

Speaking Culture: Language, Identity, and Tourism in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030

Luluh Alfurayh

Correspondence: Luluh Alfurayh, Department of European Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, King Abdul-Aziz University, Saudi Arabia.

Received: January 13, 2025

Accepted: February 15, 2025

Online Published: February 17, 2025

doi:10.5430/elr.v14n1p21

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/elr.v14n1p21>

Abstract

Language is important in every social context, as through language people communicate, interact and express oneself. At the same time tourism plays an important part in shaping the perception of self through experiences of other people and places. This study explores the intersection of language, identity and tourism under the Saudi vision 2030. It explores the perspectives of international tourists, Saudi locals from major cities, and rural areas to understand the evolving linguistic landscape and its influence on the Saudi people, tourists and the tourism experience in general. The findings reveal that language plays a fundamental role in shaping and expressing one's cultural identity and hence influencing tourists' experiences. They also illustrate the importance of language as a source of authenticity and a means of cultural engagement. They reveal complex dynamics, with international tourists highlighting the challenges of language barrier and at the same time admiring the beauty and authenticity of Arabic language and the role this language played in their overall experience. On the other hand, local Saudis express a range of views on the role of Arabic and English in tourism and national identity, as some admitted that while speaking a very good English, they preferred to communicate with tourists in Arabic to enrich their experience and to show another part of their culture. Moreover, photographic evidence further explores the different linguistic patterns in rural areas and major cities and provides more insights into the effects of such bilingual practices on tourists and citizens. This study contributes to understanding the role of language use on the tourism industry and how it can enhance cultural exchanges. It also contributes to the understanding of the sociocultural implications of Saudi Arabia's vision 2030 and its ambitious developmental goals and provides insights for policymakers.

Keywords: language, identity, tourism, Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030

1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia has always been cherished for being the birthplace of Islam, home for the Holy mosques and a centre for pilgrims and traders. But recently, the kingdom opened its doors to the world for the first time to explore its rich history, unique culture and diverse heritage, as mentioned in Vision 2030. It is an attempt to diversify the Kingdom's economy, reduce its dependence on oil, and enhance the country's global competitiveness (Saudi Arabia vision 2030 A story of transformation, 2016). Developing the tourism industry hence plays a crucial part of vision 2030, as it has the potential to contribute to the nation's economic, cultural and social advancement. The initiative emphasizes diversification of the economy, enhancing the Kingdom's international profile while preserving its national identity and cultural heritage, thereby changing the way Saudi Arabia engages with the world (Saudi Arabia vision 2030 A story of transformation, 2016). In this evolving view, language becomes an essential medium through which identity and culture are communicated and negotiated—both for international tourists and local Saudi residents.

Language and identity are deeply intertwined. Language acts as a vehicle for interaction, cultural expression, symbolizes national unity, preserves heritage, makes political statements, and fosters a sense of pride and belonging (Palmer, 1998). It shapes national identity while being shaped by it. Understanding the connection between language and national identity is essential for appreciating the rich diversity of human cultures and promoting inclusive societies that value linguistic heritage as a vital component of national and global identity.

The linguistic landscape of Saudi Arabia also plays a pivotal role in shaping the tourism experience. As the country seeks to attract a broader global audience, the interplay between Arabic, the official language, and the increasing presence of English has become a topic of both cultural significance and practical importance.

This study utilizes a mixed-method approach and examines the perspectives of international tourists, Saudi locals

from major cities, and rural residents to understand the evolving linguistic landscape and its influence on the tourism experience within the context of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language, Identity and Tourism

The intricate relationship between language, identity, and tourism has been extensively studied across various cultural contexts (Heller et al., 2014; Thurnell-Read, 2017). Scholars have highlighted the pivotal role that language plays in both shaping and reflecting individual and collective identities, particularly within tourism environments.

A fundamental aspect of this relationship is how language is utilized to construct and represent cultural identity in tourism contexts. Thurnell-Read (2017) explored how the tourism industry employs linguistic and semiotic resources to create and market specific images of destinations. This often involves utilizing stereotypical or idealized representations of local culture and language, such as selective use of greetings, place names, or cultural references, to foster a sense of authenticity and exotic allure for visitors. This selective representation can create a dichotomy between "authentic" local experiences and the consumer-driven narratives promoted by the tourism industry.

Heller et al. (2014) further investigate the commodification of culture in tourism, arguing that as tourists seek "authentic" experiences, local languages and practices become valuable resources that can be packaged and sold. This may lead to the emergence of "tourist languages," which differ significantly from the everyday vernaculars of local communities. Such dynamics raise concerns about the preservation of linguistic diversity and the potential marginalization of indigenous languages as they are repackaged for tourist consumption.

