The Consequences of the Zig-Zagging Education Policies on Mass Communication Students at Qatar University and the Transition to a Knowledge-Based Economy

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Abstract

Language education policy in Qatar in recent years has imposed changes on Qatari higher education institutions, which moved to English as a medium of instruction in 2003 and then back to Arabic in 2012. This latter movement, as we will expand upon below, was motivated by a desire to preserve the national language, namely Arabic, as well as national identity and culture (Mustafawi et al., 2019; Wyatt et al., 2023). It can also be seen as a rejection of colonialism and foreign interference (Almuhaish, 2016; Amin et al., 2023). This article reveals the effects of returning to Arabic as a medium of instruction on Mass Communication students enrolled in sociolinguistics course at Qatar University. This discipline was chosen mainly because of the intrinsic connection between it and language education policies and given that Mass Communication is a field that is yet to be extensively studied. It also explores whether Arabic and cultural preservation policies are compatible with an education system that calls for a greater need for English and openness and an economic system that aims to become knowledge-based.

Key Words: Language policy, multilingual education, higher education, mass communication, globalization.

1. Introduction

Like numerous other Gulf countries, Qatar has undergone significant socioeconomic and political transformations in recent times, which have markedly influenced its educational policy. The country's educational system initially centred on teaching in Arabic. Karmani (2005), however, notes that the modernization process that followed the discovery of oil and gas reserves resulted in a shift in emphasis toward English as the predominant language of instruction, in particular in higher education. Alkhatib (2017), referring specifically to Qatar, states that the country's language education strategy changed significantly when English replaced Arabic as the primary teaching language in 2003.

Despite its widespread acceptance, this shift has faced criticism from certain scholars and policymakers who harbour apprehensions that its implementation may give rise to detrimental repercussions concerning Qatar's language, culture, and identity (Ahmadi, 2017). Consequently, in 2012, Qatar reinstated Arabic as a medium of instruction at Qatar University. This decision was chiefly motivated by the desire to safeguard the country's language, heritage, identity, and culture while implicitly denouncing colonialism and external influence (Amin et al., 2023). This policy change posed considerable challenges for higher education establishments, particularly those that had formerly embraced English as the primary means of instruction. One such institution, Qatar University, and particularly its Mass Communication department, was obliged to modify its pedagogical approach and learning protocols to accommodate the language transition.

The objective of this article is to critically analyze the repercussions of this paradigm shift on mass communication students who are enrolled in sociolinguistics course at Qatar University and, by extension, on the fulfilment of Qatar's endeavour to preserve its unique

cultural and linguistic identity amidst the evolving dynamics of national policies. This article presents a pilot investigation into the consequences of Qatar's language education strategy on mass communication students at Qatar University. Our intention is to examine the impacts of shifting from English to Arabic and its significance for Qatar's efforts to safeguard its culture, language, and identity, while also navigating its role in the global knowledge economy.

To meet these objectives, the paper is structured as follows. First, we briefly review Qatar's language education policy, its historical context, and the events that directed the early 2000s decision to use English as the primary teaching language. We then describe the 2012 policy change mandating Arabic as the primary language of instruction in all public schools and institutions. Following this, we investigate mass communication students at Qatar University and their reactions to the switch from English to Arabic as the primary language of instruction. Our analysis focuses on the effects of this change on the students' prospects and difficulties, the quality of education provided, and the prospects for employment after graduation. Finally, we address the balance between preserving Arabic and Qatar's cultural history and equipping students with essential knowledge and skills required for success in the modern, global knowledge-based economy.

This pilot study lays the groundwork for more detailed and nuanced investigations. Future research will encompass a broader range of undergraduate and postgraduate students from the entire mass communication department, ensuring diverse representation of both female and male students. This approach aims to accurately reflect the national impact of language policies.

2. Language Policies in Higher Education in Qatar

In navigating the linguistic dilemma within Qatar's educational framework, using interpretive and critical paradigms is crucial for attaining a thorough understanding of the consequences

stemming from language regulations. The prioritization of English as the principal medium of instruction, propelled by aspirations for economic expansion and international competitiveness, mirrors a prevailing discourse that underscores the economic benefits and global prospects associated with English proficiency. Nonetheless, implementing such policies without consideration of their societal and cultural impacts perpetuates a hegemonic discourse that marginalizes alternative linguistic heritages and diminishes societal diversity.

The interpretive paradigm facilitates an exploration of how language policies influence individuals' experiences and identities within educational settings. Researchers such as Masri (2019) and Siemund et al. (2021) emphasize the obstacles encountered by Arab students studying in English, including feelings of cultural alienation and the potential decline of native languages - both Standard and Colloquial Arabic. This perspective underscores the significance of considering students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds in educational planning and implementation.

Moreover, the critical paradigm promotes an analysis of power dynamics inherent in language policies and their implications for social justice and fairness. Academics like Kirkpatrick (2011) and Widagdo (2018) scrutinize the dominance of English as prioritizing Western-centric perspectives and disadvantaging local communities. This perspective highlights the necessity of challenging prevailing discourses prioritizing English at the expense of linguistic diversity and cultural heritage.

The transition back to using Arabic as the primary language of instruction at Qatar University signifies a notable alteration in language policy, motivated by the aspiration to reclaim cultural identity and self-governance. This change demonstrates a crucial examination of the ramifications of language choices on national identity and cultural conservation.

Nevertheless, it also prompts questions concerning the potential economic consequences of prioritizing Arabic over English in a globally interconnected knowledge-based economy.

Examining the consequences of reverting to Arabic as the instructional language through interpretative and critical lenses unveils complex dynamics at play. There are clear benefits to using Arabic, such as improved comprehension and increased cultural affinity, as emphasized by scholars like Al-Tamimi et al. (2012) and Sabbour et al. (2010). These findings underscore the significance of recognizing indigenous languages - Standard and Colloquial Arabic - in educational environments and resisting linguistic standardization.

On the other hand, concerns exist regarding the potential barriers to accessing global knowledge and economic prospects linked to favoring Arabic over English. Scholars such as Lee (2012) and Brock-Utne (2016) warn of the adverse effects of language policies that restrict English proficiency in a globalized economy. This viewpoint underscores the necessity of harmonizing the promotion of Arabic with the enhancement of English language skills to guarantee the competitiveness of students in the global markets. Kim (2021) argues that using English as the language of instruction allows students to learn both the subject matter and English. This raises the question of whether Arabic as a medium of instruction can effectively preserve students' identity, culture, and language while enhancing their linguistic skills.

