

The Newfound Status of English in 21st-Century Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

To keep pace with Saudi Vision 2030, the status of English in Saudi Arabia has undergone rapid changes over the past few years and will continue to change and grow in the future. This article is intended to portray an accurate picture of the contemporary indomitable prominence of English in present-day Saudi Arabia on a variety of fronts. In particular, it identifies the prevalence of English in the overall landscape of Saudi Arabia in light of Saudi Vision 2030, especially in the Saudi education system, in the public perception, in the Saudi workforce, and in Saudi media outlets, as well as its function as the primary language of communication between Saudi citizens and expatriate residents. To this end, this in-depth discussion contributes to a better and deeper understanding of the central role English plays and its prestigious position in Saudi Arabia's national setup and highlights Saudi Arabia's newfound appreciation for English as a vital tool to meet its ambitious advancement plans.

Keywords: Status of English, Saudi Arabia, Saudi Vision 2030, Saudi education system, The public perception, The Saudi workforce, Saudi media outlets, English as a Lingua Franca in Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

As a global language, English enjoys a preeminent status in Saudi Arabia, where it serves several functions across all levels of society and in various sectors. In many ways, English's popularity in Saudi society has emerged as a multifactor response to the country's ongoing national development. In 2026, Saudi Arabia introduced its highly ambitious Saudi Version 2030 development plan and has since experienced the establishment of numerous institutions, along with rapid changes in its social fabric. Transformative growth in Saudi Arabia's economy and its industrial and commercial bases has generated a marked influx of foreign

workers and various media sources into the country. Education at all levels is expanding, and, partly in response, Saudis' attitudes toward English continue to evolve.

With the introduction of Saudi Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has indicated its awareness of the need for a workforce with strong English-language skills if the country is to be globally competitive in the 21st century and enable its economy and citizens to thrive. That realization explains English's current significance in the Saudi context—indeed, a degree of significance that will most likely expand as Saudis continue to view English as a resource for national development. Currently, English-language skills are in demand nationwide and are even becoming prerequisites in an increasing number of sectors and jobs. That demand also reflects the newly recognized significance of English skills for career advancement as well as scientific and technological progress.

Given English's importance in all domains of life in Saudi Arabia and its rapidly growing perceived value among Saudi nationals, it is essential to thoroughly characterize the language's new preeminent status, as accorded by both the state and the Saudi community. In response, this scientific, descriptive research article examines English's current status in Saudi Arabia in six self-contained parts. Each part contains a brief overview of its respective topic, along with an in-depth discussion of related issues, followed by a conclusion. The first part discusses English-language competency as a key component of Saudi Vision 2030, while the second provides a comprehensive overview of English's undeniable permeation into the Saudi education system. Next, the third part describes the remarkably positive public perception of English in Saudi Arabia in depth, while the fourth addresses English's strong presence in the workplace and in daily life in Saudi Arabia. The fifth part considers English's prominence and emergence as a lingua franca in Saudi Arabia, after which the sixth explores English's prevalence in Saudi Arabia's mainstream and digital media.

Through an inclusive, aggregated look at English's current prestigious status on Saudi soil, we hope to offer a full account of the breadth and depth of English's presence in Saudi Arabia, how the language is incorporated into various sectors across the nation, and how it has affected Saudis from all walks of life and in every aspect of their lives. It is a necessary venture to delve into unidentified insights behind the uncontested status, functions, and role that English plays in Saudi Arabia, and its permanent influence, which is most likely to grow over time. It is also hoped that this comprehensive, richly detailed profile will help to illuminate Saudi Arabia's motivation to position English as a bellwether of the country's national development and ultimately enrich understanding of the language's predominance in 21st-century Saudi Arabia.

2. English Language Competency Is a Key Component of Saudi Vision 2030

2.1 Overview

Saudi Arabia's ambitious Vision 2030, yet achievable, with its National Transformation Plan (NTP), conceived on 25th April 2016, is a major transformation plan built around three themes: a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation. English-language education is considered a potent step toward achieving Vision 2030's objectives. Moreover, it

is perceived as an important aspect of Saudi Arabia's success in globalization and social and cultural transformation, and the acceleration of its economy's integration into the global system. Consequently, English-language education plays a dual role – contributing to the goals of Vision 2030 and enhancing its achievements. Indeed, Saudi Vision 2030 induces English competency in particular and language education, in general, to cater to the fast-growing demand for improved English education and also steer the country on the path toward the realization of Vision 2030. Hence, the English language holds immeasurable significance in contemporary Saudi Arabia. Al-Mwzaiji and Muhammad (2023) succinctly captured the interdependence between Saudi Vision 2030 and English language acquisition by describing the relationship as mutual and complementary to each other, both inextricably linked.

2.2 The Key to Global and Cultural Transformation Is English Proficiency

The cultural and global transformation of Saudi Arabia, as envisioned and mandated in Saudi Vision 2030, hinges upon cultivating highly competent English-language users and communicators among its citizens. Given this shifting paradigm, Alqahtani (2022) emphasized the pressing need to bolster the English communicative proficiency of Saudis. Moreover, effective global understanding and collaboration between Saudi Arabia, in the context of Saudi Vision 2030, and other nations worldwide in various critical areas such as education, economics, politics, international trade, and more can be achieved by equipping a substantial number of Saudi compatriots with strong English communication skills. This will facilitate and expand trade and investment flows in Saudi Arabia.

Two key factors contribute to the current global situation: first, English has become the inevitable language of global communication, connecting the world as one global village; second, the development and success of a nation are closely tied to its ability to maintain successful communication with a world that mostly speaks this global language.