2.2 Power Dynamics and Language Use

The relationship between language, identity, and tourism also delves into issues of power and agency. Research indicates that the linguistic choices made by both tourists and local communities reflect and reinforce social hierarchies and power dynamics. The dominance of certain languages, notably English, as the lingua franca of global tourism can marginalize local linguistic practices, thereby challenging the cultural identities of local populations (Holliday, 2010). This phenomenon highlights the need to consider how language use in tourism contexts influences social interactions and the power relations that underpin them.

Language is a cornerstone of identity, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others (Holliday, 2010). In Saudi Arabia, for instance, the predominance of Arabic has historically defined national identity (Al-Haq & Smadi, 1996). However, the rise of English as a vital second language, especially among the youth (Fadaak & Roberts, 2018), reflects the country's increasing emphasis on global competitiveness. This shift has implications for interaction patterns and identity negotiation within tourism settings, where the coexistence and competition of languages can create complex dynamics.

2.3 Language, Tourism and Authenticity

Tourism is frequently depicted as a pathway for individuals to seek authentic cultural experiences. Cohen (1988) emphasizes that this desire for authenticity is a significant motivator for many tourists, who aspire to immerse themselves in the genuine cultural practices and traditions of their destinations. Within this framework, language emerges as a critical element; effective linguistic communication is essential for meaningful cultural exchanges. Thurlow and Jaworski (2011) explore the role of language as a gateway to cultural understanding, positing that linguistic competence can enhance tourists' engagement with local communities. In the context of Saudi Arabia, where the cultural landscape has historically been relatively homogeneous, the country's opening up to a more diverse international audience necessitates a deeper understanding of the interplay between language, identity, and tourism.

As Saudi Arabia seeks to diversify its tourism offerings and attract global visitors, it faces the challenge of navigating the complex dynamics of language, authenticity, and cultural representation. Tourists from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds bring differing expectations and perceptions of what constitutes "authentic" Saudi experiences. Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive understanding of how language intersects with Saudi identity and how the presentation of linguistic practices can shape tourist experiences.

2.4 Vision 2030: A Framework for Cultural Tourism

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 presents a unique opportunity to examine the interplay between language, identity, and tourism within a rapidly evolving sociocultural landscape. This strategic framework aims to position Saudi Arabia as a leading global destination for cultural tourism, facilitating access to its rich heritage, historical sites, and diverse cultures (Moshashai et al., 2020).

Vision 2030 emphasizes the importance of promoting Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage and historical sites. The initiative includes plans to enhance the accessibility of sites such as Al-Ula, an archaeological treasure, and Diriyah, the birthplace of the Saudi state. These sites aim to attract international tourists and educate them about the rich history of Saudi Arabia (Alraithi, 2024). A critical aspect of Vision 2030 is the investment in tourism infrastructure. This includes building hotels, entertainment venues, and transportation networks to support increased tourism. Projects like NEOM, a futuristic city, and the Red Sea Project aim to create luxury resorts and adventure tourism opportunities, drawing visitors from around the globe (Moshashai et al., 2020).

The framework encourages the organization of cultural events and festivals that celebrate Saudi identity and heritage. Events such as the Janadriyah Cultural Festival showcase traditional Saudi arts, crafts, and cuisine, providing tourists with an immersive cultural experience (Moshashai et al., 2020).

To realize this vision, it is imperative to understand the linguistic practices that can bridge cultural gaps and foster deeper connections between local communities and international visitors. This involves promoting Arabic alongside other languages to accommodate the diverse backgrounds of tourists. The introduction of multilingual signage, guided tours in various languages, and language training for locals can enhance the tourism experience (Datang, 2022).

Vision 2030 also emphasizes sustainable tourism practices that respect the environment and local cultures. This includes initiatives to protect natural resources and promote eco-tourism, which is essential for maintaining the integrity of historical sites and natural landscapes (Mason, 2003).

To realize this vision, it is imperative to understand the linguistic practices that can bridge cultural gaps and foster deeper connections between local communities and international visitors. This involves not only promoting Arabic but also embracing the multilingual realities of a globalized world, where different languages coexist and interact within tourism settings.

In summary, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 provides a comprehensive framework for developing cultural tourism by leveraging its rich heritage and promoting linguistic diversity. By focusing on language accessibility and fostering connections between local communities and international visitors, Saudi Arabia can enhance its position as a leading global destination for cultural tourism. This strategic approach will not only enrich the tourism experience but also contribute to the preservation and celebration of Saudi cultural identity.