The broader concern is whether Qatar can maintain a balance and remain faithful to its culture, tradition, and language while being open to the world and embracing internationalism while its language policymakers revert to Arabic as a medium of instruction at the department of Mass Communication. The potential impact on Qatar's goal of transforming its economy into a knowledge-based one by reverting to Arabic as a medium of instruction is a critical aspect that requires scrutiny.

In essence, a thorough comprehension of Qatar's language dilemma requires a multifaceted strategy that integrates both interpretative and critical perspectives. Through scrutinizing the underlying presumptions and power dynamics influencing language policies, policymakers can establish more comprehensive and fair educational frameworks that prioritize linguistic variety while equipping students for success in a globalized environment.

3. Assessing the Impact of Arabic Language Instruction in Higher Education

The questions presented are designed to elicit information from Mass Communication students enrolled in sociolinguistics course at Qatar University regarding their experiences with Arabic as the language of instruction. Through a comprehensive analysis of the data obtained from the responses, the primary objective of this study is to ascertain the ramifications of the language policy on the students' academic proficiency, cultural authenticity, and future opportunities.

The insights gained from the students' responses can provide valuable information into the efficacy of employing Arabic as the language of instruction within the Mass Communication curriculum at Qatar University. These data are useful in assessing the influence of language policies on students' academic achievement, as well as in formulating methodologies to enhance language education in Qatar. Additionally, this study can contribute to the broader discussions surrounding language planning and policy implementation within educational contexts.

This study can offer valuable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of endorsing indigenous languages while concurrently pursuing international competitiveness. The findings from this study may serve as a valuable resource to policymaking initiatives, aiding in the development of linguistic programs that effectively balance the imperative of preserving linguistic diversity and promoting economic and social advancement.

4. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study involved administering a structured questionnaire using Lime Survey. This survey was distributed among 27 female undergraduate students pursuing a degree in Mass Communication at Qatar University and currently enrolled in the English sociolinguistics course. These participants, aged 19 to 21 years old, belong to the middle-class socioeconomic stratum. The selection of these students was deliberate, as they represent individuals studying Mass Communication in Arabic, a field that necessitates proficiency in English. Specifically, they have chosen the English sociolinguistics course to augment their English language skills, recognizing its significance for their field of study and prospective careers. The questionnaire was distributed on October 6th, 2023.

The survey's results are anticipated to offer insightful information on how the language policy affects students' educational experiences and prospects in the future. This analysis will cover several important topics, including scholastic achievement, cultural authenticity, and balancing language preservation and economic progress. First, exploring language proficiency and course selection could reveal connections between language skills and academic and career trajectories, highlighting the significance of English proficiency in their respective academic domains and future careers. Second, examining the intersection of economic variables with language proficiency and educational perspectives may offer insights into the participants' language learning experiences and opportunities. Finally, analyzing response patterns to different question formats might unveil recurring trends or contrasting viewpoints, enhancing data analysis and indicating areas for further investigation.

The selection of questionnaire items was conducted meticulously in alignment with the research objectives and the specific focus of the study. Some questions were structured to be more straightforward, extracting precise details pertinent to the research aims. In contrast,

others were intentionally crafted to be open-ended or ambiguous, enabling participants to offer nuanced responses and express their viewpoints freely. This approach aimed at attaining a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives, attitudes, and experiences regarding the study's focus. Additionally, the variety of question types enhanced the questionnaire's credibility and reliability by encompassing a broad spectrum of relevant themes within the study investigation.

Interestingly, none of the students answered the open-ended part of Question Two in the questionnaire. However, during subsequent meetings and discussions, they addressed this section. Notably, all the students preferred to respond in English, expressing that it was easier for them to comment and express themselves in this language. This preference was attributed to their upbringing in English-language instruction schools. They found it challenging to use Arabic exclusively during the discussions, as they struggled to find the correct words.

Participants were asked which language they preferred to use for answering the questionnaire, to enable them to express themselves confidently. This survey served as a pilot study to procure data about the consequences of Arabic-medium instruction on Mass Communication students at Qatar University, their performance, native language, culture, and identity, as well as its impact on Qatar's policy of transforming its economy into a knowledge-based one. The study also sought to understand Qatar University's Mass Communication students' perspectives on the policy imposing Arabic as a medium of instruction and to investigate its effects on their ability to find excellent job opportunities, access materials and resources, pursue post-graduate study abroad, interview people who only speak English, and so on.

One goal of this study was to identify the many realities and meanings that participants have formed based on their individual experiences in a particular context. These data possessed

the potential to guarantee an inclusive and balanced cohort of respondents. The questions were based on pre-established meetings to guarantee that they reflected contributions from relevant stakeholders, such as academic professionals. This methodology bolsters the reliability and trustworthiness of the survey tool by integrating a variety of viewpoints and confirming that the questions address relevant issues. Furthermore, it promotes transparency in the research procedure, aiding in comprehending the rationale behind the questionnaire's creation and fostering trust in the research outcomes.

The results were documented with the express permission of the participants and subsequently analyzed to identify recurring motifs and trends. As noted earlier, the investigation used both interpretive and critical paradigms to examine the data. The interpretative paradigm was employed to comprehend and construe the subjective perceptions and experiences of the study participants. In contrast, the critical paradigm scrutinized how power structures and social systems impact the use and reception of Arabic as a medium of instruction. The investigation also included supplementary data acquisition techniques, such as document analysis and classroom observations, to provide a more all-encompassing view of the impact of Arabic-medium instruction on students in the field of Mass Communication at Qatar University.

The primary objective of the methodology was to collect comprehensive and detailed data about the experiences and perceptions of Mass Communication students at Qatar University. This information was intended to provide insights into the potential ramifications of Arabic-medium instruction on their academic and professional achievements. Furthermore, the data were also analyzed to determine how much this facet of education aligns with Qatar's broader policy goals to establish a knowledge-based economy.

Participants in this study find themselves now in a vulnerable position in the educational system since they have no voice concerning language policy in education. After years of studying in English, these students must adapt to learning in Arabic. Fus-ha is used for teaching and academic tools while Ammiyya is employed for daily conversation. Students are expected to understand, use and write in Fus-ha. These requirements may hinder students who are not fluent in Fus-ha, causing issues in the shift from English to strict Arabic education. Allowing students to express their opinions and attitudes, as well as reflect on their experiences with Arabic medium instruction, may raise awareness of the critical issue of learning Arabic. This research also aims to empower students so that their voices can be heard in future educational reforms.

