDP will allow us to understand, at least partially, the official narrative on the teaching of foreign languages in general and English language in particular, in modern-day SA.

The paper starts with a historical overview of the introduction of the English language in Saudi Arabia. The historical overview itself has two parts—a general overview focusing on the first contacts between the Saudis and the British; and the second part, focusing more on the more recent introduction of English language to the Saudi educational system. It is after this historical overview that an elaboration will be given concerning the way we understand relations between nations, with a firm basis in the works of Tzvetan Todorov (and other authors). It will be argued that the introduction of the English language to Saudi Arabia, changes to public policy that happened over time, and finally the most recent educational initiatives in Saudi Arabia, can be best understood through the Self-Other prism. The relationship between two important persons, King Abdulaziz and John Philby, will be instrumental in applying this perspective to the Saudi-British relationship. This analysis will be wrapped up with a careful analysis of the Self and the Other in the colonial context, which will serve as a basis for our own theoretical speculations on what happens today in contact between the Saudi culture and the most important proponent of the Western culture—the English language.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Historical context

SA and the United Kingdom have a long-standing relationship which stems back to at least the middle of the 19th century when Faisal Ibn Turki al-Saud (Imam Faisal), the leader of the House of Saud, entered discussions with British Political Resident in the Persian city of Bushire, in 1848 ([Sindi, 2013](#)). [Krairi \(2017\)](#) puts the start of British-Saudi relations in 1865, when Sir Lewis Pelly, a British Colonel, visited the centre of Arabia. At the time, the interests of the British and Imam Faisal stood at odds, with the British aiming to stop Imam Faisal interfering in the Arabian Gulf. Pelly also had another motive; he wanted to prove that it was possible to penetrate deeper into the Arabian Peninsula, and learn more about the geography and history of this part of the world. Pelly had several rounds of talks with Imam Faisal, though it is likely that these talks did not result in any signed treaty ([Krairi, 2017](#)). The object of these talks was potential British involvement in Saudi conflicts with Ottomans, but the British offered no concrete support and were not interested in entering a conflict with the Ottomans.

The Saudi relationship with the British was, from early on, coloured by the conflict of interests between Saudis and Ottomans ([Goldberg, 1985a](#)). For centuries Ottomans exerted authority over some parts of Arabia, and it was only with King Abdulaziz, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that Saudis started to gain more power and influence in the whole region ([Ochsenwald, 2016](#)). The contact with the British, to the Saudis, was the potential start of a cooperation

which would grant Saudis more control over the Arabian Peninsula ([Ochsenwald, 2016](#), p.33).

The Saudis contacted the British just after the capture of Riyadh in 1902, which is indicative of the importance of the United Kingdom for Saudi interests early in the 20th century ([Goldberg, 1985b](#)) although the British government was uninterested in starting any official relationship with Saudi Arabia at that time. But the world soon entered what would become known as the Great War, with Britain and the Ottomans again on opposite sides, prompting Britain to consider more closely the possibility of cooperating with the Saudis, who were known to be opposed to the Ottomans ([Goldberg, 1985b](#)).

In 1915, the leader of the House of Saud, King Abdulaziz, signed an important treaty with the British. This treaty recognised King Abdulaziz as the ruler of Najd and its dependencies ([Goldberg, 1985a](#)). In 1925, King Abdulaziz demanded a new treaty, which would reflect his growing power and importance in the region; the new treaty, signed in 1927 (The Treaty of Jiddah) foresaw King Abdulaziz's absolute authority over Najd and Hijaz ([Silverfarb, 1982](#)). He was also granted absolute authority over the foreign relations of his country. There was a peculiar note to the agreement of Jiddah; it was drawn up in both Arabic and English and in case of any divergence in interpretation, the English version would prevail ([Silverfarb, 1982](#), p. 282).

From this very brief historical overview, the most important takeaway is that Saudi Arabia's relationship with Britain is very complex and was determined, at least partially, by the ever-fluctuating interests of Britain in the Gulf. The relationship, however, was never, and still is not today, that of complete dominance of one culture over the other. Quite to the contrary, there was always friction between the British and Saudi interests, as was seen in the case of the 1927 Jiddah agreements between King Abdulaziz and the British; and, more generally, there is always the perennial conflict between external influences and internal strivings to preserve the traditional way of living. It is in this interplay of forces that the teaching and learning of the English language in SA has to be considered.

### 2.2 English language in Saudi educational system

Education in Saudi Arabia, up until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been aimed almost exclusively at helping students to get a good grasp of Qur'an as well as learn concrete skills such as arithmetic ([Elyas and Picard, 2010](#)). [Al-Ajroush \(1981\)](#) pertinently summarised the fundamentals of Muslim education formulated in the early days of Islam:

- 1 Studying and memorising the Qur'an
- 2 Religious morals
- 3 Subordination to religious authorities
- 4 Pursuing knowledge as the revelation of God's nature

Over centuries, Muslim scholars emphasised the importance of teachers and teaching, offering useful guidance to teachers, who were advised to be sympathetic, pious, and honest with their students ([Al-Ajroush, 1981](#)). Although there were voices advocating for a balanced, fairly secular education initially focusing on Arabic language, poetry, mathematics, and only later Qur'an, for the most

Abbreviations: SA, Saudi Arabia; HCDP, Human Capability Development Program.

part the education in pre-20th century areas that today belong to Saudi Arabia was focused on Islam, as well as religious, and ritualistic tradition (Al-Ajrourh, 1981). But the majority of the population received little to no education, with Saudi Arabia exhibiting high rates of illiteracy up to the mid-20th century (Al-Ajrourh, 1981). It is against the backdrop of this tradition that English was introduced to the Saudi Educational System.

The Scholarship Preparation School (SPS), opened in Makkah in 1936, was one of the first schools in SA to teach English (Mahboob and Elyas, 2014). It was also amongst the first high-school institutions in SA and was exclusively for young Saudi Arabians who planned to travel and study abroad. In this early period, the English language was the necessary means for a small number of students to go abroad and acquire new knowledge. The modern, vaguely secular Saudi educational system was still in its inception and the vast majority of people did not have much contact with the English language. However, immediately at this stage appeared dissenting voices which disagreed with the introduction of English language (and other new subjects) to the nascent educational system (Elyas and Picard, 2018). The English language and all the other foreign languages were deemed to be ‘a means of learning the beliefs of the infidels, and their corrupt science, which is dangerous to our beliefs and the morals of our children’ (cited in Assah, 1969, pp. 292–293). Such voices will continue to criticise the inclusion of English language in Saudi curricula, presenting it as dangerous, and likening its influence to the influence of the devil.

From 1958 onwards, Saudis were establishing their intermediate level educational system, and English was a part of its curricula. Schools were opening all around the country, but during the period only a small proportion of people in Saudi Arabia were literate (Elyas and Picard, 2018). French was introduced during this period but was removed from the educational system in 1969 by the Saudi Ministry of Education. Elyas and Badawood (2017) translated an important excerpt from the official policy of the Curriculum Department Centre for Development (Ministry of Education). It very nicely summarises the Saudi policy towards English as a school subject from 1970 to 2001:

*One of the goals of the education system in the Kingdom is to provide students with proficiency in English as a way of acquiring knowledge in the fields of sciences, arts and new inventions, and of transferring knowledge and the sciences to other communities, in an effort to contribute to the spread of the faith of Islam and service to humanity. (Ministry of Education, Policy of English).*

Elyas and Badawood (2017) interpret this important excerpt in the following way: the English language is a potentially harmful agent to important goals of SA as an Islamic state, and it only has a place in school curricula as long as it serves the goals of Islam. The official discourse on the English language in SA only considered it as a potential school subject as long as it actively pursued religious and traditional goals.