2.5 Linguistic Landscapes in Tourism

The concept of linguistic landscapes—defined as the visibility and salience of languages in public spaces (Landry & Bourhis, 1997)—offers valuable insights into power dynamics and social hierarchies in tourism contexts. Studies have shown that linguistic landscapes significantly shape the tourism experience, affecting how visitors engage with local communities (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). For example, the presence of multilingual signage can facilitate communication, enhance the visitor experience and foster intercultural dialogue.

Moreover, the influx of tourists and the development of tourism infrastructure can transform local linguistic landscapes. Increased visibility of foreign languages may alter the dynamics of language use in public spaces, impacting the vitality of local languages. Understanding these changes is crucial for addressing the potential erasure of linguistic diversity and ensuring that local identities are preserved in the face of globalization.

Overall, the relationship between language, identity, and tourism is a complex and multifaceted area of study. It encompasses various dimensions, including the commodification of culture, power dynamics, and the transformation of linguistic landscapes. Scholars underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of how language shapes and is shaped by the tourism industry, which can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of cultural exchange and power relations.

3. Theoretical Framework

Hall-Lew & Lew (2014) provides a comprehensive exploration of the intersection between language, identity, and tourism. Their work delves into the evolving dynamics of language use in the tourism industry, shedding light on how language shapes interactions between hosts and guests in various cultural contexts. The authors highlight the significance of language in defining tourist experiences and emphasize the role of linguistic mediation in facilitating cross-cultural communication.

The research on language and tourism, as discussed by Hall-Lew and Lew, underscores the intricate ways in which language operates as a tool for cultural representation and communication in tourism settings. The concept of "tourist talk" and "foreigner-directed speech" elucidates how locals adapt their language use to accommodate the linguistic

needs of tourists, reflecting the complex interplay between language, identity, and hospitality. This framework can be instrumental in analyzing how Saudi Arabia navigates linguistic diversity within its tourism sector, considering how language choices impact visitor experiences and perceptions of cultural authenticity.

Furthermore, the article emphasizes the role of language brokers, such as translators and tour guides, in mediating interactions between hosts and guests with varying linguistic backgrounds. In the Saudi Arabian context, where the promotion of cultural heritage and linguistic diversity is central to the tourism strategy, the presence of skilled language intermediaries can enhance the quality of visitor experiences and foster cross-cultural understanding. The demand for translation services and language learning opportunities, as highlighted in the theoretical framework, aligns with the goals of Vision 2030 to enrich Saudi Arabia's tourism offerings and attract a diverse range of international visitors.

By integrating the theoretical framework presented by Hall-Lew and Lew with the objectives of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, a nuanced understanding of the interplay between language, identity, and tourism emerges. This synthesis can inform strategic initiatives aimed at promoting linguistic diversity, preserving cultural heritage, and enhancing the overall visitor experience in Saudi Arabia, contributing to the realization of Vision 2030's vision for a vibrant and inclusive tourism sector.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both visual analysis and qualitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive exploration of the intersecting themes of language, identity, and tourism in Saudi Arabia. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the interactions between language use and cultural identity within the tourism sector. According to Creswell (2017), mixed methods can enhance the validity of research findings by triangulating data from different sources, thus offering a fuller picture of the phenomena under investigation.

4.2 Data Collection Methods

4.2.1 Qualitative Interviews

A total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with international tourists (10 participants) and Saudi locals (10 participants) from both urban (Jeddah) and rural areas (Al-Ula). Tourists were selected based on their travel origins and experiences during their stay in Saudi Arabia. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in responses while ensuring that key topics were covered (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each interview lasted approximately 10-15 minutes and was designed to explore participants' perceptions regarding language use in cultural interactions and tourism experiences.

4.2.1.1 Participant Selection for Interviews

The participants were selected Randomly, with the focus on individuals who can provide rich, relevant information about the research topic (Patton, 2002). They were approached on the spot and were asked if they were interested to participate in research study. By including both international tourists and local residents, the study aimed to capture different perspectives on the use of language within the tourism context. Also to gather deeper insights about their experiences related to language, identity, and authenticity. The tourists' questions in particular were designed to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding language barriers, cultural engagement, and overall satisfaction with their tourism experiences.

4.2.2 Visual Analysis

To complement the qualitative data, photographs of signs, advertisements, and promotional materials encountered in urban and rural settings were collected and analyzed. This visual component aims to understand how language is represented in public spaces and contributes to identity perception. Visual analysis can reveal how linguistic choices reflect cultural narratives and engage with tourists (Soulard et al., 2021).