A web-based questionnaire was designed and delivered online to Mass Communication students with various linguistic backgrounds at Qatar University using Lime Survey. The Lime Survey questionnaire comprised fifteen multiple-choice questions and one open-ended question (see Appendix). It was necessary to request authorization from Qatar University to perform the research before beginning. The Faculty of Arts and Sciences permitted the study to be carried out in the Department of Mass Communication. The participants responded anonymously to protect their personal information and safeguard their privacy.

In response to the questionnaire, several students expressed distinct preferences regarding language of instruction. One student highlighted a preference for courses taught in English rather than Arabic, prompting her to enrol in sociolinguistic and translation courses to enhance proficiency in both languages. Another student cited aspirations for postgraduate studies abroad and the limited availability of global curricula in Arabic as reasons for favouring English-medium instruction. She mentioned considering Northwestern University in Qatar, where Mass Communication programs are conducted in English, pending financial feasibility. Additionally, another student emphasized the significance of Arabic for cultural preservation

while acknowledging English's critical role in local and international communication, particularly within Mass Communication. Moving forward, the collective preferences of these students provide a foundational understanding for the subsequent section "Findings and Discussion". Within this section, an analysis and investigation will be conducted to explore their implications and broader significance in the context of language policy and educational frameworks.

The critical approach was not used as the primary study framework since language policies decisions are made by the government and these language policies are largely outside the students' sphere of influence. This article does not advocate for changing the current educational system. However, raising awareness among students and policymakers about the crucial challenges of Arabic medium instruction could be a step forward in improving students' learning environments in the future. As a result, the critical paradigm is entrenched in the current study's interpretive paradigm.

5. Findings and Discussion

In academic research, the choice of language in data collection tools is crucial to the quality and reliability of research findings. This calls for a thorough analysis of student perceptions of language use and competency, along with broader sociolinguistic interactions within the educational environment. Participants were given the option to choose either the English or Arabic questionnaire provided to them via the Lime Survey online tool for their responses. It should be noted right from the outset that all 27 female students completed the questionnaire in English rather than Arabic. This preference is indicative of language proficiency and perceived effectiveness in communication. Moreover, the prevalence of English as a global lingua franca and its association with modernity and prestige may influence students' language choices. In addition, sociocultural factors may also influence the inclination towards English.

In specific contexts, English might be perceived as a symbol of elevated social standing or academic achievement, leading students to prioritize it over Arabic (Masri, 2019; Bouhlila et al., 2022). Additionally, the impact of media, technology, and globalization may amplify the significance of English in students' daily lives, shaping their language identities and preferences. Despite the widespread use and importance of Arabic, with over 400 million speakers and substantial cultural and religious influence (Sulaiman, 2018; Mufwene et al., 2022), it nevertheless faces barriers from dominant global lingua francas like English. Arabic occupies a critical position within the Islamic world and has a profound legacy of contributions to diverse knowledge domains (Selim, 2017; Versteegh, 2018; Hamidah, 2019). Despite this, English dominates international discourse in the fields of science, technology, commerce, and diplomacy domains. This scenario underscores the need for strong languages to navigate a bilingual or multilingual global environment, effectively reconciling the imperative of global communication with the safeguarding of their cultural and historical heritage.

Nonetheless, the support for Arabic could be related to a number of influences, such as cultural identity, societal norms, career opportunities in Arabic-speaking environments, and personal beliefs about preserving and promoting the students' native language. Accordingly, when mass communication students were asked about Arabic as a language of instruction, the findings revealed that 88% considered Arabic to be particularly important compared to English as a language of instruction (see Figure 1). Furthermore, Figure 2 shows that 65% of the respondents said that using Fus-ha terminology in their field of study was challenging. This ratio suggests that Fus-ha is regarded as a symbol of High culture as it is employed in religion, literature, and official works. At the same time, Ammiyya is seen as representative of Low variety culture because it is used only as a medium of regular communication. This means that students are more exposed to Ammiyya than Fus-ha in their daily life, which leads them to face difficulties while using Fus-ha in their academic studies, especially those who spent their high

school years in English medium instruction. In Qatar, there are varying perceptions of the significance of Ammiyya in cultural identity. Some people attach considerable importance to Ammiyya due to its function as the primary means of daily interaction and its close association with to local identity. This stance accentuates the importance of Ammiyya in promoting a feeling of belonging and cultural pride among individuals (Hussain, 2020; Sahib, 2021). Nonetheless, there are divergent opinions, with certain Qataris valuing Fus-ha more highly. This inclination towards Fus-ha is rooted in its association with formal education, literary heritage, and religious scriptures, and presents it as a symbol of erudition and refinement within Qatari culture (Coelho et al., 2022, Mustafawi et al., 2022; Nasrullah, 2023).

In addition, some specialist terminology used within academia may derive from the English language or other linguistic sources. The incorporation of such terminology from other languages may introduce further obstacles for learners or individuals engaging with the subject matter, thereby exacerbating the apparent complexity of understanding the content.

Figure 1: How do you regard Arabic as a language of instruction compared to English?

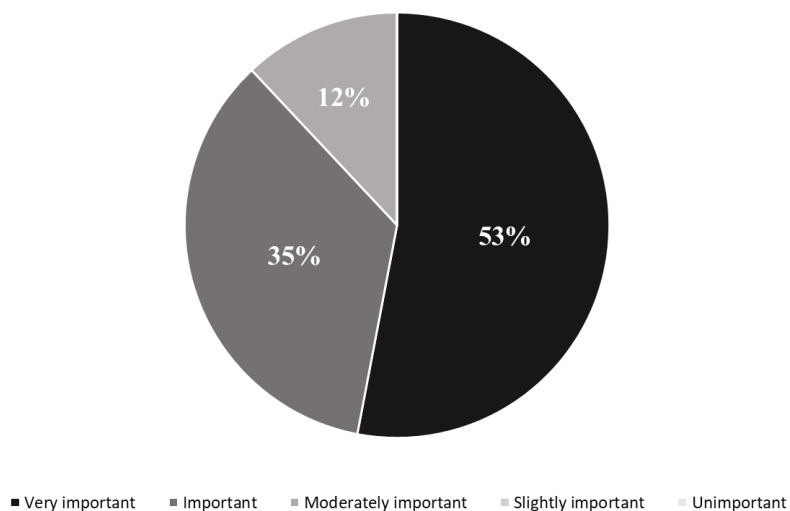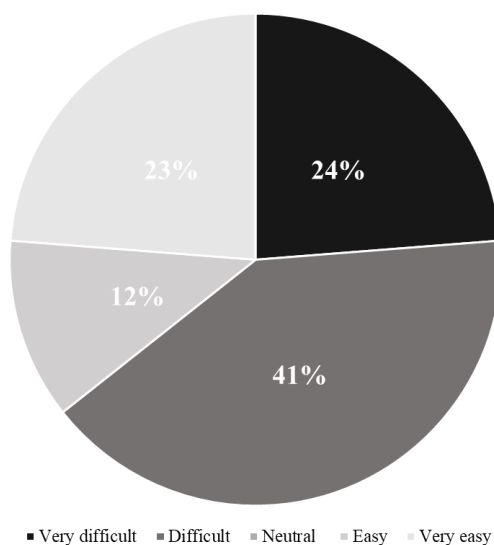■ Very important ■ Important ■ Moderately important ■ Slightly important ■ Unimportant

Figure 2: How difficult do you find using the Standard Arabic -
Fus-ha - terms in your field of study?