2.3 Working Knowledge of Business Language Is Essential

Saudis must attain proficiency and knowledge in English-language skills, as it is the language of international business and multinational companies. This language ability, in turn, will help them to achieve, execute, and materialize Saudi Vision 2030, which entails diversifying and expanding the economy, positioning Saudi Arabia as a leading global economy, and effectively competing with the global workforce by the year 2030. In addition, proficiency in English enables them to meet the diverse linguistics needs of the global market and to compete more effectively in new and emerging commercial ventures. Thus, high proficiency skills in English among Saudi citizens, who are the architects of the country's future, is currently identified as one of the key measures to achieving Saudi Arabian economic diversification, weaning its reliance on oil revenues, and transforming and advancing its unrivaled economic growth. English proficiency provides Saudi Arabia with a competitive edge. In this regard, Almegren (2022) emphasizes that language plays a remarkable role in securing a position in the world economy during government-led economic revolutions. Hence, proficiency in the English language is a vital measure in Saudi Arabia's efforts toward

economic diversification and transforming and advancing the country's unmatched economic growth.

2.4 Leading Industrial Powerhouses Require Proficiency in English

An essential aspect of Saudi Vision 2030 is transforming Saudi Arabia into a leading industrial powerhouse, a global logistics hub, and a global manufacturing hub. Due to this goal, Saudis are increasingly demanded to acquire sufficient English language competencies in order to gain a competitive edge in the global economy and to engage more efficiently in the labor market as well. English language competency will also ensure that their English language skills are aligned effectively with the globalized labor market needs, especially the novel market demands based on English. Saudis need after all to think locally and act globally by acquiring a strong working knowledge of English. Alzahrani (2017) argued that Saudi Arabia can transform from an oil-dependent industrial economy to a powerful knowledge-based economy through higher levels of English proficiency. Going a step further, Albiladi (2022) opined that it is only through such language ability they can effectively participate in intercultural professional communication.

In light of Saudi Vision 2030, the areas highlighted above areas underscore the newfound significance of the English language in 21st-century Saudi Arabia. English is now recognized as a driving force for Saudi socio-economic development and a means to attain competitive economic advantages. Strong English skills are also viewed as a key skill to have for fruitful participation in the global knowledge economy and as a facilitator of international trade and attracting long-term foreign investments. Consequently, the economic incentive for English proficiency is compelling and ensures full engagement in the global world economy.

Overall, Saudi Arabia is investing in English education at an unprecedented rate, as it is one of the primary human resources tools for the sustainability, modernization, and diversification of its economic prosperity, as well as for accelerating the economy's integration into the global system. Additionally, by empowering the general public with good command of English language skills, the country stands to benefit in the long run and contributes *substantially* to the country's economic prosperity. Moreover, the strong grasp of the English language by Saudi nationals gives the country a significant advantage in the global soft power arena, which aligns with one of the priorities of Vision 2030.

3. The English Strong Presence in the Saudi Education System

3.1 Overview

English is held in very high regard in Saudi Arabia, where it plays a key role in the national education system, one of the country's major sectors and its backbone of progress. Considered to be an indispensable component of the country's educational development strategy, the use of English serves the national interests of remaining globally competitive and developing a thriving knowledge-based economy, especially in light of the education-oriented initiatives of Saudi Vision 2030. Article 50 of the Educational Policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia states that students should learn (i.e., be taught) at least one foreign language so that they can interact with people of other cultures for the purposes of

spreading the message of Islam and serving humanity. This article delineates explicitly the promulgation of English in the Saudi educational system and the rationale for teaching English in Saudi schools, where the learners' ability to communicate with speakers of international languages is a priority and where English is regarded as a tool of knowledge. In Saudi Arabia's ambitious National Transformation Program 2020, English represents an essential part of the country's ambitious education plan, which has eight key objectives. The aim of the plan is to equip Saudi citizens with the necessary skills, including sufficient command of English, to become more competitive in local and global labor markets.

The official status of English in Saudi Arabia is that of a primary foreign language, and the country continues to show considerable interest in the language. It is the most needed foreign language to be taught and learned in the country and is primarily serving as the de facto foreign language of study. However, the country's political stance, if it can be termed as such, does not recognize English as the second official language in Saudi Arabia because it does not fulfill certain functions that are necessary for intranational communication and lacks any special administrative status in Saudi society. By contrast, Arabic, the autochthonous and official language of the state, continues to be used in all spheres of Saudi life and at all levels of government. Even so, as Alnasser and Almoaily (2022) have explained, English continues to have ever-higher prominence in Saudi Arabia today and is used in many areas of education. The authors, therefore, contend that English is increasingly being promoted in Saudi Arabia as a second language due to its widespread use as a medium of communication in most government offices, organizations, and technical firms.

3.2 National Public and Private Schools

At present, there are approximately 7.7 million students in Saudi Arabia, 6.7 million of whom (87%) attend public schools while 1 million (13%) attend private schools (Ministry of Education, 2023). English has a strong, palpable presence in the Saudi education system due to a range of considerations. To begin, it is the sole foreign language taught in Saudi public schools and on a large scale as well. Hence, English has come to occupy a singular and privileged position among languages in mainstream schooling. English classes or lessons are given at the preschool and/or kindergarten levels, with three hours of instruction per week. Some of the skills that children learn at these levels of schooling include distinguishing shapes, counting, reciting the English alphabet, naming colors, describing spatial positions, and using basic English vocabulary. Remarkably, at all grade levels in public and private schools, English is a core, compulsory subject taught to produce better language learning outcomes and to develop language competencies that are aligned with Saudi English learners' needs and the country's priorities. The scope and sequence of English language learning focus on competencies that span Grades 1 to 12 and reflect the four major skills of language use (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing). This education at these levels enables students to acquire a basic understanding of English as the first step on their journey toward becoming proficient in English. The English-language learning curriculum spans Grades 1 to 12 and focuses on the four major language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This education allows students to acquire a basic understanding of English as the initial step toward proficiency. Moreover, by starting their English-language education early, students

can immensely develop their knowledge swiftly as they progress to higher educational levels when they are more flexible and receptive to language learning compared to the later stages and have not yet reached the critical threshold of language learning.