During this period, English curricula carefully avoided references to Western culture, habits, and behaviours that could be regarded as unacceptable by the Saudi culture (Mahboob and Elyas, 2014). Indeed, there was no need to include cultural information in the curricula, as teaching English in SA during this period had little to do with the cultural aspect of the English language. It is safe to say that English could only find its way to Saudi classrooms in its ‘sterilised’ form. The

effects of this stance towards English are still visible today. In spite of the subsequent change of stance towards English, and significant investments, the overall English proficiency amongst Saudi students was still fairly low in 2019 (Duris and Koffi, 2020). Of course, this is not to say that the only factor to blame for low English proficiency amongst Saudi students is the decades-long ‘sterilisation’ of anything that had to do with the external world (including the English language). But it could be one of the most important, if not the most important factor in this case.

Despite introducing the English language to curricula, all other innovations such as discussion of the Western way of life, were carefully avoided. Anything that was in discord with the rigid interpretation of Islam was discarded, to the point of inciting rejection and hate towards non-Muslims (Elyas, 2008).

Mahboob and Elyas (2014) mention that in 2003, the Ministry of Education decided to introduce the English language to all primary schools in SA. The curricula also gradually (though slowly) changed; careful references to Western cultures started finding their way into the curricula. The content of textbooks also changed. Foreign cultures were compared with the Saudi culture, not in the context of a clash of civilization, but more in the context of peaceful coexistence (Mahboob and Elyas, 2014). The English language is the language of business, and naturally the English language started to become perceived as an indispensable asset on the job market (Rahman and Alhaisoni, 2013, p.114).

Numerous critics of the 2003 reform soon made their voices heard; for instance, 61 sheikhs, university presidents, professors, judges, attorneys, educators, and businessmen condemned what they saw as the increasing Western influence in their country and corresponding decrease in the importance of Islam (Elyas, 2008). They understood the new “Westernising” reforms as “deviant” and something which had a potential to destroy Saudi society and the country’s Islamic values.

According to Charise (2007), Karmani has nicely summarised the conservative interpretation of new reforms: “More English and less Islam,” speaking not only about SA but about the Gulf region in general. Karmani (2005) uses the term “petro-linguistics,” denoting the fact that the teaching of English in oil-rich Arab states is intrinsically related to the oil trade, so that the expansion of English becomes an element in “pacifying the political force of Islam” (Karmani, 2005, p.87). The oil crises of the 70s taught the West that the Gulf countries have to be controlled in order for the oil market to remain stable.

Karmani (2005), p. 88 mentions “Islamic conservatives,” people who are adamantly opposed to the expansion of the English language in the Arabic world. In such a context, the English language, as the sign of the Other, can be understood as different from the self and unacceptable, and, in more extreme cases, as demonic, valueless, and disgusting (in subsection 2.3.2, we will attempt to synthesise this viewpoint with its opposite, characterised by idealisation and imitation). This conservative viewpoint can be referred to as “radically Islamic” but its prevalence is decreasing, due to a recent crackdown by the Saudi Arabian government (Farouk and Brown, 2021). The strivings of the Saudi Arabian government have made it nearly impossible for this viewpoint to be spread and heard across the country.

On the other side are some young Saudis who are, in the opinion of conservatives, overly eager to learn the English language and are

potentially abandoning their own Arabic language, culture, and religion (Aldosari, 1992). Although data in this respect is scarce, and even though it is almost certain that most Saudis will not let the English language endanger their own heritage, one can still find such headings as “Why do we abandon our beautiful Arabic language?” published in the Saudi Gazette (Yahya, 2016). Similar concerns can be heard in countries like Ghana (Amankwa, 2022), Indonesia (Dilo and Biahimo, 2017), Russia (Avetisyan, 2021), and across other countries, where the English language is sometimes understood to be a threat to local languages. Arabizi, which is the usage of Latin script to write Arabic, a practise fairly popular amongst Saudi youth, is also brought into question (Alghamdi and Petraki, 2018). The fears of conservatives aren't entirely unsubstantiated, as there were also voices coming from Saudi Arabia according to which English language is the “superior” language (Faruk, 2014, p. 175) in comparison to Arabic, and this viewpoint is the complete opposite of the conservative devaluation of the English language.

What do the Saudi people think about the English language? A 1996 survey (Al-Haq and Smadi, 1996) of Saudi students' attitude towards the English language showed that around 20% of students believed learning English would “Westernise” them; moreover, one fifth of participants replied that learning English entails imitation of the Western culture (Al-Haq and Smadi, 1996, p. 312); interestingly, 66% agreed that English language will make them more socially prestigious, a sign of idealisation of English language and its benefits; however students' answers generally implied that they thought about English in a pragmatic way. A more recent study has also shown that most young Saudis believe that there has to be a balance between tradition and openness (Zidi et al., 2021); moreover, most of them have a moderate view of the West.

Another survey of Saudi students (Al-Jarf, 2008) has found a high prevalence (96%) of belief that English language is superior to Arabic language, especially with regards to science, technology, medicine, nursing, and computer science. Al-Jarf (2008) argues that a majority of surveyed students have misconceptions regarding the prevalence of usage of English language in universities around the world (i.e., they think that in most universities around the world English is used as the main language, whereas in most universities it is the native language of the country that is primarily employed), as well as misconceptions regarding the indispensability of English language in the world of education. It can be argued furthermore that these misconceptions are fuelled by idealisation of the English language.

Idealisation of the English language is not only evident amongst students. A recent survey of Saudi mothers who have kindergarten children shows that idealisation of English is potentially present amongst parents too (Al-Jarf, 2023). Namely, 50% of surveyed mothers would prefer to use a mix of English and Arabic when speaking to their children at home and 70% believe that the age of four or five is ideal for starting to learn English. The major reason behind these beliefs, it can be argued, is idealisation of the English language and exaggeration of its importance for the future of Saudi children.

Neither of the aforementioned surveys (Aldosari, 1992; Al-Haq and Smadi, 1996; Al-Jarf, 2008, 2023; Zidi et al., 2021) has gathered a representative sample of Saudis, which is the reason why their results should be taken with scepticism, at least when it comes to exact prevalence of certain beliefs. However, all these surveys point to a conclusion that there has been, and there still is in Saudi Arabia a certain idealisation of the English language, coupled with incentives

to imitate the idealised representation of English (i.e., using both English and Arabic at home from an early age), this being the exact opposite of the conservative demonisation and disgust in relation to the usage of English language in SA.