4.3 Sampling Strategy

4.3.1 Participant Demographics

The study aimed for a balanced representation of participants:

- **International Tourists:** Participants were from different countries selected to ensure diversity in nationality, age, and gender.

- **Local Residents:** This group comprised individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds, some fluent in English and others primarily Arabic speakers, providing insights into the linguistic landscape of the region. Special attention was given to ensuring representation from both urban and rural residents, acknowledging that linguistic practices may differ significantly across these contexts (Fadaak & Roberts, 2018).

4.4 Data Analysis

4.4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded using thematic analysis, a method that allows researchers to identify and analyze patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Key themes related to language use, cultural identity, and tourism experiences were identified and categorized to highlight commonalities and differences in perspectives.

4.4.1.1 Process of Thematic Analysis

The researcher read transcripts multiple times. Then, initial codes were generated based on recurring ideas, such as "language barriers," "cultural pride," and "tourist expectations." Codes were grouped into broader themes, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of participants' experiences.

4.4.2 Visual Data Analysis

Photographs collected during the study were systematically coded and categorized to analyze language use in public signage and advertisements. The analysis focused on the prevalence of Arabic and English in different contexts, examining how these choices reflect attempts to engage with tourists and promote cultural understanding (Thurnell-Read, 2017).

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time. Ethical guidelines were followed to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of individual responses, protecting the identities of both tourists and locals (Badampudi et.al., 2022).

To minimize potential biases that could affect the validity and reliability of the findings, several strategies were employed throughout the data collection and analysis phases to ensure a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the interplay between language, identity, and tourism in Saudi Arabia. The researcher implemented a diverse recruitment strategy for participants. This included targeting international tourists from various countries, as well as local residents from different regions, including urban centres and rural areas. By ensuring representation from a broad demographic spectrum, the study aimed to mitigate biases that might arise from a homogenous group of respondents. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Creswell (2014), who advocates for diverse sampling to enrich qualitative research outcomes. Moreover, the use of a mixed-methods approach allowed the researcher to triangulate data from various sources, including interviews, and visual analyses. This methodological diversity helped to validate findings by confirming trends and themes across different data types. This aligns with the principles outlined by Patton (2015), emphasizing the importance of multiple perspectives in research.

The researcher also employed member checking, where participants were invited to review and provide feedback on the preliminary findings and interpretations. This process allowed participants to clarify or challenge the researchers' interpretations, ensuring that the results accurately reflected their experiences and viewpoints. Engaging participants in this manner aligns with the practices advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for enhancing trustworthiness in qualitative research.

By implementing these strategies, the researcher aimed to minimize potential biases throughout the data collection and analysis processes. The commitment to diverse participant representation, mixed-methods triangulation, and ethical considerations contributed to the study's overall reliability and validity, enriching the insights gained regarding the intersection of language, identity, and tourism in Saudi Arabia

4.6 Limitations

While the chosen methods offer valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations. First, the qualitative nature of the study may limit the generalizability of findings to all tourism contexts in Saudi Arabia. The specific focus on urban areas and certain tourist attractions may not reflect experiences in more rural or less frequented locations (Mason, 2003).

Moreover, the reliance on self-reported data in the interviews may introduce biases, as participants may be inclined to provide socially desirable responses (Durmaz et al., 2020). To mitigate this risk, the researchers aimed to create a comfortable and open environment during interviews, encouraging honest and reflective responses.

In conclusion, this methodology outlines a comprehensive approach to exploring the intersection of language, identity, and tourism in Saudi Arabia. By employing qualitative interviews and visual analysis, the study aims to capture the rich, multifaceted experiences of participants. The insights gained from this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how language practices shape cultural identity and influence the tourism experience, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

5. Findings

The findings of this study illuminate the complex interplay between language, identity, and tourism within the context of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative. This multifaceted exploration draws from both international tourist perspectives and local Saudi insights, revealing diverse experiences and attitudes toward language in the tourism landscape.

5.1 International Tourist Perspectives

5.1.1 Navigating Language Differences

Communicating with the locals in rural areas posed a challenge for tourists: "I loved my time in old Jeddah but really struggled to understand people, a guy gave me a stick and told me it's a gift, but I really struggled to understand what it is for! I thanked him and carried it around with me and asked the receptionist in my hotel who explained to me that it was like a toothbrush!" it seems here that the struggle here was in the street market of Old historical Jeddah, as his communication problems were solved as soon as he got to his hotel. Another shared: "I love to eat in local restaurants, not the fancy ones but the ones in the allies as you can taste the real flavour of the country, but I couldn't understand the signs or menus and communicating with the owners is no use!" lack of communication can be frustrating and prevent full experience of the culture of the desired country. Another one sought help from Saudi English speakers: "it was tough to communicate and sign language, and I've used to it here, but sometimes random Saudi guys would volunteer and translate for me, but they are like gems you can't find them everywhere." All these tourists experienced some difficulties and challenges in communicating with locals, small businesses and restaurant owners. So language barriers hindered their experience. However, it seems that some tourist figured out a solution for this problem: "I came here because I was interested in understanding the history of the country, so I contacted some travel agency and got myself an interpreter before arriving and my experience so far is great"