In Saudi Arabia, there are a total of 262 international schools spread across numerous cities that together enroll 345,998 students, accounting for 6.2% of all schools in the country (Ministry of Education, 2023). However, until recently, international schools were not open to Saudi citizens. Currently, these schools mostly are attended primarily by children of expatriates and residents coming from English-speaking countries. A portion of international schools are operated by embassies, while others are privately owned. Most international schools today are English medium schools and teach British or U.S. curricula, as well as offer the International Baccalaureate Program. English is the core subject and medium of instruction in all of the different English-language courses and in all subjects as well. Over the course of a given week, English is taught in 10 periods out of a total of 40 over a range of courses, in which lesson periods last 45 minutes each.

3.3 Higher Education: State Universities

Saudi Arabia currently has 62 comprising 30 public and 18 private universities, 42 specialized private colleges and seven military colleges. The higher education system in Saudi Arabia encompasses three major domains: universities, colleges, and a rapidly growing number of technical and vocational institutions. The country's total number of students enrolled in higher education stands at 1,982,722 (Ministry of Education, 2023).

English, in addition to being taught in public institutions of education, is taught in all Saudi state universities. Saudi state universities share the same strong stance that English is vital to the success of their prospective students, which explains why English is an essential component of their academic programs. In turn, English courses continue to be in high demand at all levels of education, showcasing the language's growing importance and ensuring its proper promotion of in the country.

All Saudi state universities offer a one-year preparatory course in English as part of a non-credit program. This course is specifically designed for students newly admitted to state universities, especially those planning to major in science-based fields such as medicine, computer science, or engineering. They are required to complete a structured, 20-hour-per-week, intensive pre-university course in general English and academic English for two consecutive semesters to augment their academic English skills before commencing their studies at a Saudi university. This course gives students 300 hours of instruction over 15 weeks in each semester.

While some Saudi state universities offer English as a major field of study or as a required course, others offer it as an elective course. Even students who are not majoring in English are required to take an introductory English course at certain universities. For instance, mathematics majors have to take an English course as part of their study plans. English departments and centers are available in most Saudi state universities across the country's five major regions, enabling even non-English major students to take English courses in these

departments and centers. Two to four credit hours of English instruction are typically given per week over approximately 15 weeks per semester, with classes lasting 50 minutes each. Some of these English departments additionally offer graduate and postgraduate programs in the English language.

Moreover, English serves as an instruction delivery language in most university departments in the sciences, medicine, engineering, allied health, and other technical subjects. This gives English the eminent status it enjoys today in Saudi Arabia and its a central position in the higher education system in particular. Two prominent scientific universities—King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (founded in 1975) and King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (founded in 2009 as a graduate-only research university) —both of which use English as their sole official language of instruction. Universities that provide instruction in English have their own English-language teaching centers or English-language institutes that offer one-year preparatory courses to students, and applicants must demonstrate English-language proficiency to be admitted.

It should be noted that the use of English as a medium of instruction in Saudi state universities is determined by the student's major field of study. In the field of medicine, for instance, all instruction is given in English. However, in engineering and the sciences, while the textbooks are in English, but the courses are taught in Arabic. Alharbi (2022) has argued that using English as a medium of instruction in higher education marks a move toward the internationalization of higher education in Saudi Arabia. I can further substantiate this by suggesting that the goal is to provide Saudis with opportunities to enhance their competitiveness through global mobility and simultaneously acquire deep knowledge that can be enhanced through English proficiency. Furthermore, acquiring advanced knowledge of English ramifications of high educational standards prepares Saudi citizens for the demands of building a knowledge-based economy.

The recognition of English's importance in the sphere of education is also evidenced by the increasing number of newly established English departments in Saudi colleges and universities, the proliferation of language institutions offering English-related courses, and the continued emergence of English programs and institutions in the public and private sectors. Additionally, the demand has grown significantly for additional Saudi English teachers, translators, and more qualified graduates for various jobs that require high command of English. English also plays an increasingly significant role in scientific research and advanced studies in most fields within higher education.

3.4 Private Colleges and Universities

Private institutions of higher education represent an essential part of Saudi Arabia's higher education landscape where the number of private universities and colleges has grown dramatically, and more are in the pipeline. Moreover, this number will double in value over the next few years. Currently, there are 18 private universities in Saudi Arabia, with seven (38.9%) of them located in Riyadh, alongside 42 private colleges, all granting bachelor's and master's degrees (Ministry of Education, 2023). English is increasingly being used in the curricula of private Saudi institutions of higher education as they have taken notice of its

significance. The medium of instruction in some newly established private universities and colleges is exclusively English, especially in disciplines such as engineering, medicine, business, and information technology, where content areas are taught in English. In certain disciplines, English is designated as the language of the institution or the medium for disseminating education.

Private universities and colleges that do not offer a bachelor's degree in English require admitted students to take an intensive one- or two-semester English course to enable them to cope with class instructions delivered in English at those institutions.

3.5 Technical and Vocational Institutes

In Saudi Arabia, technical and vocational institutes include technical colleges, international technical colleges, strategic partnerships institutes, secondary industrial institutes, and industrial vocational training institutes. There are currently 1,120 Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC) facilities, with 80.1% representing the private sector and 19.9% the public sector.

Numerous technical and vocational institutes, as well as military academies, incorporate English as a subject into their curricula, acknowledging its utility and significance. For instance, the TVTC operates 50 colleges and training institutes scattered across Saudi Arabia, partnering with high-caliber global universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. English serves as the medium of instruction in all TVTC programs. Similarly, the Royal Commission of Colleges and Institutes at Yanbu and Jubail, both prominent technical education institutions, also use English as a medium of instruction in all of their programs. The same applies to various public and private organizations and establishments, which often establish training centers to teach English to their employees and advance their proficiency level.