■ Very difficult ■ Difficult ■ Neutral ■ Easy ■ Very easy

According to Figure 3, about 79% feel they will not be able to find a job, and 21% feel that they may get a job even if Arabic is the medium of instruction in their field of study. The high percentage of respondents who fear not being able to find a job suggests that most employers conduct interviews in English. Interviewers make snap assessments and place a high value on first impressions. Therefore, poor English language skills can reduce the chances of finding a job, as Pandey et al. (2014) state that English is the most widely used language in business. In Qatar, journalists need good English proficiency for job opportunities, given the country's emphasis on English in all sectors, such as the media. This proficiency allows for effective global communication, access to diverse sources of information, collaboration with international outlets, and contribution to global discourse, all of which significantly expand job prospects (White et al., 2018; Hillman, 2019; Emans, 2020; Boéri et al., 2022). In addition, Birdsall (2011), Casale et al. (2011), and Chakraborty et al. (2016) report that citizens usually seek to improve their English skills on a micro-level to find better jobs and earn a better salary. Moreover, students at Qatar University value English more than Arabic due to its importance in future job opportunities and employment prospects.

Figure 3: Will you be able to find a job opportunity if you graduate
with Arabic as the language of instruction in your major?

9% · 5% · 7% · 44% · 35%

■ Definitely ■ Very probably ■ Probably ■ Probably not ■ Definitely not
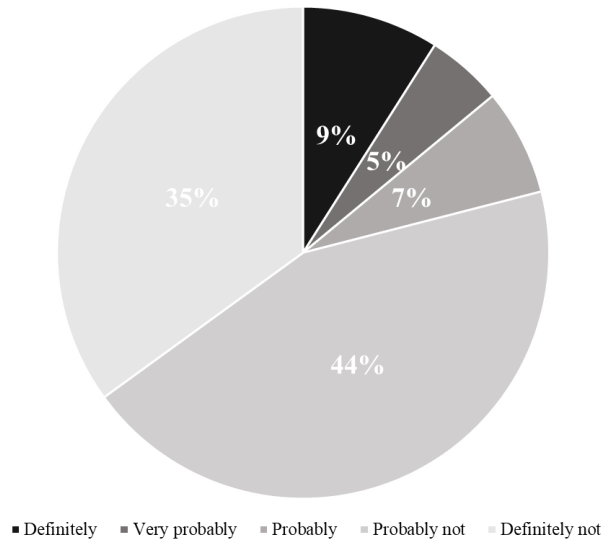
Despite this, Qatari learners reflected positive attitudes towards Arabic and frequently asserted their proficiency in Fus-ḥa owing to the formal training they received, the integration of the language within the curriculum, and their commitment to preserving the language. These factors have contributed significantly to the advancement of Arabic language proficiency among Qatari students, thereby facilitating the preservation of cultural heritage and the attainment of linguistic competence (Mustafawi et al. 2022). However, 65% of those asked if they could speak Fus-ha fluently admitted that it was a challenge to do so (see Figure 8). Students find it difficult to achieve fluency in Fus-ha because of the complexity of its grammar and vocabulary, the lack of exposure to it in daily situations, its divergence from spoken dialects, the perceived restricted scope of practical applicability, and the expectation to adhere to formal linguistic standards (Lubis et al., 2022; Khasanah et al., 2023; Yul et al., 2023).

Figure 8: How difficult is it to speak Standard Arabic - Fus-ha - fluently?

Very difficult   ▪ Difficult   ▪ Neutral   ▪ Easy   ▪ Very easy
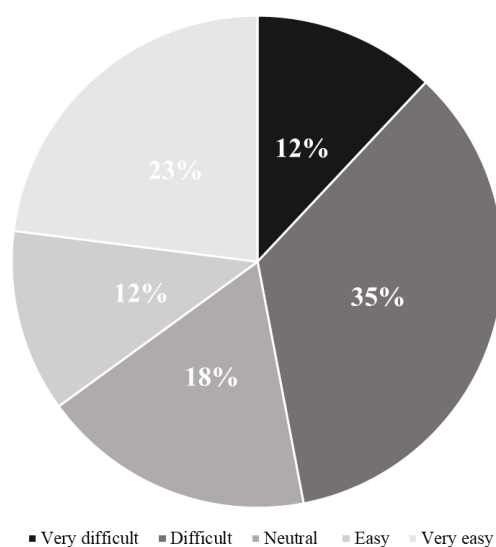
On the other hand, communication skills are vital for job interviews and in the workplace. Therefore, a solid command of English requires the ability to talk clearly and effectively. That is why 59% of the students feel they cannot interview people who speak only English since they do not master the language, and 41% claimed they can handle an interview in English, as demonstrated in Figure 4. Factors such as different degrees of assurance, cultural heritage, educational background, and the accessibility of support resources play a significant role (Shahini et al., 2017; Putri et al., 2020).

Figure 4: Can you interview people who speak only English if Arabic is your language of instruction?