5.1.2 Cultural Authenticity through Language

Despite these challenges, many international tourists expressed admiration for the preservation of the Arabic language and cultural identity. A Japanese tourist noted, "I admired the commitment to maintaining the Arabic language and traditional customs, even as the country embraces modernization. It added to the unique and authentic experience." The desire for authentic experiences was a recurring theme among tourists, often linked to their interactions in Arabic. A German tourist expressed, "Hearing Arabic in discussions made me feel like I was truly experiencing the culture." He further noted the distinctiveness of local accents, saying, "The accent of the locals in AlUla was so rich; it's completely different from the people of Jeddah." So though communication with locals was difficult, yet the Arabic language and its speakers were considered an important aspect of the whole experience.

Additionally, interviews revealed that learning basic Arabic phrases significantly enhanced tourist experiences, fostering deeper connections with locals. A British traveller stated, "When I learned to say 'shukran' (thank you), the locals seemed so much friendlier. It made me feel welcomed." Speaking in Arabic even if inly using few words made a huge impact on the locals as Arabic is highly appreciated and considered part of their heritage, religion, nationality and identity.

5.2 Saudi Local Perspectives

5.2.1 Pride in Linguistic Heritage

Interviews with Saudi locals provided a multifaceted view of the role of language in tourism and national identity. Participants from major cities acknowledged the importance of promoting Arabic while recognizing the practical necessity of English in the tourism sector. A resident from Jeddah stated, "Arabic is the heart of our culture, and it should be celebrated. But we also need to cater to international visitors by ensuring a greater presence of English, especially in popular tourist destinations."

Conversely, rural residents expressed a stronger desire to prioritize Arabic and maintain their traditional linguistic

landscape. A participant from a small village in AlUla shared, “Our language is a sacred part of our identity. I worry that the increasing use of English in tourism will erode our cultural heritage. We must find a way to balance progress and tradition.”

Local residents exhibited a strong pride in their Arabic linguistic heritage. A Jeddah resident emphasized, “Arabic represents who we are. While we value the importance of English, our culture is deeply rooted in our language.” Many locals expressed a willingness to help tourists learn basic Arabic and their extreme excitement when they show interest and speak the language even if it was just greetings. As a university student from Jeddah noted, “We learn English to communicate with tourists, but we also encourage them to learn some Arabic. It’s a two-way thing.” Another one emphasised what Arabic means to him “I want everyone to know the word Shukran the same way they know Thank you. I want it to be an international word.”

5.3 Visual Analysis Outcomes

A visual analysis of public signage, advertisements and menus further illustrated the trends in language representation as shown under the below figures:

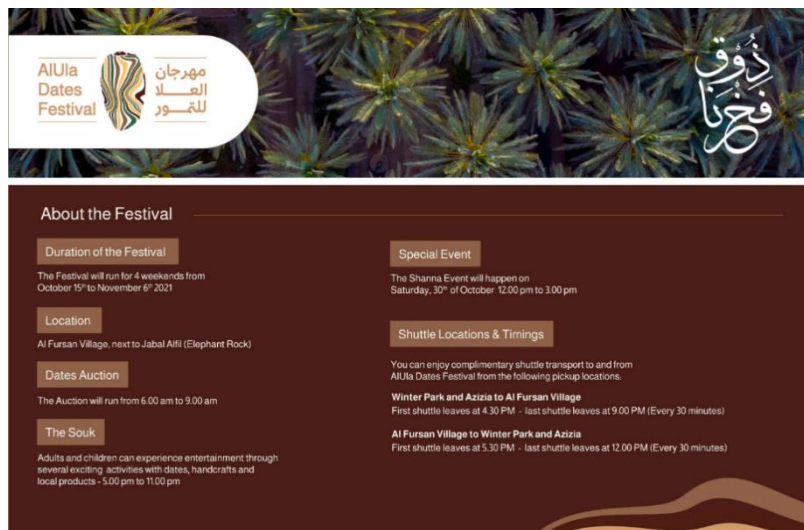


Figure 1. A photo of an ad of a festival in AlUla area- a major tourist destination



Figure 2. Two signs at the entrance of the old town in AlUla area- a major tourist destination



Figure 3. 3 local restaurants in the historical villages near AlUla town- nams are only displayed in Arabic

Figures 1 and 2 show the signs in Alula are written in both English and Arabic, while the signs in a close-by restaurants (figure 3) are lacking basic translation; these restaurants not only lack translated signs and menus, but their employees also lack basic language skills.