The contemporary, official stance of the authorities towards studying foreign languages is more favourable than ever. “Saudi Arabia is striving to adjust to the multilingual immigrant workforce on its soil, whilst the Kingdom envisages a larger role for its people on other soils. In this changed paradigm, strengthening the Saudis' English communicative proficiency is an emergent need” (Alqahtani, 2022, p. 556). The efficiencies of various teaching methods, such as translanguaging (Alqahtani, 2022), collaborative teaching, and group activities (Abulhassan and Hamid, 2021), are critically examined and compared in order to find a combination that best suits students. In the light of the developing Saudi tourism industry, English becomes instrumental in enabling numerous Saudis to participate in this growing sector (Al-Malki et al., 2022). This is all reflected in the content of the English curriculum in SA, which now includes important references to cultures other than Saudi culture (Aldawsari and Karakas, 2021), and is less defensive in the way it deals with such content.

Faruk (2015) analysed how the English third-grade textbooks in SA (more specifically, the reading text exercises) changed over the years; the first book “Saudi Arabian School's English” (used between 1982 and 1997), contained only one reference to Western culture in the text called “The first time men flew” (Faruk, 2015, p. 530). The second book Faruk analysed, “English for Saudi Arabia” (used between 1998 to 2012), only has six reading texts and no references to Western cultures. Faruk (2015) concludes that both of these textbooks were written with great care not to disturb the traditional Saudi identity. The third book, “Traveller 3” (used since 2013) is very different compared to the other two. The reading texts in “Traveller 3” contain only two direct references to Islamic culture. The first reference is the storey of Salah al-Din, an Islamic leader who, thanks to his intelligence and planning, was able to “win the heart” of King Richard I. This same storey was recounted in the older textbook, “Saudi Arabian School's English,” though in the older textbook Salah al-Din and Islamic culture in general are presented in a much more glorified light compared to “Traveller 3.” In the older textbook, Salah al-Din was presented as someone so great and so powerful as to be able to mercifully help King Richard I, who had fallen sick. In the newer textbook, the two leaders are presented as fairly equal, with Salah al-Din getting the better of his rival thanks to his personal wits and intelligence.

In the same textbook, there are 18 references to Western culture. There is, for instance, a storey of four teenagers (Saad, James, Faisal, and Bob: notice that two of the boys have Western names); Saad is a bookworm and loves reading anything from science fiction to adventure. “Traveller 3” introduces elements of cultures other than the Western. For instance, there are mentions of Pyramids, Indian culture, and Australian aborigines. Faruk (2015) concludes that “Traveller 3” is indicative of the modern shift in the way Saudi authorities think about their country in relation to the world (p. 537). The movement analysed by Faruk has to be understood in the more recent context of Saudi Vision 2030, which was announced in 2016 by Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (Rashad, 2016). Saudi Vision 2030 is a comprehensive plan to modernise Saudi Arabia, which foresees changes in practically all aspects of Saudi society, from the financial

sector, across housing, industry, and, most importantly for our present topic, education.

## 2.3 Self and other in international relations

It may seem somewhat irrelevant to continue the analysis of the way Saudi society as a whole relates to the English language with a discussion of the formation of self and others in international relations. But it is very much relevant when one considers that a foreign language can act as an avenue, so to say, along which the collective self is formed, in the interaction with the external world.

The notion of collective self has numerous conceptualizations (Neumann, 1996). The collective self is most certainly not a Research Topic of individual selves. The collective self of a nation is formed in an interaction between the outsiders and that nation. As such, the collective self is not something that is deeply ingrained within the members of the collective. The collective self, much like the individual self, exists only in relation to the Other, and cannot exist without the Other (Lacan, 1968). However, there is a simultaneous, underlying relationship, and that is the one between the self and the other, the *objet petit a*, *l'autre* (Lacan, 1966). This is a mirroring relationship where the self is confused with the other. The two modes of relating are superimposed upon each other and do not exist separately; quite the contrary, it is their symbolic coexistence that assures coherence.

The collective self is something that comes into existence when the Other (or Others) starts relating to a group of people who are separated from the Others in certain ways. It may seem that the collective self is thus purely a product of the Others, but that is not the case; or, when this starts to become the case, the collective self enters the realm of mirroring relationship with what now is *objet petit a*, *l'autre* ('small other'), where differences and equalities are not symbolised but expressed through a string of mirroring identifications with the other.

It is obvious that this viewpoint positions itself within the *dialogical* approach to international relations as described by Neumann (1996). According to Neumann, viewpoints of various authors, such as Hegel, Bakhtin, and Todorov, with respect to international relations, can be described as *dialogic*. This approach is contrasted with the *dialectic* approach pursued by Marx. As Neumann (1996), p. 146 notes, (within Marxian dialectics), 'One meets the self and the other as raw material for a possible *Aufhebung* in the name of reason and progress in a number of different loci (...)'

A dialogue is not a Research Topic of monologues. What this essentially means is that intrinsic equality, but also the difference, of interlocutors has to be recognised (Todorov, 1982). It is only within this framework that successful communication between two people, as well as two cultures, can happen. Language, whilst being a means of communication, can start serving different functions, in the light of the distortions of the balance between equality and difference of the Other. This is one of the main points of the present article, namely that ways in which we think about the teaching of a foreign language, and thus the ways we teach and accept a foreign language, are a function of the balance between how different and how equal we consider the Other who is the source of this foreign language.

Todorov (1982) analysed the formation of the self and Other through the historical lens of the meeting between Native Americans and Europeans. The relationship between the two cultures was, from

the start, marked by non-recognition of the difference (and equality) between the self and the Other. Todorov emphasises this by carefully analysing the beliefs of the first colonisers, like Christopher Columbus or Hernán Cortés. Columbus, for instance, whilst being a keen observer, naturalist, and a master-sailor-navigator, never failed to see in the Other (all the tribes he encountered over the course of his numerous voyages), what he wanted to see. There was a clear non-differentiation between the self and the peoples he met. The new lands he discovered, along with the peoples he met, were to simply serve as another step in expanding Christianity. In spite of an abyssal language rift between the colonists and natives, Christopher Columbus 'knew' that the natives would be good servants for the Spanish Crown. The Other he met, was nothing more than the reflection of his own self.

Todorov emphasises that the coloniser's mindset fails to integrate or simply ignores two important and related realisations, that there are people who are different from us but at the same time equal. This realisation can be described as the very essence of the dialogic approach. It is when one of these aspects of relating to the Other prevails that the relationship takes a mirroring quality. When relating to the Other functions under the sign of absolute difference, the typical devaluing, dehumanising, exploiting actions from the colonisers ensue towards the colonised. The difference of the Other, for the colonisers, is such that the only thing they can serve for is to assert the self. Inversely, when all difference is suppressed, what is left is a complete equality between the things that are different, which can be nothing else than mirroring.

One might say, and Todorov indeed mentions this, that when international relations function under the sign of absolute difference, dehumanisation and exploitation are not the only things that ensue. Native peoples, Moctezuma's Aztecs for instance, also could not integrate the intrinsic difference and similarity of the Spanish people. But this difference was interpreted in a fatalistic way, as a sign of catastrophe, a sign of bad things to come. The arrival of the Spanish was assimilated completely into age-old networks of beliefs. The other side of the dehumanisation of a culture different from one's own is fear. It is the impression of the impending doom of one's society under the pressure of the coloniser, coupled with complete devaluation of that which is different. It is the same kind of fear and devaluation that pervades the conservative Saudi stance towards the English language.