Public health institutes and private medical colleges accredited by the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties offer a variety of postsecondary certificate and diploma programs, with most lasting two to three years, in nursing, X-ray technology, emergency aviation, medical assistance, and other specialty programs. Medical English and English for health care courses offer enrolled students general and advanced courses in medical English and English for health care professionals. These courses cover key areas of practice, including medical English terminology and concepts, technical vocabulary, documentation and record-keeping of patient care, the everyday language used in healthcare settings, and effective communication with patients, colleagues, and other healthcare stakeholders.

3.6 Government Ministries

English instruction also receives consideration and support from various government institutions in the form of language centers or institutes annexed to ministries, where English is taught intensively. These institutions include, among others, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, the Council for Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), the Saudi Royal Air Force, and the Institute of Banking (IOB). Of these institutions, the IPA and IOB are heavily involved in

teaching English. The IPA, where government employees are trained, is an autonomous government institution with a large English language center at its headquarters in Riyadh and several branches in Jeddah and Dammam, which assumes the responsibility of running the intensive English program. Most of these programs include a year of intensive English-language training. The IOB, by contrast, has a well-established language program offering daytime and evening courses in general English and English for specific purposes, targeting professionals in the banking and financial sectors.

3.7 English in Private Corporations

The momentum of learning English in Saudi Arabia is evident through in-house English programs that are widely recognized by the private sector, especially by Saudi corporations engaged in overseas dealings or business. These companies are dedicated to improving their prospective employees' English proficiency, recognizing that understanding English is crucial for success in today's business environment. While companies offer general English training and education to their employees, they primarily focus on teaching English for specific purposes to equip employees with the language skills necessary for their work. These English programs fall into one of two categories: short-term programs, lasting two weeks or less, and long-term programs, which meet once or twice a week for up to three months. Some large companies without training centers opt to hire third-party trainers to teach English to their employees.

The oil, hotel, banking, and airline industries all exemplify this trend, with leading Saudi companies providing in-house English programs. Such companies include Saudi Aramco, Saudi Development and Training (an offshoot of British Aerospace), Saudi Arabian Airlines, Saudi Basic Industries Corporation, the Saudi Electricity Company, the Saline Water Conversion Company, and the Saudi Telecommunication Company.

3.8 Language Institutions

In response to ever-increasing public demand for learning English in big cities, small towns, and even remote areas of Saudi Arabia, myriad institutions offer English courses taught by both native and non-native English-speaking teachers. These privately owned English-language institutions provide a variety of English programs catering to different audiences. They offer beginner's curricula suitable for children, and programs designed for adult professionals seeking to improve their general or specific skills-based English and enhance communication abilities. The latter category includes vocation-specific English instruction, English for lawyers, business English, as well as other specific uses. Some English institutions are locally owned, while others operate as franchises or branches of renowned international language institutes with varying levels of quality.

3.9 Beyond the Country's Borders

The strong permeation of English in Saudi Arabia also manifests and extends far beyond the country's borders. In recent years, as part of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, which is a multistage scholarship grant, the Saudi government has sent a large number of Saudis abroad—5% of all Saudi tertiary students were studying abroad in 2018—to

English-speaking countries, primarily the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia, where they earn in these alien climes undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in various disciplines. The vast majority of Saudi students abroad are enrolled in universities in the United States. English is the booth selling the ticket to English-speaking countries. Currently, the program sends students overseas on scholarship programs to attend universities ranked among the top 200 international universities or to programs in the top 50 in their respective fields, aiming to develop Saudi Arabia's human capital base.

As demonstrated, the English language holds a unique position in Saudi education. Its ever-increasing importance stems from its magnitude as a tool for the country's development in international relations and scientific-technological advancements. English-language education also empowers Saudis linguistically and enables them to transfer scientific and technological advances from other countries to Saudi Arabia, thereby propelling the country forward. Additionally, using English is considered pivotal for Saudi Arabia's economic development and the expansion of its business environment.

4. A Strong Positive Public Perception of the English Language

4.1 Overview

It can be assumed that the attitude of the general populace of Saudi Arabia has shaped the long-standing status ascribed to English and its widespread functions. On the whole, Saudis hold highly positive attitudes toward English, with the majority believing that it is indispensable for the country's future prosperity and essential across various domains. Individuals of all ages group affirm that English is the language of economic survival and development. Moreover, English is deeply valued in Saudi society and has been aggressively promoted as more than just a foreign language.

Saudis generally show an active interest in English and firmly believe that possessing a good knowledge of the English language is a crucial skill in today's dynamically developing world. Consequently, English has steadily gained prominence among the general Saudi public. Alsubaie's study (2021) supported this notion, as it reveals that Saudis maintain a positive attitude toward English and are well aware of its significance in today's globalized world.

4.2 Attributing Factors to Prominence Status of English

English's high valuation and acknowledged importance in Saudi Arabia can be attributed to several factors. These attitudinal factors significantly influence how English is perceived by the general Saudi population and exert a crucial role in its dissemination across the country. The enduring factors are linked to various dimensions, including internationalization, technological advancement, individual professional development, a global perspective, and scientific progress.

4.3 Individual Development

For many Saudi nationals, acquiring competence in English and being eloquent in it is perceived as a key to both personal and professional success. English is a vital tool for advancing career trajectories and seizing various available vast array of employment

opportunities. Additionally, a strong command of the English language helps elevate their understanding across a wide range of disciplines, including, but not limited to, liberal arts, science, and technology, among other fields of knowledge. It also helps satisfy the localized requirement for socio-economic mobility. Moreover, with it, Saudis can pursue educational opportunities abroad, especially in higher education, or even leisurely pursuits, such as international travel or roaming freely across countries for pleasure. To remain competitive in an era of globalization, Saudis believe that proficiency in English is essential.