In figure 4, we can see the efforts put into translating the menu as the restaurant is located in a tourist hotspot in an urban area, while the other, which was located in the historical town in Jeddah was poorly translated.



Figure 4. Two menus of restaurants in Jeddah; left is located in a tourist destination area in Jeddah Promenade and right from a local restaurant in Albalad

These photos show that in urban and rural areas, bilingual signage was prevalent, particularly in commercial, cultural districts and major tourists' hotspots, as they include famous international restaurants and cafes, and special consideration was given to translation of signs in these areas. For example, an ad promoting a local festival displayed both Arabic and English prominently, indicating an intention to attract diverse audiences (figure1). Also, as we can see in figure 2 main signs in the entrance of the old town in AlUla was translated into English. In contrast, historical destinations in both urban and rural areas largely featured Arabic signage, with minimum or no English translations.

Though these destinations are primarily the focus of international tourists as they seek authentic experiences and assimilation into the local culture, no attention was given to them which highlights a gap in accessibility.

6. Discussion

6.1 Bridging the Language Gap

The findings indicate that many international tourists found the linguistic diversity in Saudi Arabia both fascinating and challenging. While they appreciated the cultural richness associated with the Arabic language, the lack of English proficiency among some locals created barriers to meaningful interaction thus lack of full engagement in their experience. The tourists' comments highlight the frustrations experienced when faced with language barriers, particularly in rural areas. For example, while AIUla is considered a tourist destination, most of the people working there are locals with limited language abilities which leads to lack of communication. The same can be said to the rural areas in Jeddah- such as Albalad (Historical Jeddah) while the area has some international restaurants and cafes, most of the shops are run by locals who lack language abilities.

Drawing from Hall-Lew and Lew's framework (2014), the development of training programs focused on "tourist talk" for hospitality staff emerges as a key strategy to improve visitor experiences and bridge cultural and linguistic gaps within the Saudi tourism industry. By empowering local workers with language skills tailored to the needs of international tourists, Saudi Arabia can enhance the quality of interactions, making visitors feel more welcomed and engaged during their stay. This aligns with the sentiment expressed by a Saudi local who noted, "We learn English to communicate with tourists, but we also encourage them to learn some Arabic." Such mutual learning creates a more inclusive environment and fosters respect for both languages.

6.2 The Role of Language in Shaping Identity and as a Reflection of Cultural Heritage

The findings of this study illuminate the pivotal role language plays in expressing and shaping cultural identity within Saudi Arabia's tourism landscape. Both international tourists and local residents emphasized that language usage transcends mere communication; it serves as a profound means of expressing identity and cultural pride in their linguistic heritage. For instance, a resident from Jeddah articulated, "Arabic represents who we are.". This aligns with the work of Thurnell-Read (2017) who noted that language is instrumental in constructing and representing cultural identities, particularly in tourism contexts. Moreover, the reverence for the Arabic language among locals reflects a broader cultural narrative that values tradition and continuity in the face of modernization, a theme echoed in the literature on cultural tourism (Cohen, 1988).

Most tourists reported learning words like *shukran* (thank you) and *Alsalem aliykum* (greetings in Arabic) to be able to communicate and engage with the locals. By engaging with Arabic, tourists not only navigate the sociocultural environment but also demonstrate respect for local customs, thereby enriching their travel experiences. The hospitality of Saudis was also a factor here, being hospitable is part of the Arabic culture and it is also reflected in the words of greetings they use, and those the tourists learned like *Ahlan wa Sahlan* (welcome) and *Marhab* (hello).

The appreciation shown by international tourists for the Arabic language also highlights its role in enhancing cultural authenticity. Tourists who made an effort to learn basic Arabic phrases reported feeling more connected to the local culture. This mirrors findings by Hurombo (2016), who argued that meaningful interactions often hinge on linguistic exchanges. The ability to communicate—even at a basic level—facilitates deeper connections and understanding, enriching the overall travel experience.

6.3 Enhancing the Tourist Experience Under Vision 2030

As Saudi Arabia aims to establish itself as a leading global tourism destination under Vision 2030, effective communication strategies are essential. The study reveals that language barriers significantly impact tourists' experiences, not only in rural areas where English proficiency is lower, but also in major cities like Jeddah and its tourists' hotspots like Historical Jeddah. Tourists expressed a desire for more multilingual support, indicating that such resources could enhance their engagement with local cultures.

