

THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH ON LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE ARAB GULF

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Abstract. This study examines the influence of English on language use, cultural identity and socioeconomic opportunities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, two major countries in the Arab Gulf. The results show that English is playing an important role in education, professional life and international communication in these countries. The results obtained show that among the surveyed participants, English contributes to social development and global integration, coexisting with efforts to preserve the Arabic language and cultural identity.

Keywords: English, Gulf countries, global context, language acquisition, linguistic identity.

ƏRƏB KÖRFƏZİNDƏ İNGİLİS DİLİNİN DİL VƏ MƏDƏNİ KİMLİYƏ TƏSİRİ

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Xülasə. Məqalədə ingilis dilinin Ərəb Körfəzinin iki əsas ölkəsi olan Səudiyyə Ərəbistanı və BƏƏ-də dil istifadəsi, mədəni kimlik və sosial-iqtisadi imkanlara təsiri araşdırılır. Nəticələr göstərir ki, ingilis dili bu ölkələrdə təhsil, peşəkar fəaliyyət və beynəlxalq ünsiyyətdə mühüm rol oynayır. Alınan nəticələr göstərir ki, sorğuda iştirak edənlər üçün ingilis dili ərəb dilinin və mədəni kimliyin qorunması ilə yanaşı sosial inkişafa və global integrasiyaya da töhfə verir.

Açar sözlər: İngilis dili, Ərəb körfəzi, global, dilin mənimsənilməsi, lingvistik kimlik.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, English has gained a prominent place in the Arab Gulf states, influencing patterns of communication, education and cultural interaction. As it spreads globally, English is becoming increasingly integrated into the linguistic landscape of Gulf societies, where it functions alongside Arabic in professional, educational and social spheres. This growing presence reflects broader processes of globalization and the region's strategic involvement in international economic and cultural networks.

The spread of English in the Arab Gulf states is closely linked to economic diversification and modernization initiatives aimed at reducing dependence on oil-based economies. Governments in the region are actively promoting English through educational reforms, business practices and international partnerships to enhance global competitiveness and facilitate communication in increasingly multicultural societies. As a result, English has become a key linguistic resource in sectors such as higher education, trade, tourism and digital media.

At the same time, the expanding role of English raises important sociolinguistic questions regarding its impact on Arabic language use, cultural heritage and identity. While

some observers express concerns that the growing dominance of English could weaken the status of Arabic or contribute to cultural homogenization, others argue that English can coexist with local languages and adapt to express specific cultural meanings. These differing perspectives highlight the need to examine how English is perceived and valued by native speakers within the region.

This article examines the influence of English on language use and cultural identity in the Gulf countries by analyzing the perceptions of Arabic speakers in the region. Focusing on linguistic practices, cultural expression and socioeconomic opportunities, the study examines how English is integrated into everyday life and how its influence is interpreted by its users. Drawing on empirical survey data, the article contributes to ongoing discussions about multilingualism, identity and the localization of English in a global context.

2. Literature review

Recently, research on the global spread of English has increasingly focused on regional sociolinguistic characteristics, particularly in contexts where English exists alongside strong local languages and identities. In this context, the Gulf States are attracting increasing scholarly attention due to their rapid economic transformation, multi-ethnic population and the growing use of English in institutional and everyday settings.

Research on global English varieties and English as a lingua franca (ELF) provides an important theoretical framework for understanding English use in the Gulf. Bolton [4] and Linn and Ahn [11] emphasize that English varieties develop through localized processes shaped by historical, social and cultural conditions. Similarly, Byram et al. [6] argue that the globalization of English is influenced not only by linguistic factors but also by attitudes, policy decisions and implementation patterns. These perspectives help explain how English in the Gulf adapts rather than simply borrows, contributing to the emergence of localized forms of English use.

A significant body of research emphasizes the close relationship between language and culture in the Arab context. Hameed and Aslam [9] describe language as a form of social interaction through which cultural values and shared goals are expressed. Mahmoud [12] further argues that learning a language inevitably involves exploring its cultural meanings, as language serves as a vehicle for transmitting cultural norms from generation to generation. Taken together, these studies highlight the inextricable link between linguistic and cultural identity, a theme central to discussions of the English language in the Gulf.