In the case of the conquest of the Americas, the interests of one side prevailed over the interests of the other side. The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Britain is different and it cannot be properly described by the typical colonial scenario. It is against the backdrop of this historical fact that we have to understand the recent Saudi moves towards reform, and most certainly the relationship of the Saudi culture as a whole towards the English language and associated culture.

Todorov relied heavily on attentive reading of Columbus' personal writings to understand the initial relationship between the two cultures. It is possible to approach the relationship between Saudi Arabia and England in this way. If there is one Englishman who is associated the most with Saudi Arabia, it is Harry St. John Philby, who was fascinated by the Arabian Peninsula and was a great admirer of King Abdulaziz (Goldberg, 1985b), Saudi Arabia's most important ruler.

### 2.3.1 Philby and king Abdulaziz

John Philby was a British Colonial Office intelligence officer, adviser, and explorer. Krairi (2017), p. 198 referred to Philby as 'one of

the greatest explorers of the Arabian peninsula' [Krairi \(2017\)](#) asserts that Philby had great respect for Arab leaders, and in contrast to some British officials in charge of Arab affairs, believed that Arabs could and should govern themselves. His voyages in Saudi Arabia only confirmed these beliefs.

Philby was fascinated by King Abdulaziz's energy, character, and sagacity. Likewise, King Abdulaziz admired Philby's adoption of Arabic habits and mores. For instance, Philby wore traditional Arabian *Dishdasha* and *Thoab*, grew a beard, only ate with his right hand, and slept on the ground ([Krairi, 2017](#)). As we'll see later, this is what some authors, speaking in the context of intercultural relations, would call *mimicry* ([Rehman, 2013](#)).

It was indeed King Abdulaziz's remarkable energy and character ([St Philby, 1922](#), p.79) which contributed greatly to how SA situated itself with respect to the external world. This independent leader managed to balance the interests of great empires, and built the ground on which SA stands today, including the way in which the culture of SA communicates with other cultures. To Philby, in spite of all his mimicry of the culture of the Other, differences were still evident; it was evident, for instance, that King Abdulaziz looked down on the vices practised by the Western man, such as tobacco ([St Philby, 1922](#), p.81), though King Abdulaziz only implicitly expressed his dissatisfaction with Philby's unacceptable habits. The difference could be felt by both sides, but it in no way endangered communication and cooperation.

It is possible that Philby was the reason behind King Abdulaziz exploring the opportunities of mineral and oil exploitation in SA ([Alkhashil, 2016](#); [Krairi, 2017](#)). Philby was also instrumental in bringing American experts to Saudi Arabia, who would explore investment opportunities. Even more, Philby actually met K.S. Twitchell during his stay in SA, in 1931, during a meeting where it was decided that Twitchell should check the eastern part of the Kingdom. It was there that Twitchell found evidence of significant oil reserves, returning to the US to muster the industrial and financial power necessary to exploit these oil reserves.

The relationship between Philby and King Abdulaziz is very important in understanding the way in which SA opened up to the world. Philby considered himself as the defender of the interests of SA, in the light of British colonial interests in the region, and the colonial interests of any country, for that matter ([Krairi, 2017](#)). Although it is easy to overestimate the importance of individuals in such large historic events, the relationship between Philby and King Abdulaziz signifies a crucial dimension of the relationship between SA and foreign world. These two great individuals set the course of how SA presents itself in communication with the world. This course, for most of the 20th century and early 21st century, is marked by shrewd economic moves and opening to the world, but also by strong conservative tendencies. From the middle of the 20th century, the teaching of the English language in Saudi Arabia has become an interesting point at which these two tendencies meet. In the early days, prior to the discovery of large quantities of oil, the issue of the English language was simply irrelevant. But it started becoming more and more relevant as the economy of SA grew, making possible the change of lifestyle for numerous citizens of the Kingdom. Education, in general, became more important and more available to all citizens of the Kingdom. The English language ceased to be only a language of official negotiations, and it became something potentially available to

all people in SA, and something increasingly important for the whole nation.

Philby and King Abdulaziz symbolise the dialogic relationship between two very different cultures. But the relationship between Philby and King Abdulaziz also shows other modes of communication, characterised by mirroring (e.g., Philby's mimicry of Arabians); the two registers (dialogue and mirroring) aren't mutually exclusive and can overlap in numerous ways.

### 2.3.2 Language, self, other, and other

[Rehman \(2013\)](#) analysed the function of the English language in colonial and post-colonial literature. The relationship between the language of the coloniser and that of the colonised is analogous to the relationship between the self and the Other. The self is the coloniser's culture and the Other is the local culture which is under pressure to adopt the culture of the self. From the perspective of the colonialists, there was no other way to be civilised than to be like the self. The Other was excluded from any meaningful dialogue or exchange.

The inverse relationship also has to be considered; the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, from the point of view of the colonised. This move in the inverse direction is especially relevant in our present context, even though the colonial terminology may not be the most appropriate way to describe the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Britain.

So, there is a relationship of the (domestic) self to the Other, an inverse of the coloniser's self and the Other. The external influence can be regarded as something foreign and strange, yet more, dangerous. This was perhaps the main tendency of the Saudi relationship towards the English language. It is interesting that [Rehman](#) did not consider this inverse relationship and focused very much on mimicry; this author mainly considered stark examples of colonialism, such as India or Pakistan, in which indeed the resistance was all but out of the picture (or at least, this is the way it was perceived by [Rehman](#)).

[Rehman \(2013\)](#) underlined the importance of mimicry in the context of language and colonialism. The colonised subjects sometimes start mimicking, or, even better put, *mirroring* the Other. The Other, the culture of the coloniser, is mirrored by the Self, in an attempt to erase differences. In such a movement, the Other becomes the other (*objet petit a, l'autre*). Mores, habits, ways of thinking, values which were once those of the Other are mirrored by the (native) Self. This is simply a more complicated way of saying that the foreign culture is often accepted by the native societies at the expense of their own cultures. It also goes the other way around: Philby, for instance, not only accepted the Saudi way of living and language, but he also became a Muslim and, for all intents and purposes, an Arabian.

There is the inverse of mimicry, which is akin to outright and obsessive refusal, even disgust of the Other's language. Indeed, disgust characterises the way Saudi conservatives reacted to the possibility of students learning the English language. The mirroring register can be systematised in the following way: *Idealisation-Demonisation and Mimicry-Disgust*.

What has to be underlined is that functioning along these lines, which are all parallel and analogous, marks a relationship of self to the other, not the real Other, to use Lacan's terminology ([Lacan, 1968](#)). The "small" other in this sense is nothing but a reflection of the self.

Let us now turn briefly to the way the English language was represented by rigidly dogmatic Saudi scholars. The Other is demonised and devalued. Moreover, it stops being the Other

altogether, becoming the 'small' other, which is a mere reflection of the self. It stops being something different from the self, and it becomes a canvas on which all sorts of things are projected; things which do not come from the Other, but from the self. There is no dialogue, only disgust, the inverse of mimicry.