In sum, the perspective of most Saudis is that English is a source of self-improvement and empowerment, as well as an investment in human capital, both of which significantly benefit individuals, economically and socially. In their views, a strong command of English has become a necessity to achieve the pinnacle of success. Specifically, Alotaibi (2020) noted that Saudis hold a positive view of the English language and attach great importance to its proficiency, recognizing its advantages and critical role in their professional success.

4.4 Cultivating a Global Vision

English has become more pronounced than ever in Saudi Arabia because the multilingual citizenry recognizes its value in appreciating cultural differences, becoming more insightful, and gaining and developing a better knowledge and understanding of the world. This prevailing attitude stems from knowing that proficiency in the English language weaves a richer tapestry of Saudis' life through an expansion of their interests and involvement as well as a better understanding and tackling of global challenges effectively. Furthermore, a working knowledge of English allows Saudi people to freely interact with other portions of the globe, thereby enriching their worldview and expanding their horizons. In this ever-growing globalized world, advanced knowledge of the English language provides them with access to multiple cultures and paves a greater desire for cross-cultural communication and understanding. This exposure to a wider range of viewpoints allows Saudis nationals to approach the world with an increased level of openness and curiosity, enabling their country to connect with the rest of the world and embrace the possibility of global citizenship.

4.5 Advancement of the Nation

The perceived inundation of English among most Saudis is also vital for their success and competitiveness in an increasingly interconnected and competitive world. Increasingly, English is viewed by the majority of Saudis as a means for achieving competitive economic advantage and as a key to unlocking sustainable development prospects. They also believe that increasing citizens' global competitiveness can be achieved through English proficiency. Moreover, the scientific sphere in Saudi Arabia will also be boosted by a good grasp of English, as the latest developments in any given area are largely communicated in this language. A working knowledge of English is integral to staying current with innovations and accessing a stream of multidisciplinary advancements and ever-growing knowledge. Therefore, a substantial number of Saudis believe that remaining relevant is heavily dependent on being able to understand English. The advances in the present world of science and technology make extensive contact with English increasingly unavoidable and exceedingly essential for the advancement of knowledge. Competence in written and spoken

English is becoming a linguistic sine qua non among Saudis for their country's future development and is offering access to global knowledge, science, and technology. The English language allows rapid cross-pollination of ideas and innovation worldwide, contributing to developing a new supranational knowledge market. Alkhannani (2021) observed that English-language learning opens the world for Saudis and enables them to be active participants in the knowledge-making society. Likewise, Al-Ahdal and Al-Awaid (2018) pointed out that Saudi Arabia is experiencing a surge in knowledge and technological advancements due to the prominence English language.

Additionally, English features prominently in Saudi Arabia because a higher level of English proficiency would likely make it a more attractive destination for outsiders to visit and work. Knowing English enables the Saudi community to provide a more enjoyable tourism experience and prevent unnecessary conflicts and misunderstandings. English is considered a symbiotic factor benefiting both tourists and the local community. Equally important, through English, Saudi Arabia can more naturally become a multilingual nation that welcomes others to its land, signaling a change from older policies aimed at limiting outside influence to preserve local culture.

In view of this, according to a large number of the Saudi population, the English language makes an important contribution to their wider lives beyond learning contexts or values. English plays an equally important role in enriching their quality of life. A high level of proficiency in English is considered by most to be a valuable soft skill, a source of empowerment, a form of capital, and a means of sustainable development. It also provides various instrumental benefits to its users in a wide range of settings.

5. The English Strong Presence in Saudi Arabia's Workforce

5.1 Overview

The highly prized status of the English language in Saudi Arabia also applies and extends to other various aspects of employment. Employers in the public sector and in private companies, given the latter's increased role in the market, especially in industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, aviation, and tourism industries, expect applicants to possess a particular level of proficiency in English. Moreover, advertisements for job openings, and publications for the teaching profession are released, and national newspaper supplements emphasize employers' preferences for English-speaking applicants. Both local and international companies are keen to hire English-speaking staff members, as they often tend to form alliances and partnerships with international business entities and maintain vital international links. Additionally, having English-speaking staff can also accelerate a company's performance. Furthermore, possessing sufficient knowledge of English improves Saudi job seekers' overall employability. Conversely, high school and college graduates without adequate command of the English language often face disadvantaged when seeking to secure well-paid and/or rewarding employment. Thus, English-language competence in knowledge-based markets can open doors for Saudi citizens and give rank-and-file employees—the cogs of private commerce and industry—greater access to promotions, advancement, and competitiveness at the global level. Overall, because English is the

language of the global market, English proficiency is critical to an individual's success in today's highly competitive corporate world.

For this reason, a high level of English proficiency has also become a means to realize Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to integrate prospective Saudi employees into a competent workforce by improving their English-language skills. Today, having sound knowledge of and a higher level of English-language skills has grown in importance in Saudi Arabia's labor market, and with the rise in English usage, demand for English competence has surfaced in public and private work settings alike. In fact, English is regarded in Saudi Arabia as part of the 21st-century skill set and a must-have for participation in the global knowledge economy. To maintain a competitive edge in today's global business world, Saudi Arabia is committed to developing a pool of its own professionals with skills in more in-demand languages in today's world of business. Thus, English has become a compulsory language in Saudi commercial contexts and a panacea for economic well-being.

5.2 Saudi Employees' Perception of English

The recent adoption of English as the working language in Saudi Arabia has significantly impacted how potential Saudi employees perceive the importance of being skilled in English and the value of making efforts to improve their English-language abilities. Indeed, Saudi nationals now view English proficiency as a crucial tool for securing employment and advancing their corporate careers, both locally and globally. Saudis also recognize various other reasons why English is a necessary skill, including its status as a core criterion for employability and its role in opening doors to opportunities otherwise inconceivable without it. Having English skills increases potential employees' eagerness to avail themselves of various opportunities from working in high-tech industries to positions in luxury hotels, among other economic gains as well. Additionally, they also understand that language proficiency can obscure other barriers to unemployment, including a lack of necessary training and/or proper credentials. Saudis' employment prospects are grim as a result of insufficient language skills. Accordingly, potential Saudi employees now regard the English language as a form of capital that plays a gatekeeping role, either allowing or restricting job opportunities. Alqarni (2018) has indicated that Saudis' chances of landing good jobs, particularly well-paid ones, are affected by their English-language skills. English proficiency thus affects employment prospects, earnings, and job opportunities.