Globalization and technological advances have increased intercultural communication, heightening the perceived need for English in the Arab world. Researchers note that English has become essential for participation in international education, business and diplomacy Ebad [7]. As Arab societies increasingly engage with global networks, English increasingly functions as a lingua franca, enabling communication across national and linguistic boundaries. However, this expansion has also raised concerns about the preservation of the Arabic language and Islamic cultural identity.

Several studies specifically examine attitudes toward English in the Gulf countries. In Saudi Arabia, Hameed and Aslam [9] note that English is promoted as a tool for global integration and social mobility, particularly among the younger generation. Proficiency in English is often seen as an indicator of competence and modernity, while Arabic remains closely associated with tradition and religion Ponnuchamy [14]; Al-Jarf [1] also notes that globalization has strengthened positive attitudes toward English, despite persistent concerns about the long-term status of Arabic.

Research conducted in Gulf countries such as Kuwait, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates reflect similar trends. Economic growth, international labor migration and the dominance of English in science and technology have strengthened its status as a key language of communication Kırkgöz [10]. Nouraldeem and Elyas [13] report generally positive attitudes toward English among Saudi students, who view it as essential for national development and participation in global processes.

At the same time, scholars emphasize that the spread of English does not necessarily entail cultural loss. Boulter [5], drawing on Girma [8], argues that English can function as a means of expressing local and religious values when cultural content is integrated into its use. This view is consistent with sociolinguistic approaches that emphasize localization and cultural significance over linguistic imperialism.

Concerns about linguistic balance and identity preservation are particularly prominent in public discourse in the Gulf States. Weber [18] notes that while governments promote English to prepare citizens for participation in the global economy, concerns persist about the declining prestige of Arabic, particularly in the UAE. Initiatives such as the Year of National Identity in the UAE Randall and Samimi [15] reflect ongoing efforts to reconcile globalization with cultural continuity. Schneider's [17] dynamic model of postcolonial Englishes offers a useful approach for interpreting these developments. Al-Surmi [3] applies this concept to the Arabic context, suggesting that English use in the region has entered an early stage of nativization, characterized by lexical borrowing, structural variation and the emergence of localized norms. This process supports the concept of "Gulf English" as an evolving variety shaped by regional linguistic and cultural realities.

Al-Nasser [2] highlights the importance of English in the Saudi educational system, where it is required from elementary school through university. While acknowledging the challenges of English acquisition, Al-Nasser emphasises that sociocultural factors, such as a strong attachment to the Arabic language and cultural identity, can influence students' attitudes toward English. This perspective is relevant to the present study as it reflects broader tensions between the institutional promotion of English and concerns about maintaining linguistic and cultural continuity in the Gulf countries.

Overall, the existing literature suggests that English in the Arab Gulf operates within a complex multilingual ecosystem. While closely associated with modernity, opportunity and

global participation, Arabic continues to retain deep symbolic and cultural significance. This study builds on previous work by examining contemporary perceptions of English among Arabic-speaking residents of the Gulf, focusing on how linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic factors intersect to shape attitudes toward English.

3. Objectives of the study

Thus, it is hoped that the study will achieve the following purposes:

1. To better understand the influence of the English language on various aspects of cultural legacies.
2. To examine the way how English influences the regional language and the implications of these changes for native Arabic speakers.
3. To investigate how Arab students perceive the opportunities associated with English and the cultural implications of its growing use in the Arab Gulf.

Hypothesis - The rise of English in the Arab Gulf serves as a catalyst for socio-economic advancement and global participation, while coexisting with - rather than replacing - local cultural identities and practices.

Research questions:

- 1) Will the rise of English as a lingua franca in the Arab Gulf seriously influence the region's major language, Arabic?
- 2) What effects does the use of English in academic and professional contexts have on the cultural identities of Arabic-speaking people?
- 3) What are the social and cultural effects of the growing use of English alongside Arabic in the Arab Gulf region?

4. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative method to explore perceptions of the impact of English on language use and cultural identity in Gulf countries. Data were collected using a structured cross-sectional survey, allowing for the examination of attitudes toward the issue at a specific point in time.

Participants

The study involved 55 Arabic-speaking participants with the majority of respondents coming from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with a smaller number living in Bahrain, providing a limited but regionally relevant perspective, aged 14 to 50. Although the study focuses on the Arab Gulf, the sample primarily represents these two countries. Participants had diverse educational backgrounds and varying levels of English proficiency.

Participants were selected using convenience sampling, which is appropriate for exploratory sociolinguistic research focused on perception-based data. Participation was voluntary and no personal information was collected to ensure anonymity.

Instrument

Data was collected using a structured online questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The questionnaire consists of ten closed-ended statements designed to measure respondents' perceptions across three thematic areas:

1. Linguistic influence of English,
2. Cultural identity and expression,
3. Socioeconomic and educational impact.

Responses were recorded using a three-point Likert scale (*Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree*). In addition, basic demographic information regarding nationality and age was collected at the beginning of the survey.

The study employed an online questionnaire to collect data on attitudes toward English among participants from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE. The questionnaire was distributed via online platforms, including Google Forms and SurveyMonkey and was accessible on personal devices. The estimated completion time was approximately 5-7 minutes. For responses collected via Google Forms, only 15 eligible participants were included in the analysis to ensure the sample reflected the target population. Due to the limitations of the free SurveyMonkey account, only 40 responses were accessible and included, in this study. Consequently, the final sample consisted of 55 participants, the majority of whom were from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and a few from Bahrain.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent was obtained before completing the questionnaire. All responses were treated confidentially and analyzed in aggregate.

Data collection procedure

Before distribution, the questionnaire was reviewed for clarity, relevance and relevance to the research. A link to the survey was distributed through academic networks and student communication channels in the Gulf countries. Participants were informed of the study's objectives and assured that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes.

The study initially aimed to collect responses from participants across several Arab Gulf countries, including Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. However, due to lower response rates in some countries, the final sample consisted predominantly of participants from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Consequently, the findings primarily reflect the perceptions of respondents from these two countries and should not be interpreted as representative of the entire Arab Gulf region. The full questionnaire is provided in Appendix A.

5. Data analysis

The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify common patterns and specific features in participants' responses. Periods and percentages were calculated to

summarize attitudes toward the English language across linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic dimensions.

Ethical Considerations

Strict ethical standards were observed throughout the study. Participation was completely voluntary, with informed consent required to complete questionnaires and maintain anonymity. No confidential or identifying information was collected and all responses were handled confidentially.

6. Findings

The findings of the study are presented thematically to reflect participants' perceptions of the linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic influence of English in the Arab Gulf region. Responses were collected primarily from participants in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with limited representation from Bahrain.

Overview of Responses

Table 1 summarizes participants' responses to the ten survey statements using three response categories: *Agree (A)*, *Neither agree nor disagree (N)* and *Disagree (D)*. The findings are presented in Table 1 followed by discussion of the findings.

	A	N	D
1. English has become an essential part of daily communication in my community.	46	4	5
2. Many English words or phrases have entered my native language.	38	10	7
3. The influence of English is reducing the use of languages native to this region.	20	20	15
4. Younger generations are more fluent in English than in their native language.	35	14	6
5. The use of English positively affects the way I express or share my culture with others.	34	15	6
6. The increasing use of English in education and media is beneficial for my community.	35	16	4
7. It is possible to balance the use of English with the preservation of local languages and cultural practises.	44	7	4
8. English plays a key role in the social and professional opportunities of individuals in the Arab Gulf.	52	2	1
9. English speaking countries influence local holidays in my community.	23	16	16
10. The influence of English will continue to shape cultural and linguistic identity in the Arab Gulf.	35	13	7