Through the English language, there came a new way to mirror one's self. It allowed extreme conservatives to sharpen the blades of their social critique by enumerating all the negative consequences of learning English. It allowed the assertion of a pure self of a traditional Saudi. The difference here is such that it loses its dialogic meaning, and in fact becomes only the justification of mirroring. It really is a form of *negative mirroring*, where the Other becomes everything that the self-loathes. Characteristics which are ascribed to the Other, in which movement it becomes the mirroring other, are related to the self and a potential insult to the self. The self is immaculate, the other (the negative of the self in this case) is dirty; the self is virtuous, the other sinful. The real difference and real equality, thanks to such a movement, are lost. What is left is only the negative mirroring, the other (*objet petit a, l'autre*) is nothing more than the canvas on which the self can project all the things it loathes, in order to assert its perfection.

But the conservatives, perhaps, are not entirely wrong to fear and loathe the teaching of the English language in SA, or at least the things they associate with the English language and Western culture in general. Amongst certain groups of the younger Saudis, as presented earlier, there might be a tendency to do the exact opposite of what the conservatives are doing. Whilst conservatives are projecting their worst onto the other, a number of young Saudis are projecting their idealised selves onto the other. The English language here is not a simple instrument of communication; it is a sign of superiority, class, status, and whatever increases one's importance. It is one of the ways in which mirroring a grandiose self in the other can take place. The difference is erased, and what is left is complete equality, degradation to a complete identification, to use [Todorov's \(1982\)](#) vocabulary. One has to keep in mind that the majority of Saudis probably fall within neither of the extremes, adopting moderate viewpoints towards preservation of tradition and opening up to the West ([Zidi et al., 2021](#)). The relationship between Philby and King Abdulaziz (discussed in section 2.3.1) can be understood as the prototype of these moderate viewpoints, characterised by the dialogic understanding of other cultures.

### 3 Methodology

A type of qualitative analysis, namely content analysis was chosen as the appropriate method to uncover how the teaching of English is conceptualised within Vision 2030 (more specifically Human Capability Development Programme of Vision 2030), a barometer for where the officials want the country to go and where the country is going in the future. The approach taken in this article can be best described as summative content analysis ([Hsieh and Shannon, 2005](#), p. 1283), which relies on quantifying the frequency of occurrence of target words and contexts in which these words appear, exploring ways in which concepts of interest are used in a text. The analysis of the manifest content will be followed by a latent analysis ([Bengtsson, 2016](#)) that goes beyond frequencies of words and looks into the hidden meaning of the manifest content.

Summative content analysis is a good way to thoroughly analyse the manifest side of a piece of content, especially when the researcher wants to focus on a topic situated within a much larger frame, such as the HCDP. However, it may not be enough to understand the deeper meaning of a text, which is why it is necessary to go beyond mere frequencies and attempt to understand why words appear (or do not appear) in specific contexts.

#### 3.1 Analysing data

The first step in content analysis is formulation of the research question. Our main research question is "How is the English language represented in the official Saudi discourse?" Next comes the choice of the content to be analysed. Saudi Vision 2030 is perhaps the most relevant and most recent initiative that can be used in order to answer our research question. It is an ambitious plan to develop each aspect of SA as a state and as a society. Vision 2030 is an all-encompassing Saudi initiative to practically revolutionise the country. The main programmes of Vision 2030 include the Housing Programme, Public Investment Fund Programme, Quality of Life Programme, and, most importantly for our present topic, the [Human Capability Development Program, \(2022\)](#). This programme relates directly to education in Saudi Arabia, which makes it highly relevant for our research question. There are of course, many other official documents which can be analysed, and this would be a task for future studies attempting to answer the same research question as this article. Of course, it is possible to analyse content which falls outside the scope of official discourse (for instance, certain pieces of content published on social media).

The next step is to choose the main keywords which would be searched for in the chosen piece of content. Here, it is important to remain flexible and be aware of the different ways to signify a concept. The final steps are counting frequencies, identification of categories of contexts in which keywords appear, and counting frequencies of different types of contexts, which allows us to determine the relevance of target concepts and prevalent ways in which they are thought of within a specific discourse.

Our main hypothesis is that the teaching of the English language will figure as an important theme within the HCDP, not being used in the context of the spread of Islam, but more in the context of the modernisation of the country.

A possible way to test this hypothesis is to count all the occurrences of the word "language" (and other keywords), which allows us to compare the simple frequencies of the mentions of the English language and other languages. In order to avoid missing references to language which do not use the word "language" explicitly, occurrences of terms like "English" or "Arabic" were also analysed. All contexts in which the target words appear was analysed and their number reduced by dividing them into relevant categories of contexts. The analysis of frequencies was done in the Microsoft Word programme.

The same was done for other important keywords, namely "religion" and "Islam." The text was also searched for related words, specifically "faith," "beliefs," and "tradition," in order to uncover the basic position of Islam in the text.

Our hypothesis can thus be specified further: the English language will be mentioned more frequently than other languages in the text of

the HCDP. The prevailing context in which the English language will be mentioned is the one of the Saudi reforms and opening up to the world, signifying an improvement and something that will allow the Saudi state to develop further.

Moreover, it is hypothesised that Islam will be an ubiquitous theme in the Programme, manifested in a high total word count, relative to the frequencies of other keywords such as “language”; the main (most frequent) context in which references to Islam appear, will be that of moderate Islam and Islam that is in no way in contradiction with the world external to SA.

## 4 Findings

Now follows a brief description of the HCDP, which can be found on the official government website of Vision 2030 (alongside full-text version):

*The Human Capability Development Program aims to ensure that citizens have the required capabilities to compete globally by instilling values and developing basic and future skills, as well as enhancing knowledge. The program focuses on developing a solid educational base for all citizens to instil values from an early age, whilst preparing the youth for the future local and global labour market. It also focuses on upskilling citizens by providing lifelong learning opportunities, supporting innovation and entrepreneurship culture, and developing and activating policies and enablers to ensure KSA competitiveness.*

It is about “instilling values” early on, whilst also “preparing the youth for the future local and global labour market.” Some of the values which will be instilled are most certainly those which were instilled for centuries in Saudi Arabia. But, at the same time, the youth will also be prepared for the future challenges of the market. It is obvious that the formulation of the HCDP is such that the conflict between “values” and “future” does not exist, or is very much mitigated. It is the absolute abstractness and vagueness of this formulation that allows conflict to be mitigated.

The full text of the HCDP comprises 95 pages. The word “language” is mentioned 55 times. 46 times, this word was used in the context of the preservation of the Arabic language. Upon a closer inspection, expressions such as “increase the Arabic dissemination/spread and appreciation” (p. 21), “uphold the Arabic language” (p. 23) are encountered. It is also mentioned that preserving the Arabic language is “both a religious and national duty” (p. 42), although this specific synthesis of Arabic language, religious, and national duties appeared only once in the whole text.

Nine times, the word “language” was used in the context of the general importance of foreign languages; for instance, developing a solid educational base which would include proficiency in at least one foreign language (p. 21), reforming the “traditional” educational system which did not focus on foreign languages (p. 30). In this context, what always appears is a general reference to foreign languages, and never a reference to a specific foreign language. “English” is mentioned only once, when describing the future goals of the Saudi educational system (in 1.3.1: Review and update primary to secondary curriculum framework to give more focus to basic skills and build skills for the future, p. 67): “Mandatory English classes from

grade one with options for other relevant languages (e.g., Chinese).” It is very interesting that the only mention of the English language is immediately followed by a reference to the future teaching of other languages, such as Chinese.