Saudi employers realize that outstanding English skills, both in spoken and written forms, as they allow their teams to effectively communicate with customers, suppliers, and competitors across geographical boundaries, and with non-Saudi colleagues with limited skills in the Arabic language. Good communication skills in English also ensure greater success whether to transact an idea or a good. Possessing staff with advanced English skills also enables organizations to establish long-term business relationships around the world. Having a high level of competency in English is therefore considered to afford life-changing opportunities and a key to success in today's job market and in entrepreneurship. For one, because English-language abilities increase networking opportunities, they allow job seekers greater career mobility by expanding the job options available. For another, prospective Saudi

employees are aware of the difficulties of holding certain positions within companies, of working their way up the corporate ladder, and of navigating various aspects of employment, and continue acquiring skills without adequate language skills. They regard it as the ticket to upward mobility. Therefore, acquiring proficient English skills becomes essential for personal growth. Furthermore, a strong command of English enables Saudi job seekers to expand their reach beyond their country and tap into the global labor market, thereby enhancing their versatility in the workplace. In addition, good working English allows for greater access to international markets, enables prospective Saudi employees to learn new business practices, and enhances overall general productivity. Saudi domestic market as a result stands to profit with higher English abilities.

Beyond that, there is a significant earnings premium exists for Saudis who possess English-language proficiency. Having a strong command of the English language is highly valuable for corporate workers as it enables them to successfully execute their job roles. It is also an empowering tool that grants individuals who master it access to otherwise unattainable powers and privileges. Despite having a degree and appearing to be well-qualified, job candidates may only be offered an interview only if they have the necessary English skills. Consequently, English has become the de facto language for Saudis, the language of opportunities, and a key to individuals' economic prosperity and improved prospects for employment.

5.3 Changes in the Saudi Labor Market and the Demand for English Skills

The rapid transformation that the landscape of the Saudi market has experienced in recent years also reveals the English language's rise in prominence. Significantly dramatic changes have shifted the expectations of English proficiency for job seekers in Saudi Arabia, leading to unprecedented corporate perceptions highlighting the economic value of English competency. Since the launch of Saudi Vision 2030 in 2016, Saudi Arabia has experienced a steady rise in foreign investment, with multilingual companies relocating their headquarters to the country, further attracting inward investment from multinationals. The nation has witnessed significant developments in various sectors, including a flourishing entertainment industry, expanding defense sector, the National Renewable Energy Program, and a booming infrastructural sector.

Added to that, Saudi Arabia is positioning itself as a new force for regional tourism, aiming to become a hub for international tourists. Government initiatives, such as the declaration in February 2021, have compelled international companies to expand their Saudi operations and establish regional headquarters in the country by the end of 2023 to work on government contracts. The country is also actively building megacities for tourism and undertaking tourism-related megaprojects like Neom, Qiddiya, Amaala, King Salman Park, and Diriyah Gate. On that topic, Al-Malki et al. (2022) have stated that Saudi Vision 2030 places great importance on international tourism as a driving force for economic growth. For that reason, good command of English, and specifically practical English communication abilities, is an added value for any worker's skill set in the tourism industry.

5.4 Global Investment Powerhouse and Global Business Speaks English

Recently, two additional factors have taken center stage in Saudi Arabia's workforce landscape. First, one of the primary objectives of the Saudi Arabia 2030 vision is to become a global investment powerhouse. Second, English has emerged as the global language of business. A growing number of multinational companies now mandate English as the language of business to facilitate communication and performance across geographically diverse functions and business endeavors.

In response to this noticeable development, the Saudi government has taken measures to empower Saudi individuals with English language skills. This step is essential to ensure the success of the country's plan to expand its economic relationships with other nations and undertake an increasing number of joint ventures with foreign companies, investors, and businesspeople. Besides, Saudi Arabia maintains relationships with all blue-chip international companies worldwide and communicates successfully with most other countries. All of these factors endorse the idea that Saudi citizens with good English skills have a gateway to becoming a global investment powerhouse and fostering better communication with international businesses.

Such rapid growth and drastic changes in the local workforce environment have created a high demand for English proficiency or working fluency in English. Indeed, a good command of English specific to each area of the Saudi corporate world is the most complementary skill required. In promoting economic advancement, English cultivates the ability to sustain a competitive advantage. As Saudis are hired in an array of positions, corporate leaders have stressed the need to hone their English-language skills, for their work requires them to express themselves in English, whether nationally or internationally. Most enterprises have thus devoted substantial resources and efforts to cultivating or enhancing their employees' English proficiency in a bid to run the companies more effectively. That trend reflects the fact that with growth in the Saudi economy, companies have realized that proficiency in English is one of the most effective means to communicate with the world and support their international operations. Because professional performance today depends heavily on language competence and ever-higher proficiency, English has become a fixture in the Saudi business world, and its usage is pervasive. According to Alzuoud and Gaudel (2020), these trends illustrate the current importance of English in increasing Saudi nationals' employability in the domestic labor market, as well as contributing to Saudi Vision 2030. Similarly, Khawaji (2002) asserted that English is driving and directing Saudi Arabian's industrial revolution today.