6.1. Linguistic influence of English

The data suggests that many participants view English as an important part of everyday communication in their local contexts. The majority of respondents agreed that English plays an important role in everyday interactions in their communities. Respondents reported noticeable lexical influence in their perceptions of Anglo-Arabic contacts. Most respondents acknowledged that English words and expressions have entered their native language, which participants associated with practices such as borrowing and code-mixing in informal and professional communication. Opinions regarding the decline in native language use were more

mixed. Although a significant number of participants disagreed that English is reducing the use of local languages, a significant proportion chose neutral responses, suggesting uncertainty or mixed views about long-term linguistic influence rather than explicit concern about language loss. Generational differences were also observed in the responses. Most respondents agreed that younger generations demonstrate higher levels of English proficiency than older generations, which may be associated with factors such as English-language education, digital experience and global mobility, although these were not directly examined in the study.

6.2. Cultural influence and identity

Participants generally rated the role of English in cultural expression positively. Most respondents agreed that English enables them to express and share their culture with others, especially in intercultural or international contexts. However, attitudes toward the influence of English-speaking cultures on local traditions were more varied. Many respondents disagreed that English-speaking countries have a significant influence on local holidays or cultural customs, while others remained neutral or agreed. This pattern suggests that participants perceive English as a factor influencing communication practices more strongly than deeply rooted cultural traditions.

Regarding future trends, most respondents agreed that English may continue to influence linguistic and cultural identity in their societies. However, the presence of neutral and opposing responses may reflect differing perspectives on relationship between global linguistic influence and the preservation of local culture.

6.3. Socioeconomic and educational impact of English

Perceptions of socioeconomic and educational relevance of English emerged as the prominent theme in the findings. The majority of respondents agreed that the growing use of English in education and media benefits their communities.

Similarly, most participants viewed English as an important factor in accessing social and professional opportunities in the Gulf countries. This aligns with participant's perception of English as linguistic capital in academic, professional and international settings.

Importantly, respondents expressed support in linguistic balance. Most agreed that it is possible to promote English while simultaneously preserving local languages and cultural customs, this view is consistent with an additive perspective on bilingualism rather than a replacement-oriented model.

6.4. Summary of key findings

Overall, the results reveal a predominantly positive perception of English across linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic domains. English is commonly viewed as important for

communication, education and professional advancement, while concerns about cultural and linguistic erosion remain nuanced rather than dominant.

The results suggest that participants integrate English into everyday life in their contexts as a complementary resource, coexisting with Arabic rather than replacing it. This may be understood as reflecting processes of linguistic adaptation, in which global and local identities continue to interact. Given the small and localized sample, these findings should be interpreted as exploratory and reflective of participant perceptions rather than as representative of Gulf societies more broadly.

7. Discussion

The discussion is organized around three research questions of the study. Overall, the results highlight the role of English as perceived by participants in linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic contexts. English was generally seen not as a competing force threatening Arabic, but as a complementary resource functioning alongside it in a multilingual environment. These findings are consistent with sociolinguistic perspectives that view English in the Gulf as a localized and adaptive variant rather than a homogenizing global influence.

Regarding the first research question, which examines whether the rise of English as a lingua franca seriously influences Arabic, participants reported that English has become part of everyday communication which may be associated with its presence in education, professional life and digital media. The reported lexical borrowing and incorporation of English expressions into Arabic are consistent with earlier studies of language contact and code-mixing in the region Al-Surmi [3]; Schneider [17]. Importantly, respondents' mixed views on the decline in language use suggest that the increased English use does not necessarily imply language shift or loss. Participants appeared to distinguish between functional multilingual practices and deeper linguistic identity. These findings suggest that, among the surveyed participants, the increasing use of English does not necessarily threaten Arabic but instead supports functional multilingualism.

Generational differences in English proficiency were also noted, with younger speakers reporting higher levels of proficiency. This may relate to exposure to English-medium instruction, technology and international mobility. However, these changes do not necessarily imply cultural displacement. Rather, they may be indicative of emerging bilingual or multilingual identities, consistent with the additive models of language acquisition commonly discussed in studies of global Englishes.