This simple analysis of the contexts in which the word “language” appears in the HCDP does not necessarily show the decreasing relevance of the English language, but it is nevertheless indicative of the increasing care to preserve the Arabic language. It also showcases the increasing relevance of other languages, such as Mandarin Chinese. Thus, the results stand at odds with our first hypothesis: the English language does not figure as an important topic, although foreign languages in general do appear in the expected context (that of reform as opposed to the spread of Islam).

The preservation and spreading of the Arabic language is what stands out in the agenda for the HCDP. The Arabic language is inextricably tied to Islamic values. Preserving the language “is both a religious and national duty” (section 3.D.3. Development of interest in Arabic Language, p. 42). The programme foresees the focus on Arabic internet content and investment in global Arabic fairs, which would help spread the global extent of Arabic.

Interestingly, the word “Islam” is mentioned 14 times in the text, with “values” (we will soon focus on these, largely secular values) being mentioned 100 times (only six times in the context of religious, Islamic values). Although one of the main objectives of the programme is apparently to “strengthen Islamic values” (p. 13), this assertion is immediately followed by “and national identity.” Of the 14 times Islam is mentioned in the text, three times it is in the context of moderation, tolerance, and anti-extremism. Three times Islam is mentioned in the context of banking, and the remaining eight times the straightforward religious context prevails. Religion is mentioned three times, once in the context of the educational challenges relating to the relative burden of classes in religion as opposed to foreign languages and STEM; faith was not mentioned, and neither were other related words. These results falsify the second research hypothesis; in other words, Islam is not necessarily the most important theme in the analysed content, with Arabic language and ‘values’ all being mentioned much more frequently.

## 5 Discussion

It is evident that the care devoted to preserving and disseminating the Arabic language gains importance in the light of the diminishing visibility of Islamic teachings, in the agenda for HCDP at least. Once the general stance towards some religious teachings has to be revised, the conservative tendencies are manifested in the realm of language. It is also a sign of a more nuanced viewpoint taken by the official Saudi discourse towards external cultural influences; whilst external influences always exist and can hardly be eliminated in a country which plans to open even more to the world, what can be done is increasing the attention paid to one’s own culture by preserving one’s language. This marks a shift from “Our culture can only be preserved by eliminating the influence of other cultures.” to “We can only preserve our culture by fostering it and taking positive actions towards it.”

Language is at the centre of this shift. What is the position of English in this new discourse? Most certainly, it is not that of demonised manifestation of the foreign negative influence. But the



new discourse does not idealise English or present the language of progress and development in a wider context of a complete reversal of traditional values. It removes the old dilemma by reformulating the dilemma itself, in the way described in the last paragraph. Thus, the English language, and any other language (e.g., Chinese) for that matter, stops being a potential threat to Saudi culture. It cannot affect Saudi culture if the country does enough to protect its culture. A recent study of the attitudes of young Saudis (Zidi et al., 2021, p. 235) has shown that most of them have a "(...) balanced vision of reconciling conservatism with a move towards openness, and a sense of confidence in the state and in the self." In such a context, and in the absence of an overbearing foreign influence, it really is unnecessary to pursue a harsh conservative policy, and it is possible to approach the studying of a foreign language without fear of committing a grave sin against one's own tradition, whilst also not becoming too much like the foreigners.

Findings of this study are in accordance with the findings of Faruk (2015), who noticed a shift in the content of English workbooks used in SA. Compared to the official policy of the Curriculum Department Centre for Development (Elyas and Badawood, 2017) which guided the teaching of the English language in SA between 1970 and 2001 and only accepted the necessity of learning English as long as it contributed to the spread of Islam, learning foreign languages in Vision 2030 is seen as a way to improve the general capabilities and competitiveness of Saudi citizens, in the context of a more tolerant and moderate Islam.

Saudi Arabia is a country with an increasingly strong language-preservation agenda; the preservation of the Arabic language has entered the playground. It is now the Arabic language which will be preserved and disseminated, expressions which were once used in the general context of Islam (Elyas and Badawood, 2017). Interestingly, religion itself did not figure as an overly important association to the Arabic language in HCDP; rather, the synthesis between preservation of the Arabic language and fostering national identity was at the forefront.

In short, the English language went from being a language of the colonisers, the language of foreign influence and an omen of the dissipation of domestic culture, across its status as a necessary evil for the spread of Islam, to becoming something completely irrelevant to the question of preservation of the culture of SA. It is possible that this new lack of relevance corresponds to how the major Anglophone centre of power is losing its global influence in recent years (Muzaffar et al., 2017; Wasinger, 2020).

## 6 Actionable recommendations

The Human Capability Development Program, (2022) is still relatively silent with respect to introduction of other foreign languages to school curricula. In fact, the only foreign language mentioned in the context of bringing innovation to foreign language curricula is the Chinese language. It is evident, however, that English classes will remain the only mandatory foreign language classes from grade one: "Mandatory English classes from grade one with options for other relevant languages (e.g., Chinese)." (Human Capability Development Program, 2022, p. 67). This wording is fairly ambiguous, and it is highly likely that in case important adjustments of this section of HCDP aren't made, the English language will remain the only mandatory foreign language in Saudi Arabia. Even more ambiguous is the wording "with options for other relevant languages (e.g.,

Chinese)" as it is not clear how and when other foreign language classes would be offered to Saudi pupils.

The first recommendation thus concerns the possibility of introducing mandatory classes of other foreign languages, not only Chinese but also Spanish, French, Russian, and German. The first task would be to determine the grade in which other foreign languages would be introduced to schools. It may not be desirable to introduce both English and another foreign language as mandatory classes in grade 1. Although the question of whether Saudi Arabia should keep the English language as the main mandatory foreign language and as the one which is first to be introduced to curriculum is also a relevant one, for the moment it seems that the most appropriate and convenient solution would be to keep English as the main mandatory foreign language and revisit this question when time comes.

The question of grade at which options for mandatory foreign language classes should be introduced is a technical one as it has to take account of all other classes to make everything logistically sound. What is certain is that new mandatory classes should not be introduced too early, and, based on the educational solutions utilised by EU countries like Germany (Thaler, 2017) and the positive effects of these solutions [i.e., high foreign language competence across EU, see EUROSTAT report, Foreign language skills statistics published in 2019 (EUROSTAT, 2019)], it can be concluded that new foreign language mandatory classes should be introduced at least two or three grades after English, thus in third or fourth grade of primary schools in Saudi Arabia, ideally in the fifth grade of primary school.

Next, comes the question of whether children should be offered a choice between several foreign languages for their second mandatory foreign language classes, or whether there should be a main second mandatory foreign language. Moreover, there's the possibility, once again a one utilised by countries like Germany (Thaler, 2017; European Commission /EACEA /Eurydice, 2023), of different schools having different mandatory second foreign languages. In case it is decided that there should be only one mandatory second language, our recommendation is that it should be Chinese. In this article it was shown that the introduction of the English language to Saudi schools had an important economic value. The Chinese language, thanks to the incredible development of China and more specifically the increasing energy needs of this country, thus seems to be a good candidate for the mandatory second foreign language, in case we have to choose only one. In this respect we are following the HCDP, but giving the possibilities presented in this Programme a more concrete and actionable form.