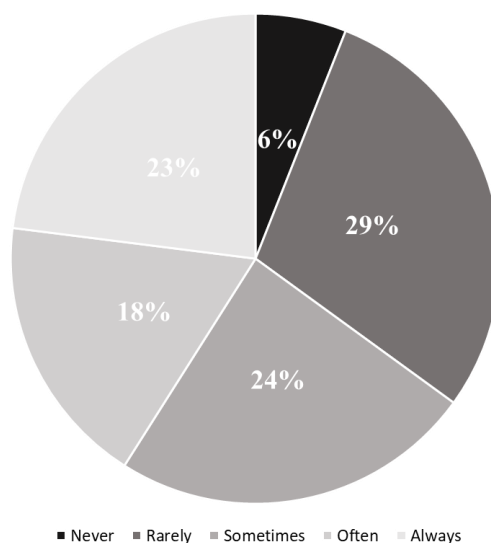■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ Always

Figure 5 shows that 39% are confident in answering open-ended and critical thinking questions in Fus-ha, whilst 61% say that using Fus-ha to answer the same questions is challenging. Outdated and ineffective teaching practices have been at the root of the deficiencies in the teaching of Arabic - Fus-ha - and have led to the alienation of Arabic at all levels of education in recent decades. In addition, English medium instruction before 2012 explains the students' lack of proficiency in Fus-ha.

Figure 6 shows that 35% can find Arabic references and resources. In comparison, 65% have difficulty finding them for the following reasons: a scarcity of literature, medical texts and references in Arabic, limited professional Arabic translation and editing services, which in turn restricts the dissemination and transfer of the most recent international scientific knowledge, and the rapid evolution of education worldwide, which makes it difficult to keep up with the most recent innovations.

Figure 5: How confident do you feel in answering open-ended and critical-thinking - based questions in Fus-ha?

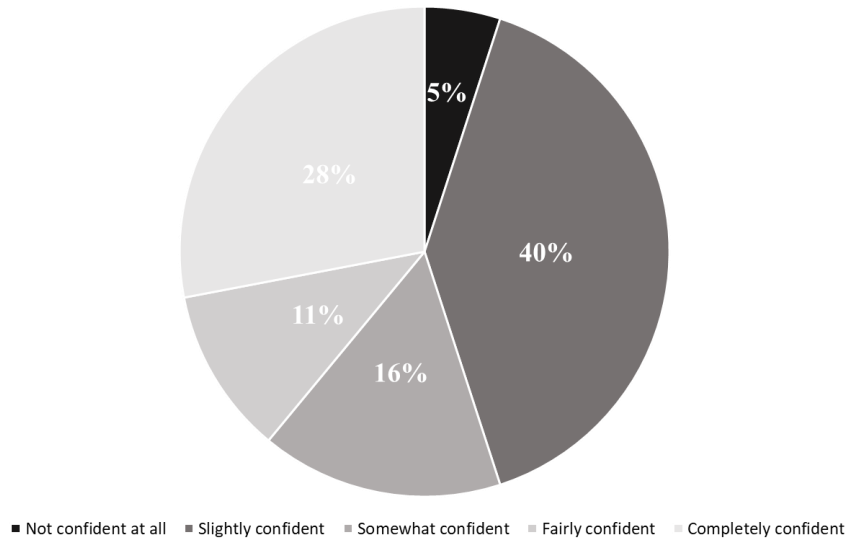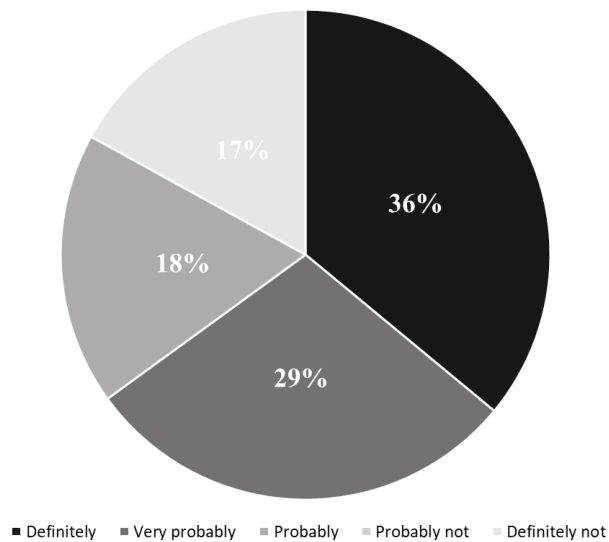■ Not confident at all ■ Slightly confident ■ Somewhat confident ■ Fairly confident ■ Completely confident

Figure 6: Do you have trouble finding Arabic references and resources in your major?

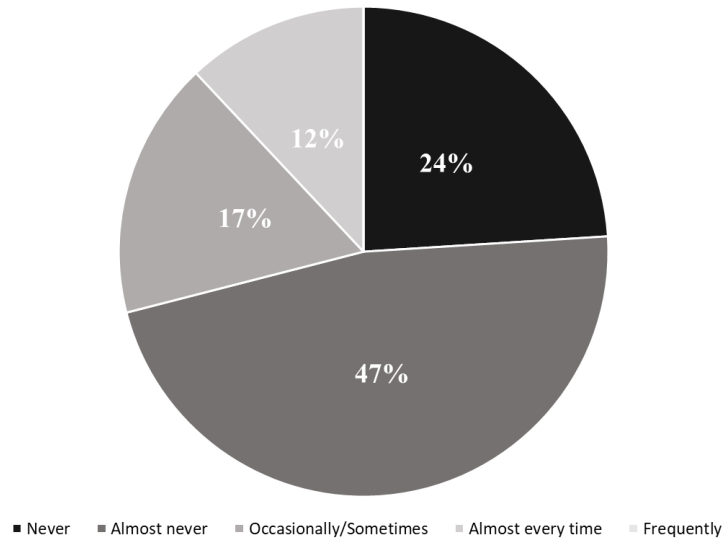■ Definitely ■ Very probably ■ Probably ■ Probably not ■ Definitely not

Consequently, as illustrated in Figure 7, 71% find Arabic resources currently provided insufficient for their needs.

Figure 7: Are the Arabic resources currently provided sufficient for
your needs?