Addressing the second research question, which explored the effects of English on the cultural identities of Arabic-speaking people, participants' responses suggest that English is not universally perceived as a culturally invasive force. Most respondents view English as a tool for disseminating local culture to a wider audience, which aligns with Boulter's [5] argument that English can serve as a means of expressing local and religious identity if it has a cultural basis. At the same time, the limited perceived influence of English-speaking cultures on

traditional practices, such as holidays, suggests that core cultural traditions remain resilient despite linguistic change. This finding is consistent with Weber's [18] observation of the persistent tension between global interaction and cultural preservation in the Gulf states.

Regarding the third research question, which examined the social and cultural effects of the growing use of English alongside Arabic, respondents also recognize English as important for educational and professional opportunities which confirms its status as linguistic capital in the region. This perception aligns with earlier research linking English proficiency to social mobility, employment and participation in global projects Ponnuchamy [14]; Hameed and Aslam [9]. Respondents' belief in the possibility of a balance between English use and the preservation of local languages indicates a pragmatic and negotiated approach to multilingualism, rather than an embrace of linguistic substitution.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the three research questions can be answered by viewing English as a complementary rather than competing language among the surveyed participants. While English continues to shape communication practices and future aspirations, it does so within a sociocultural environment that values Arabic as a marker of identity and heritage. Overall, participants' responses suggest that the spread of English may reflect processes of localization and coexistence, rather than linguistic dominance.

Conclusion. This study examined perceptions of the influence of English on language use, cultural identity and socioeconomic opportunities in the Gulf region, with a particular focus on respondents from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The results indicate that English is widely viewed as an important and useful language, particularly in education, professional life and international communication. Although English is becoming increasingly prominent in everyday interactions and media, it is generally not perceived as a threat to Arabic or deeply rooted cultural traditions.

Rather than replacing Arabic, English appears to function as a complementary linguistic resource in a multilingual context. Respondents acknowledged differences in language proficiency between generations, reflecting changing educational and social environments; however, these changes do not indicate a weakening of cultural identity. Instead, they point to the development of a bilingual identity in which English facilitates global interaction, while Arabic continues to serve as the primary marker of cultural and national belonging. Overall, the study supports an additive model of multilingualism among surveyed participants, suggesting that English facilitates social mobility and global participation without the need for cultural or linguistic loss. These findings highlight the importance of language policies and educational practices that foster balanced bilingualism, ensuring the development of English proficiency alongside ongoing support for Arabic. Future research with broader regional representation and the use of mixed methods could further deepen our understanding of how English continues to shape linguistic and cultural identity in the Gulf countries.

Limitations of the study. This study has its limitations, as the study based on closed-ended questionnaire items measuring agreement with predefined statements, the findings reflect participants' reported perceptions rather than in-depth explanations of attitudes. Despite the efforts to distribute the survey across multiple institutions and social groups in several Arab Gulf countries, response rates from some countries remained limited. As a result, the sample is not evenly representative of all Arab Gulf countries, with a higher concentration of responses from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Furthermore, the study relies on self-reported responses, which may be influenced by the individual experiences and views of the participants and may not fully reflect actual language use practices. Therefore, the results obtained should be interpreted as preliminary and not generalizable to the entire Arab population of the Gulf countries.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire

Section 1. Demographic information

Age

Nationality

Section 2. Attitudes towards English

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

(1 = Agree, 2 = Neither agree or disagree, 3 = Disagree)

1. English has become an essential part of daily communication in my community.
2. Many English words or phrases have entered my native language.
3. The influence of English is reducing the use of languages native to this region.
4. Younger generations are more fluent in English than in their native language.
5. The use of English positively affects the way I express or share my culture with others.
6. The increasing use of English in education and media is beneficial for my community.

7. It is possible to balance the use of English with the preservation of local languages and cultural practises.

8. English plays a key role in the social and professional opportunities of individuals in the Arab Gulf.

9. English speaking countries influence local holidays in my community.

10. The influence of English will continue to shape cultural and linguistic identity in the Arab Gulf.