Finally, we have to consider the option of introducing a third foreign language to Saudi schools. There is no reason not to offer facultative classes of a third foreign language in later grades (i.e., in high school), to those willing and interested in learning more.

However, our recommendation would be not to do this, at least not before the points addressed in aforementioned recommendations are acted upon. It is true, first of all, that Saudi students somewhat struggle with the English language (Alrabai, 2018; Alharbi, 2019; Al-Malki et al., 2022) in spite of mandatory English classes. There will most certainly be significant challenges with the introduction of the second foreign language. Thus, the third, this time facultative foreign language should remain something to be planned at a later date, when other points in this section will have been addressed.

As far as textbooks for new foreign languages are concerned, policy-makers would do good to avoid the slow development pace of English language textbooks in Saudi Arabia. We've seen how English textbooks in Saudi Arabia initially (and up until fairly recently) took

great care not to present foreign cultural intricacies (Faruk, 2015) which are so often equally important for learning a foreign language as grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Textbooks for new foreign languages should be carefully crafted so that they present foreign cultures in their authentic forms, whilst also providing a firm domestic cultural basis from which foreign cultures will be approached.

## 7 Conclusion

This article explores the complex issue of the reaction of the Saudi society to the introduction of the English language in the country's school curriculum. A brief historical analysis showed us that, from the early days, Saudi-British relations were not devoid of conflict of interest and a precarious balance of powers. The ambivalent position of Britain as well as an imperialist force with its own interests, was paralleled by an ambivalent position of the English language in SA.

The concept of self, other, and Other (Lacan, 1968), and especially Todorov's analysis of the birth of colonialism (Todorov, 1982) were of immense importance for understanding the various ways in which Saudis reacted to the English language being introduced to their country. Two dichotomies (Idealisation-Demonisation and Mimicry-Disgust) were identified, helping us to describe how the English language, and Western culture more generally, are perceived in Saudi Arabia. By no means are these two dichotomies/continuums the only thing that has to be said about this matter; quite the contrary, this is just the start of a very interesting inquiry. For instance, it was hypothesised that the extreme points of dichotomies are, in essence, equal and accounted for by the same type of non-differentiating, mirroring level of psychological functioning with respect to a certain entity (the English language or Western culture). But it remains to be found out, to mention only one of the tasks in front of us, under which circumstances and how these opposites turn into one another and how they coexist with the higher-order dialogic register.

We have completed our analysis by looking at a document (HCDP) which is a small part of the monumental Vision 2030. The official discourse, within this immense agenda, tries to find a

compromise to the polarised, pseudo-dichotomous stance towards that which does not belong to the Saudi culture. The HCDP represents a novel initiative where the conflict between tradition and reform (English language and Western culture, for instance) does not figure prominently. The most prominent role is awarded to the preservation of one's own culture, most importantly the Arabic language. Islam, it seems, comes after the Arabic language and new secular values. The preservation of one's culture is balanced by the care towards mitigating extremism.

Vision 2030 is a broad plan with a set of general guidelines. In this article we also offered recommendations pertaining to the realisation of some of the foreign language educational policies mentioned in HCDP, hopefully aiding the final fruition of Vision 2030 ambitions via a careful consideration of past policies, their attainments, and their shortcomings.

## Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

## References

- Abulhassan, A. B. A., and Hamid, F. I. E. (2021). Perception and interest of English language learners (ELL) toward collaborative teaching: evaluation towards group activities. *Engl. Lang. Teach.* 14, 1–12. doi: 10.5539/elt.v14n5p1
- Al-Ajroush, H. A. (1981). *A historical development of the public secondary school curriculum in Saudi Arabia from 1930 to the present [doctoral dissertation, the University of Oklahoma, graduate college]*. Available at: <https://shareok.org/bitstream/handle/11244/4833/8113241.PDF?sequence=1>. (Accessed May 1, 2024).
- Aldawsari, M., and Karakas, A. (2021). Does the Saudi English language curriculum reflect the current state of English? A documentary analysis from a global Englishes perspective. *Taiwan J. TESOL* 18, 1–28. doi: 10.30397/TJTESOL.202110\_18(2).0001
- Aldosari, H. S. (1992). *A sociolinguistic study of the attitudes of Muslim students, teachers, and religious officials on learning and teaching English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. [doctoral thesis; the Pennsylvania State University] ProQuest*. Available at: <https://search.proquest.com/openview/45d607104edc97cce91bede821aaa3be/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>. (Accessed September 16, 2023).
- Alghamdi, H., and Petraki, E. (2018). Arabizi in Saudi Arabia: a deviant form of language or simply a form of expression? *Soc. Sci.* 7:155. doi: 10.3390/socsci7090155
- Al-Haq, F. A. A., and Smadi, O. (1996). Spread of English and westernization in Saudi Arabia. *World Englishes* 15, 307–317. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-971X.1996.tb00117.x
- Alharbi, Y. G. (2019). A review of the current status of English as a foreign language (EFL) education in Saudi Arabia. *Glob. J. Educ. Train.* 1, 1–8. doi: 10.30574/wjarr.2022.15.3.0922
- Al-Jarf, R. (2008). The impact of English as an international language (EIL) upon Arabic in Saudi Arabia. *Asian EFL J.* 10, 193–210.
- Al-Jarf, R. (2023). Learning English by kindergarten children in Saudi Arabia: a mothers' perspective. *J. Learn. Dev. Stud.* 3, 15–32. doi: 10.32996/jlds.2023.3.2.3
- Alkhashil, M. (2016). Sharqieh Ltd. and mineral-exploration projects in Arabia (1926-1960). *Rev. Hist. Polit. Sci.* 4, 43–51. doi: 10.15640/rhps.v4n2a5
- Al-Malki, E. A. A., Al-Harathi, A. A. A., Javid, C. Z., Farooq, M. U., and Algethami, G. F. (2022). Comparative determination of communicative competence of Saudi students of English for tourism and hospitality (SSETH) to develop ESP course content. *Int. J. Learn. Teach. Educ. Res.* 21, 46–62. doi: 10.26803/ijlter.21.4.3
- Al-Malki, E. A. A., Javid, C. Z., Farooq, M. U., Algethami, G. F., and Al-Harathi, A. A. (2022). Analysis of the English language needs of the Saudi tourism workforce: a first step into designing ESP teaching materials. *Int. J. Learn. Teach. Educ. Res.* 21, 72–88. doi: 10.26803/ijlter.21.2.5
- Alqahtani, M. H. (2022). The Saudi 2030 vision and Translanguaging in language learning in Saudi Arabia: looking for Concord in the future. *J. Lang. Linguist. Stud.* 18, 556–568.