6. The English Strong Presence as a Lingua Franca in Saudi Arabia

6.1 Overview

The proliferation of the English language in Saudi Arabia, along with the value assigned to it, has elevated the status of English and intensified its decisive role in society. English is used for communication between Saudis and expatriates as well as among the multiple nationalities and ethnic groups that currently reside in the country. Today, approximately 13 million expatriate

workers (Saudi 2022 Census- General Authority for Statistics) live in Saudi Arabia across various sectors of the workforce, especially in the energy and service industries, because the country draws a significant portion of its labor force—low-skilled workers, skilled workers, and skilled experts alike—from foreign countries. Each year, owing to the availability of lucrative job opportunities, Saudi Arabia attracts a multitude of expatriates, most of whom are from English-speaking countries or speak English as a second language. Beyond that, tourists and thriving residents have plenty of opportunities to experience Saudi Arabia’s cultural treasures and to collaborate on projects together, all while using English.

Saudi Arabia’s large, transient international labor force and visitors from around the world have caused English to emerge as a lingua franca for communication between Saudis and the multiethnic, multilingual non-Arab expatriate community working for Saudi official and non-official establishments. English also serves as a linking language utilized by large contingents of non-Arabic-speaking expatriates of various ethnic linguistic backgrounds working in the country. Across Saudi Arabia’s numerous cities, English is therefore widely spoken and incorporated into daily transactions, functions, and settings of daily life (e.g., hospitals, restaurants, factories, banks, airports, cafés, and shopping malls). Indeed, Saudis often conduct business with Filipino baristas, Indian shop assistants, and Pakistani taxi drivers, all in English. Because most citizens across the country speak English, the language barrier is low, and few hurdles, therefore, arise among the non-national population despite the challenges associated with a lack of fluency.

6.2 English Serves as the Common Language of Communication

In recent years, expatriates have streamed into Saudi Arabia to access the exciting job opportunities available and to meet the demand for skilled and professional employees, who constitute a large proportion of the country’s workforce. This surge has led to the increased use of English as a common language of communication amid the country’s diverse expatriate population. In particular, English in this multilingual texture of Saudi Arabia serves as a communication means facilitating communication between the Saudi local community and the varied expatriate community residing in Saudi Arabia. Saudis generally use English to communicate with such workers in social and interpersonal communication in places such as institutions of education, restaurants, social events, factories, shopping malls, cafes, and health care facilities.

English is also the key language for communicating with the approximately 11 million pilgrims who visit Mecca and Medina—holy places for followers of Islam—every year. Most non-Arabic speakers—approximately 80% of incoming visitors—who visit Saudi Arabia use English as their de facto working language. As such, English is increasingly the lingua franca in interactions between Saudi nationals and non-Arabic-speaking visitors from abroad to the two holy places.

Promoting English as a means of communication with culturally different others in Saudi Arabia involves several factors and consequences. First, the use of English by Saudi and non-Saudi residents creates a positive atmosphere for interaction, and friction, as well as builds trusting relationships between them. In addition, it enables the expatriate community to quickly

integrate into the Saudi social environment, both at and outside work, thereby easing cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural communication. This situation makes it exceptionally easy for English-speaking expats to navigate daily life in Saudi Arabia and integrate into the local community. Second, the widespread use of English in Saudi Arabia makes it a convenient language to use for expatriates from around the world. Third, it emphasizes the importance of improving English-language skills among Saudi nationals, especially proficient English communication skills and strategies. Establishing proficiency in such skills can greatly facilitate effective English communication and significantly enhance social interactions among people of diverse backgrounds and languages in the workplace and in other social spheres. Hoven and Algahtani (2023) have convincingly argued that because English serves as a medium for worldwide communication, developing Saudi nationals' English communication skills is essential to sustaining the country's economic power and underpins national growth and development. Finally, it encourages the proposal of a language policy that promotes English-language learning so that robust encounters with linguistic differences can be managed and successful communication in English can occur at work, in leisure settings, and in numerous other situations.

As discussed above, Saudi Arabia has experienced a rapid increase in its international workforce, which has impacted the local linguistic landscape. Today, English has gained significant status in the country's multilingual context, as reflected in its use as the primary language of communication between Saudi citizens and expatriate residents. In Saudi Arabia's multilingual communities, Saudi-expatriate interactions illustrate the moves and motives behind the use of English in these diverse communities, along with the language's immeasurable relevance in Saudi Arabia today.

7. The English Strong Presence in Mainstream and Digital Media in Saudi Arabia

7.1 Overview

Another powerful vehicle for English's prominence in Saudi Arabia is its growing ubiquity in the country's rapidly evolving media sector—one of the largest media sectors in the region—primarily driven by digital technology and the rise of social media. The landscape of mainstream and digital media in Saudi Arabia includes broadcast TV, print media, the Internet, TV shows, movies, documentaries, music, and, of course, the vastness and inexorable interaction of social media. In parallel, there is a rapidly burgeoning demand for the entertainment industry. Indeed, both media and entertainment have figured prominently in the era of Saudi Vision 2030. Currently, media play a crucial role in the development of English-language learning in Saudi Arabia, as well as in progressively promoting English as a means to shape the country's future. The basis for this assertion is that in today's highly networked world, English has become a dominant element in media.

The media are well established and available in an array of forms—to a greater or lesser extent—in Saudi Arabia. Traditional media continue to have a strong footprint. In relation to the spread of English, two daily English-language newspapers (i.e., *Arab News* and *Saudi Gazette*) circulate in the country, and satellite broadcasting, introduced in the mid-1990s, has exposed Saudi citizens to English via a balanced blend of cultural programs, music, non-Arabic films,

serials, children's programs, and news and current affairs programs. The television and film industries offer Saudis opportunities to come into contact with English. In fact, Hollywood has recently become the global source of such English-language cultural products in Saudi Arabia. In 1995, Saudis were first introduced to the Internet—a medium that further exposed them to English—and gained access to the global network through Saudi portals. Unrestricted access to various social media platforms and outlets has enabled Saudis to interact freely with English speakers from different parts of the world, and, at present, digital media technology has become an integral part of daily life for nearly all Saudis. Thus, digital media are the chief driving force contributing to the spread of English-language learning among Saudis. Such media expose them to English, the language most commonly used on the Internet, and, in turn, broadens their view of social, political, economic, and global issues.