■ Definitely ■ Very probably ■ Probably ■ Probably not ■ Definitely not
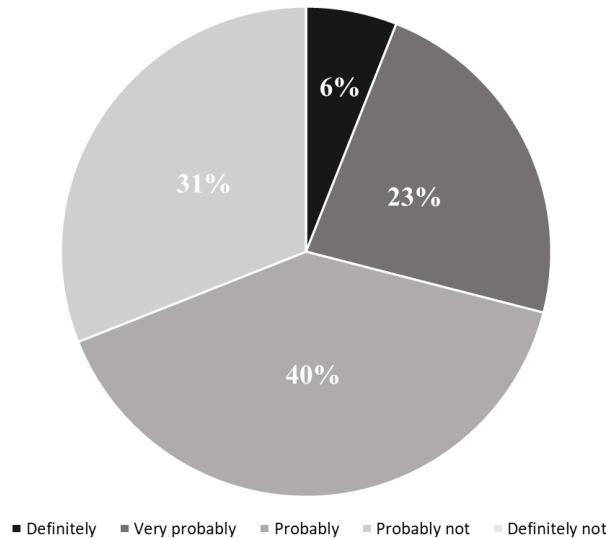
When the Mass Communication students were asked how frequently they spoke in Fus-ha with their peers and teachers, 88% replied that they hardly ever do (see Figure 9). They prefer Ammiyya as an alternative because they perceive Fus-ha as intrinsically complex and challenging to use as a language of everyday communication in Qatar. They also consider it as having a difficult vocabulary and sophisticated grammar. Socio-cultural factors - education, social class, gender, urbanization - shape language use in Qatar, influence Qatari speakers' language choices and contribute to the prevalence of colloquial Arabic in everyday conversation. As confirmed by Bergman (2009), the use of Standard Arabic in daily communication is complex and challenging. The reasons why Qatari speakers may find Fus-ha difficult or less suitable for their day-to-day interactions are the formal nature of Fus-ha, its association with written texts or religious contexts, and its divergence from the colloquial varieties that are commonly used in informal conversations. In addition, Bani-Khaled (2014) and Yoyo et al. (2020) support this point of view by stating that Fus-ha is a language that has been subjected or surrendered to external forces represented by foreign languages and cultures, and students find it challenging to use it in their daily conversations due to its complexity.

Figure 9: How often do you use Fus-ha in your discussion with your classmates and instructors?

24%

47%

17%

12%

■ Never ■ Almost never ■ Occasionally/Sometimes ■ Almost every time ■ Frequently

For post-graduate studies, proficiency in English is required to adapt to the curriculum, since research programs are taught in English and most references and resources are available in English. Proficiency in English is of paramount importance for individuals pursuing post-graduate studies, primarily because English serves as the predominant medium for both instructional purposes and academic discourse. It enables students to interact with course materials, use academic resources, communicate effectively with colleagues and mentors, and present research findings. Finally, proficiency in English is indispensable for success in post-graduate research, for academic development, and for making valuable contributions to one's specific area of study (Asio et al., 2023; Kanamitie et al., 2023). For this reason, Figure 10 shows that 65% of mass communication students may not pursue their post-graduate studies abroad because of Arabic.

Figure 10: Will you be able to pursue your post-graduate studies abroad if your language of instruction is Arabic?

Definitely ■ Very probably ■ Probably ■ Probably not ■ Definitely not
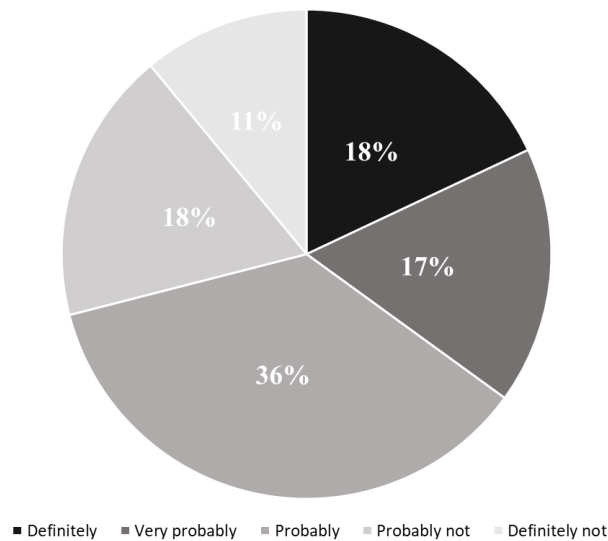
According to Figure 11, when Arabic is used in its most straightforward form, without proverbs or eloquence, 53% would choose it as the language of instruction for their major because they do not have to search for meanings, which makes learning easier. Conversely, 47% prefer English because it was the language of instruction at school. Others choose English because it allows them to improve their academic English skills in order to stay updated in their field of study and to learn a new language, both of which are requirements for their majors.

Proficiency in English are of paramount importance for Mass Communication students because of its widespread influence on a global scale. English serves as the predominant medium for exchanging ideas, conducting research, and implementing industry norms within the field of mass media on an international level. Possessing a proficient grasp of English empowers professionals to explore a vast reservoir of knowledge, broaden their professional horizons, maintain communication standards and gain experience in global networking and collaborative endeavours. Mastering English is critical for achieving success and making a significant impact in the ever evolving and interconnected landscape of mass communication (Kang et al., 2020; Archana, 2023).

Figure 11: If you had the opportunity to choose, which language of instruction for your major would you choose: Arabic or English and why?

■ Arabic ■ English
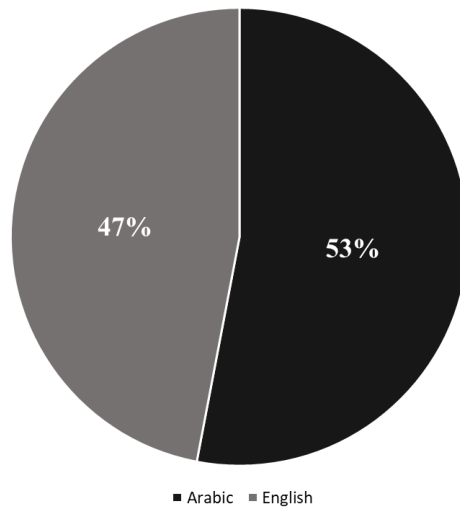
Fus-ha is expected to be the language of instruction in all Arabic-speaking countries. Zughoul (1980) and Al-Huri (2015) explain that unlike Ammiyya, which children learn at home, Fus-ha is learned through formal education. Its application is almost exclusively limited to literature, official documents, mass media, and teaching. Accordingly, students believe that their prior school-based Arabic studies have had a significant impact on the development of their linguistic and intellectual skills. For instance, Figure 13 shows that 94% of respondents agree that learning Fus-ha in middle and high schools is crucial to elevating their proficiency in the language at university and their understanding of the courses taught.

Figure 13: How did your previous experiences in studying Arabic at school contribute to shaping your linguistic and intellectual abilities?