To address these challenges, Saudi Arabia could implement comprehensive pre-travel information campaigns that include basic Arabic language resources, targeted workshops, and language exchange programs. These initiatives could significantly enhance cultural understanding and engagement, creating a more welcoming environment for international visitors. This aligns with the recommendations of Cohen (1988), who emphasized the significance of authentic cultural engagement in tourism. By equipping tourists with basic Arabic phrases, Saudi Arabia can foster deeper connections between visitors and locals, ultimately enhancing the overall tourist experience. Especially since most tourists are genuinely interested in the heritage and culture of Saudi so learning basic language would be of interest to them.

Under vision 2030, Saudi Arabia is working towards tourism development and at the same time promoting its cultural heritage. This suggests a Collaboration between local communities and tourism boards which can create frameworks that celebrate both Arabic and English, enhancing mutual understanding in cross-cultural interactions. This was clear in some of the tourists' responses who appreciated the diversity of the dialects of Saudis among different regions. By promoting local dialects and cultural practices within tourism narratives, the tourism sector can facilitate a cross-cultural engagement between locals and tourists. Hall-Lew and Lew (2014) underscore the value of highlighting local dialects and their historical significance in attracting tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences. By incorporating elements of local languages and dialects into marketing campaigns and tourism narratives, Saudi Arabia can cater to the growing global trend where tourists prioritize genuine cultural interactions over superficial experiences.

Hall-Lew and Lew (2014) emphasize on authenticity aligns with the objectives of Vision 2030 to position Saudi Arabia as a premier global tourism destination. By showcasing the richness of local languages and dialects, the country can differentiate itself in the competitive tourism market, appealing to travellers who seek immersive and genuine cultural encounters. This approach not only enhances the overall visitor experience but also contributes to preserving and celebrating Saudi Arabia's unique cultural heritage.

6.4 The Importance of Multilingual Signage

The stark differences in language representation between urban and rural areas underscore the need for initiatives focused on improving multilingual signage and access to information. As highlighted in the visual analysis of the linguistic landscape, urban centres tend to have more bilingual signage, while rural areas predominantly feature Arabic. This disparity can hinder tourists' experiences and limit their engagement with local culture.

By adopting inclusive communication practices, such as implementing bilingual signage and providing translation services in tourist hotspots, Saudi Arabia can better cater to the diverse linguistic needs of its international visitors. This approach reflects Heller et al.'s (2014) concept of commodifying culture, where linguistic diversity can enhance the authenticity of the tourist experience. Enhanced signage can serve not only as a navigational aid but also as a form of cultural expression that invites tourists to engage more fully with their surroundings.

7. Implications for Policy and Practice

Given the critical role of language in fostering authentic experiences, tourism development policies in Saudi Arabia should prioritize linguistic inclusivity as a fundamental element of cultural heritage promotion. The significant differences in language representation between urban and rural areas highlight the need for improved multilingual signage and informational resources. Policymakers should establish guidelines requiring bilingual or multilingual signage in key tourist areas, ensuring that both Arabic and English are prominently featured. This initiative could extend to maps, brochures, and digital platforms, making essential information accessible to a broader audience. Such measures align with global best practices in tourism, where multilingual communication enhances visitor experience and engagement.

Moreover, policies should support cultural exchange programs that encourage interaction between tourists and locals. These initiatives could involve community-led events, language exchange meetups, or cultural workshops that emphasize the significance of Arabic language and culture. By creating spaces for authentic cultural encounters, Saudi Arabia can enhance tourists' appreciation for local traditions while empowering communities to share their heritage. This approach resonates with Cohen's (1988) emphasis on authentic cultural engagement in tourism.

Also, establishing robust feedback mechanisms for tourists and locals can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of language policies and the overall tourism experience. Surveys, focus groups, and online platforms can facilitate ongoing dialogue between visitors and policymakers, allowing for continuous improvement in services and communication strategies. By actively seeking feedback, Saudi Arabia can adapt its tourism offerings to better meet the needs of diverse linguistic backgrounds and enhance visitor satisfaction.

In addition, collaboration with educational institutions can play a pivotal role in developing language and cultural training programs. Policymakers could partner with universities and language schools to create curricula that address the specific needs of the tourism sector. This collaboration can also promote research on the impact of language on tourism experiences, contributing to evidence-based policy decisions.