In Saudi Arabia, a European-language radio station, with programming predominantly in English and, to a lesser extent, in French, transmits 24 hours a day, with programs of various orientations. The Saudi Press Agency is solely responsible for the creation of official news and offers its services in English as well as Arabic. Aspiring to be an authentic source of news for the outside world, the media outlets using English convey Saudi Arabia's stance on a range of issues and disseminate its cultural offerings directly to English-speaking audiences. In particular, the ever-increasing number of English-language satellite television channels and FM radio channels provide a popular means of accessing the English language. Several popular streaming options are also available in the country, including BBC iPlayer, Channel4OD, SkyPlayer, Hulu, ABC, and ITV Player. Furthermore, many people use VPN services, get decoders, and install satellite dishes to receive international English channels. Taken together, English-speaking TV channels abound for Saudi citizens to access at home, and plans are even afoot to launch an English-language channel. Beyond that, a variety of English-language newspapers, magazines, and books are available in bookstores throughout the country.

7.2 Media Have Facilitated the Spread of English in the Country

In Saudi Arabia, all forms of media, comprising the fourth pillar of the state, have played an immense role in the extensive spread of English in day-to-day activities and contributed to cementing English's ascendancy over other languages. In the current era of interactive media, Saudi Arabia is embracing English in all corners today. Easy access to social media and its range of entertainment sources, together with the vast amount of information available online, have proven to be a major driving force in contributing to the spread of English in Saudi Arabia. Social media platforms in particular have become an integral part of the country's younger generations, especially teenagers, but are also important to middle-aged individuals. When using digital media, Saudi nationals tend to resort to and are sometimes compelled to use English to communicate with the world as a means to share information, ideas, knowledge, and values, in both videos and messages, among other things, as well as to ponder issues and gaze beyond the boundaries of Saudi society and culture. In particular, they use the Internet, which has proven to be an infinite source of information and a truly global communication channel with few boundaries. With an understanding of the English language, virtually anyone can use, access, and benefit from that information in various ways. All of these trends and, more broadly, the democratization of information have resulted in English's widespread adoption at all levels in

Saudi Arabia. Indeed, English is now a dominant language in the country, which has driven an increase in its number of English-language learners.

In sum, the proliferation of English can be gauged by the widespread use of emerging digital media and social media platforms that harness the latest global technology. English is also present and spoken in all related media fields that require international contact and cooperation, which has mutually reinforced its spread. According to Alshammari (2019) and Altawil (2019), media have indeed contributed to English's rapid spread in Saudi Arabia, which is only expected to increase in the future. Social media plays a key role in that process, for it increasingly allows English to gain prominence in the country.

7.3 Media Platforms Foster Learning English

Media have heavily promoted the English language in Saudi Arabia, as observable in the growing number of people learning English in the country. The availability of media across diverse platforms at the population's disposal has accelerated and enhanced the learning of English, as well as sharpened many Saudis' interest in learning the language.

Three studies have affirmed the media's role in fostering the learning of English in Saudi Arabia. First, Alshammari (2019) found that using media helped participants to improve their English and using social media platforms in particular made learning English less awkward and more enjoyable and noticeably increased learners' interest in learning the language. Second, and along similar lines, Altawil (2019) revealed that Saudi EFL learners use digital media outlets for specific language skills, mostly speaking, listening, reading, and vocabulary-building. Furthermore, they used digital media to enhance their language-learning skills, to prepare for university admission, to meet future career requirements, and/or while using the language during overseas travel. Third and most recently, Bano and Zaman (2020) reported that participants in their study believed that using social media was a valuable, indispensable tool for learning English. It not only allowed them to become immersed in an English-language environment but also accelerated their overall English-language learning process and helped them to boost their English-language skills.

The above discussion has demonstrated that the English language is ubiquitous in Saudi Arabia attesting to its significance in the national life of the country. As a corollary to this observation, the prominent status that English is gaining is attributed to the rise of mainstream and digital media outlets. English is widely spread across the country through media forms that prompt its learning and development. The spread of the English language in Saudi Arabia is the outcome of the significant role that media play in the dissemination and assimilation of English in every aspect of life in the nation, be it education, politics, economics, or society. The rise of social media has also unquestionably contributed to the diffusion of English on Saudi soil. Contemporary media, especially digital, seem to aid Saudi English-language learners during their learning experiences because the viability of the various components of media facilitates their engagement by situating them in an active and engaging language-learning environment, making learning an enjoyable and worthwhile activity.

8. Conclusion

In light of the above-prolonged discussion, English-language skills represent an invaluable commodity in Saudi Arabia. On a personal level, one could even go so far as to suggest that knowledge of English is the bare minimum for any Saudi citizen and is important to the success of any endeavor. Currently, Saudi citizens who can communicate in English have a far brighter future in terms of securing a wide range of employment opportunities, seeking and acquiring knowledge, enriching their understanding of other cultures, pursuing study abroad, widening their horizons with better knowledge of the world, and even engaging in leisurely pursuits, including international travel. Simultaneously, it has also become increasingly clear that for the country as a whole to remain competitive and prosper in the 21st century, a growing number of professionals in Saudi Arabia need to possess English-language skills.

Therefore, it can be asserted that English in Saudi Arabia at the individual and national levels is primarily used for external purposes and, to a lesser extent, for purposes of internal employment. Along the same lines, the use of English in Saudi Arabia remains instrumentally motivated, as opposed to being used for integrative purposes. It is viewed as an instrument for modernization, advancement, and technological transfer; as a dependable means of strengthening and expanding the economy; as a way to assimilate modern technology and scientific breakthroughs; and as a vehicle for global communication.

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