■ Very important　■ Important　■ Moderately important　■ Slightly important　■ Unimportant
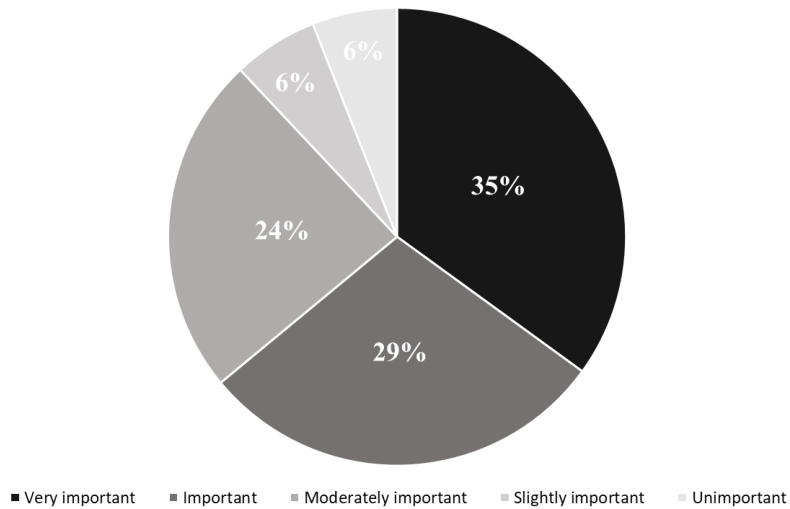
In addition, Figure 14 shows that 94% of the students considered their previous experience of studying Arabic at school to be excellent. It can therefore be concluded that students value their previous experiences of studying Arabic at school for its positive impact on their learning.

Figure 14: How would you evaluate your previous experiences in studying Arabic at school?

■ Very good　■ Good　■ Barely acceptable　■ Poor　■ Very poor
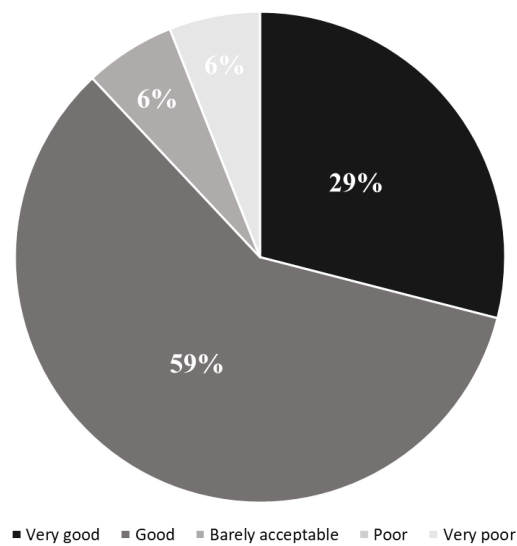
Most Mass Communication students at Qatar University can distinguish between Fus-ha and Ammiyya, as 60% are aware of the shift from Fus-ha to Ammiyya during their classes (Figure 12). The diglossic situation of Arabic is a significant element that can hinder the learning process. For instance, when teachers switch between Fus-ha and Ammiyya, this affects the learning process in both positive and negative ways. In the first case, students will be able to understand the courses taught, which will lead to an increase in their performance. However, in the second case, as mentioned by Harbi (2022), it will impede the process of learning Fus-ha by affecting the development of the students' speaking and listening skills.

Figure 12: Are you aware of a shift between Fus-ha and Ammiyya during the class?

■ Not at all aware ■ Slightly aware ■ Somewhat aware ■ Moderately aware ■ Extremely aware
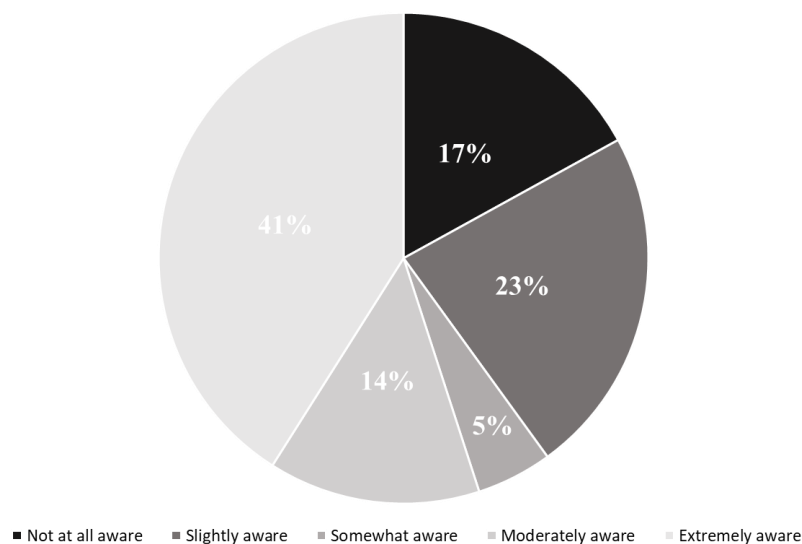
Figure 15 shows that 88% of instructors use Ammiyya when explaining concepts. Instructors use Ammiyya when they feel it is indispensable to explain proverbs, analogies or formal sentences and concepts. Furthermore, Figure 16 indicates that 100% of students are satisfied when instructors use Ammiyya to explain concepts. Consequently, there is a difference between the students' preferences regarding whether their instructors use Ammiyya or not. This discrepancy is due to the students' proficiency in Fus-ha. If they are proficient in Fus-ha,

they face no hurdles in understanding the courses taught. Otherwise, they require explanations in Ammiyya to facilitate their understanding and learning.

Figure 15: Do your instructors use Ammiyya in explaining concepts?

■ Very frequently ■ Frequently ■ Occasionally ■ Rarely ■ Never
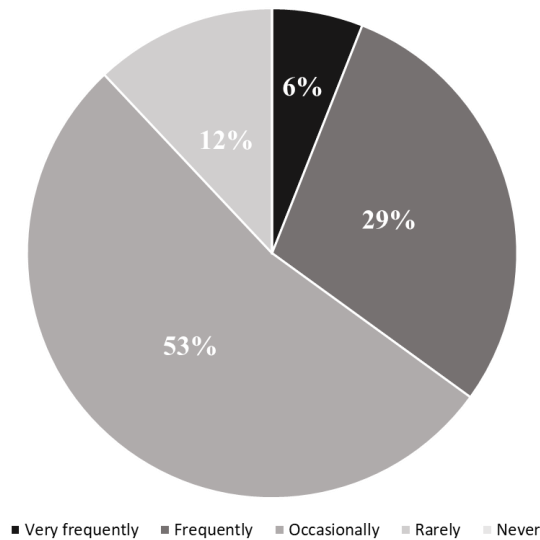
Figure 16: How do you feel about the instructors' usage of Ammiyya in explaining concepts?