- Alrabai, F. (2018). "Learning English in Saudi Arabia" in *English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia*. eds. C. Moskovsky and M. Picard (Abingdon: Routledge), 102–119.
- Amankwa, B. K. (2022). *The dominance of the English language: is it a threat to our local Ghanaian languages?* Modern Ghana. Available at: <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1176365/the-dominance-of-the-english-language-is-it-a.html> (Accessed May 6, 2024).
- Assah, A. (1969). *Miracle of the desert kingdom*. United States: Johnson.
- Avetisyan, N. G. (2021). Growing trend towards borrowing from English-threat to the Russian language? *Bull. Moscow Univ.* 19, 62–71.
- Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NursingPlus Open* 2, 8–14. doi: 10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001
- Charise, A. (2007). *More English, less Islam? [Unpublished manuscript]* Faculty of Arts and Science: University of Toronto. Available at: <https://cpercycy.arts.utoronto.ca/courses/eng6365-charise.htm>. (Accessed August 5, 2023)
- Dilo, U. A., and Biahimo, S. D. J. (2017). English, modernity and the decay of local language. In: *International conference on education in Muslim society (ICEMS 2017)*. Atlantis Press, pp. 134–137. Available at: <https://www.atlantis-press.com/article/25895139.pdf>.
- Duris, M., and Koffi, E. (2020). English proficiency profile study of an L2 speaker from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Linguist. Portfolios* 9:4.
- Elyas, T. (2008). *The attitude and the impact of American English as a global language within the Saudi education system*. Novitas-ROYAL, 2, pp. 28–48. Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/111888>.
- Elyas, T., and Badawood, O. (2017). English language educational policy in Saudi Arabia post 21st century: enacted curriculum, identity, and modernisation: a critical discourse analysis approach. *FIRE: forum for international. Res. Educ.* 3, 70–81. doi: 10.18275/fire201603031093
- Elyas, T., and Picard, M. (2010). Saudi Arabian educational history: impacts on English language teaching. *Educ. Bus. Soc. Contemp. Middle Eastern Issues* 3, 136–145. doi: 10.1108/17537981011047961
- Elyas, T., and Picard, M. (2018). "A brief history of English and English teaching in Saudi Arabia" in *English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia*. eds. C. Moskovsky and M. Picard (Abingdon: Routledge), 70–84.
- European Commission /EACEA /Eurydice. (2023). *Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe – 2023 edition, Eurydice report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg*. Retrieved June 11, 2024, from <https://eurymdice.ba/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Key-data-on-teaching-languages-at-school-in-Europe.pdf>
- EUROSTAT. (2019). *Foreign language skills statistics*. Retrieved June 12, 2024, from [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Foreign\\_language\\_skills\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Foreign_language_skills_statistics)
- Farouk, Y., and Brown, N. J. (2021). *Saudi Arabia's religious reforms are touching nothing but changing everything*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/06/07/saudi-arabia-s-religious-reforms-are-touching-nothing-but-changing-everything-pub-84650>. (Accessed October 20, 2023).
- Faruk, S. M. G. (2014). Saudi's attitude towards English: trend and rationale. *Prof. Commun. Transl. Stud.* 7, 173–180.
- Faruk, S. M. G. (2015). Winds of change in Saudi English textbooks: a cultural perspective. *Sino-US Engl. Teach.* 12, 524–538. doi: 10.17265/1539-8072/2015.07.008
- Goldberg, J. (1985a). The origins of British–Saudi relations: the 1915 Anglo–Saudi treaty revisited. *Hist. J.* 28, 693–703. doi: 10.1017/S0018246X00003368
- Goldberg, J. (1985b). Philby as a source for early twentieth-century Saudi history: a critical examination. *Middle East. Stud.* 21, 223–243. doi: 10.1080/00263208508700625
- Hsieh, H. F., and Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qual. Health Res.* 15, 1277–1288. doi: 10.1177/1049732305276687
- Human Capability Development Program. (2022). Available at: <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/v2030/vrps/hcdp/> (Accessed Jun 3, 2022).
- Karmani, S. (2005). Petro-linguistics: the emerging Nexus between oil, English, and Islam. *J. Lang. Identity Educ.* 4, 87–102. doi: 10.1207/s15327701jlie0402\_2
- Krairi, K. A. (2017). *John Philby and his political roles in the Arabian peninsula, 1917-1953 [doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham]*. Available at: <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/7675/1/Krairi17PhD.pdf>.
- Lacan, J. (1966). Le stade du miroir comme formateur la fonction du Je. *Écrits*, 93–100.
- Lacan, J. (1968). *The language of the self: The function of language in psychoanalysis*. JHU Press. Available at: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1998-07345-000>.
- Mahboob, A., and Elyas, T. (2014). English in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *World Englishes* 33, 128–142. doi: 10.1111/weng.12073
- Muzaffar, M., Yaseen, Z., and Rahim, N. (2017). Changing dynamics of global politics: transition from unipolar to multipolar world. *Liber. Arts Soc. Sci. Int. J.* 1, 49–61. doi: 10.47264/idea.lassij/1.1.6
- Neumann, I. B. (1996). Self and other in international relations. *Eur. J. Int. Rel.* 2, 139–174. doi: 10.1177/1354066196002002001
- Ochsenwald, W. (2016). Ottoman Arabia and the holy hijaz, 1516-1918. *J. Glob. Initiatives* 10, 23–34.
- Phillipson, R. (1994). English language spread policy. *Int. J. Sociol. Lang.* 107, 7–24. doi: 10.1515/ijsl.1994.107.7
- Rahman, M. M., and Alhaisoni, E. (2013). Teaching English in Saudi Arabia: prospects and challenges. *Acad. Res. Int.* 4, 112–118.
- Rashad, M. (2016). *Saudis await prince's vision of future with hope and concern*. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-plan-idUSKCN0XL0B2>. (Accessed September 10, 2023).
- Rehman, S. (2013). Language as an instrument of power in colonial and postcolonial literature. *J. Res. Soc. Sci.* 1:129.
- Silverfarb, D. (1982). The treaty of Jiddah of may 1927. *Middle East. Stud.* 18, 276–285. doi: 10.1080/00263208208700511
- Sindi, A. M. (2013). *The direct instruments of Western control over the Arabs: The shining example of the house of Saud*. Unpublished manuscript. Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/116503929/House-of-Saud>. (Accessed May 3, 2024).
- St Philby, H. J. B. (1922). *The heart of Arabia, a record of travel and exploration*. Constable and Company: London. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/heartofarabiarec01philuoft>.
- Thaler, E. (2017). Englischdidaktik - State of the Art. *Fremdsprachen Lehren und Lernen.* 46, 115–131.
- Todorov, T. (1982). *La Conquête de l'Amérique: La question de l'autre [the conquest of America: The question of the other]*. Seuil.
- Wasinger, M. (2020). The US National Security Strategy: competing for supremacy in a multipolar world with a unipolar strategy. *Global Pol.* 11, 532–534. doi: 10.1111/1758-5899.12859
- Yahya, S. (2016). *Why do we abandon our beautiful Arabic language?* Saudi Gazette. Available at: <https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/146584>. (Accessed August 8, 2022).
- Zidi, M., Al-Shalaki, T., Alsaif, T., Al-Dossary, S., Hamed, D., and Ibrahim, H. (2021). Identity and participation among the new Saudis. *Humanit. Manage. Sci.* 22, 1–9. doi: 10.37575/h/art/0097