Policies can also seek to promote a strong national identity while embracing the linguistic diversity that comes with tourism. Celebrating Arabic language and culture through festivals, exhibitions, and public campaigns can instil pride in local communities and encourage tourists to engage more deeply with the cultural fabric of the country. This approach aligns with the goals of Vision 2030, which emphasize cultural heritage as a cornerstone of national development.

By integrating these insights into policy decisions related to tourism development, Saudi Arabia can create a more inclusive and culturally rich tourism environment. The emphasis on language and communication not only enhances the visitor experience but also reinforces the country's commitment to preserving its unique cultural identity while engaging with a global audience. Such policies will be instrumental in realizing the goals of Vision 2030, positioning Saudi Arabia as a leading destination that authentically represents its heritage while welcoming the world.

8. Opportunities for Future Research

Building on the current study's findings, several opportunities for future research can be identified to address remaining gaps in knowledge regarding the interplay of language, identity, and tourism in Saudi Arabia. Conducting comparative studies across different regions of Saudi Arabia could illuminate regional nuances in language use and tourism experiences. For example, research could focus on how urban centres like Riyadh and Jeddah differ from rural areas in terms of linguistic representation, tourist interactions, and cultural identity. Such studies could highlight the diverse linguistic landscapes within the country and inform targeted tourism strategies that respect and incorporate regional differences.

Moreover, future research could explore the role of digital tools and social media in shaping language use among tourists and locals. Investigating how translation apps, social media platforms, and online resources impact interactions could provide valuable insights into modern communication dynamics. This research could also assess how these tools can be leveraged to enhance tourist experience and facilitate cultural exchange.

Further investigation into the local dialects and linguistic variations within Saudi Arabia could also enrich understanding of how language influences the tourism experience. Research could focus on specific dialects, their cultural significance, and how they are perceived by both locals and tourists. This exploration could also examine how dialectical differences affect communication and cultural authenticity, providing a nuanced perspective on the role of language in tourism.

Most importantly, investigating the perspectives of tourism service providers, such as tour guides, hotel staff, and local business owners, could provide additional insights into the challenges and opportunities related to language use in tourism. Understanding their experiences, training needs, and strategies for engaging with international tourists can inform policy and practice, ensuring that the tourism sector is equipped to facilitate meaningful cultural exchanges.

By pursuing these avenues for future research, scholars can build on the current study's findings to address remaining gaps in knowledge regarding language, identity, and tourism in Saudi Arabia. Such inquiries will not only contribute to the academic literature but also provide practical insights that support the country's aspirations for economic diversification and cultural heritage promotion under Vision 2030.

9. Conclusion

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative presents a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of language, identity, and tourism within a rapidly evolving sociocultural landscape. This mixed-methods study has provided valuable insights into the perspectives of international tourists, Saudi locals from major cities, and rural residents, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities arising from this interplay.

The findings of this study illuminate the intricate interplay between language, identity, and tourism within the framework of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative. By integrating perspectives from both international tourists and local residents, this research reveals the multifaceted nature of language as a vital element of cultural heritage and identity.

International tourists often faced challenges navigating language differences, particularly in rural areas where communication barriers hindered their ability to fully engage with local culture. Despite these obstacles, many expressed a deep appreciation for the Arabic language, recognizing its significance in fostering authentic experiences. Tourists who made an effort to learn basic Arabic phrases reported enhanced interactions with locals, reinforcing the notion that language is not merely a tool for communication but a bridge to cultural understanding.

Conversely, local residents displayed a strong pride in their linguistic heritage, emphasizing the importance of promoting Arabic while also acknowledging the need for English in the tourism sector. This dual perspective highlights the delicate balance between preserving cultural identity and accommodating the needs of international visitors. The desire for mutual learning emerged as a recurring theme, suggesting that both tourists and locals can benefit from language exchange initiatives.

The visual analysis of the linguistic landscape further underscores the disparities in language representation across

urban and rural settings. While major tourist destinations often feature bilingual signage, rural areas frequently lack adequate translations, creating accessibility challenges for international visitors. Addressing these gaps through comprehensive multilingual signage and targeted communication strategies is essential for enhancing the overall tourist experience.

In conclusion, the findings underscore the need for Saudi Arabia to prioritize effective communication strategies in its tourism development efforts. By fostering an environment that celebrates both Arabic and English, the country can enhance cultural exchanges and attract a diverse array of international visitors. As Saudi Arabia continues to position itself as a premier global tourism destination, the integration of language into its tourism narrative will be crucial for achieving the objectives of Vision 2030. Ultimately, embracing linguistic diversity will not only enrich the travel experience for tourists but also contribute to the preservation and celebration of Saudi Arabia's unique cultural heritage.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the completion of this project.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The author declares that she has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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