■ Satisfied ■ Very satisfied ■ Neutral ■ Dissatisfied ■ Very dissatisfied
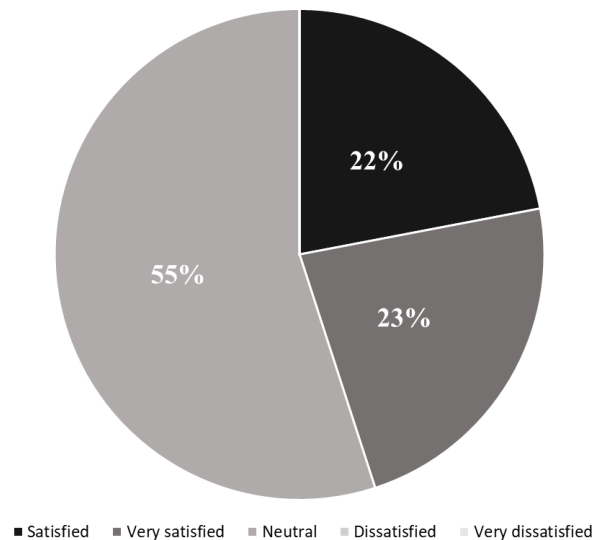
6. Conclusion and Recommendations: Qatar and Bilingual Policy

Qatar's decision to reintroduce Arabic as the medium of instruction in 2012 reflects its commitment to preserving its language, cultural values, and identity. This move also signifies

Qatar's rejection of colonialism and external interference and underlines its determination to uphold its unique cultural heritage. However, the policy change raises questions about the coherence of language preservation policies within an education system which places such an emphasis on English proficiency and an economic structure striving to become knowledge based.

To explore these issues, a survey was conducted among Mass Communication students enrolled in a sociolinguistics course at Qatar University to gauge their attitudes and experiences with Arabic as a medium of instruction. The study identifies a number of challenges faced by learners, particularly with regard to the sophisticated variant of Arabic known as Fus-ha. Concerns are raised about Fus-ha's association with High culture and potential limitations on employment opportunities tied to Arabic proficiency. The findings show that many students need to improve their skills and confidence in using Arabic, particularly when responding to open-ended and critical-thinking questions in Fus-ha. Providing students with adequate resources and support is essential to enhance their Arabic proficiency and analytical skills.

Moreover, the study indicates that prior instruction in Arabic has a positive impact on students' language skills and academic performance. The integration of colloquial varieties of Arabic into educational settings underscores the importance of teachers being aware of their students' abilities in Fus-ha and the need for effective communication and understanding. The students' preference for colloquial Arabic reinforces the importance of teaching Fus-ha in the classroom, providing educators with valuable insights to tailor their teaching styles and language instruction methods accordingly. Policymakers and educational institutions need to fully understand students' needs and requirements to provide effective language teaching.

The findings highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to language education that balances cultural preservation with the practical demands of a globalized society. The

challenge of reconciling the preservation of traditional linguistic specificities with the demands of globalization presents a challenge for the promotion of Arabic in Qatar. To overcome this obstacle, policymakers and educational establishments should formulate strategies that integrate efforts to preserve the Arabic language with the evolving demands of the contemporary world. Such an approach will enable Qatar to preserve its language, cultural heritage, and national identity while equipping students with the skills needed for success in an increasingly interconnected world.

In addition, it is crucial to develop students' critical skills, such as the ability to use English for specific purposes. English proficiency is essential for mass communication, online social networking, transportation, foreign diplomacy, skilled employment, education, and entertainment. Qatar's rapidly expanding education system aims to strengthen higher education and prepare its population for the demands of building a knowledge-based economy and global competitiveness. Preserving one language does not mean a disregard for the learning of other languages. In a world where every sector is undergoing countless developments, and where the concept of the global village prevails, the learning of foreign languages is a necessity. Languages are living organisms that have interacted, influenced one another, and converged throughout history, and they should continue to do so.

Therefore, a healthy bilingual system that recognizes Arabic as a mother tongue while allowing English a significant role in sectors of activities that allow Qataris to fully engage with the modern world is essential. This approach enables Qatar to participate in a knowledge-rich global workforce, achieve economic development, fulfil its competitive vision, while simultaneously offering hope for the promotion and protection of Arabic language, national identity, and culture. Siemund et al. (2021), Leimgruber et al. (2022), Ahmad (2023), Gallagher et al., (2023), Wyatt (2023) and Zoghbor (2023) agree that education policies in the Arabian Peninsula - UAE and Kuwait - emphasize the importance of preserving the Arabic language

and ensuring its importance in students' education and identity. At the same time, English is used as a medium of instruction in order to strike a balance between the two languages and improve students' competence in each. Proficiency in English plays a crucial role in the socio-economic goals of the Gulf states, as it facilitates effective engagement in the global knowledge-based economy. It is imperative to implement policies that promote English proficiency in conjunction with Arabic to guarantee the achievement of the government's aspirations for English proficiency among Arabic-speaking citizens by 2030. This method recognizes the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students and cultivates a culturally rich setting that values a variety of language forms. Additionally, policymakers and educational institutions can promote the Arabic language in the region through targeted measures that improve language proficiency and increase access to educational resources. In so doing, Qatar can position itself on the world cultural map and keep pace with globalization while preserving its language, culture and identity.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

This research recognizes several limitations that could affect the interpretation and utility of its findings. First, despite efforts to ensure a diverse range of participants, survey-based studies are susceptible to sampling biases. In addition, relying on self-reported information increases the risk of potentially distorting the accuracy of participants' perspectives. Focusing exclusively on students' perspectives could limit the understanding of the issue at hand by excluding the insights of administrative and academic staff, who play a crucial role in shaping language policies. Furthermore, the generalizability of the findings beyond the Mass Communication Department at Qatar University may be limited as participants' responses may be affected by contextual elements like personal incentives and socio-cultural norms. Finally, as this is a pilot study and confined to a specific academic domain within a specific institution, caution should be exercised when extrapolating the results to other disciplines or

establishments without additional empirical validation. This limitation could be mitigated by widening the scope of the research to encompass additional departments and universities. Given that the current investigation is confined to a singular academic area within a specific educational institution. Future research endeavours ought to validate these outcomes across various disciplines and educational environments to enhance their applicability.

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Appendix

1. How do you regard Arabic as a language of instruction compared to English?

    a. Very important

    b. Important
    c. Moderately important
    d. Slightly important
    e. Unimportant

2. If you had the opportunity to choose, which language of instruction for your major would you choose?

    a. Arabic
    b. English
    c. Other, specify -----------------------
    d. Why ---------------------------------

3. How difficult do you find using Fus-ha terms in your field of study?

    a. Very difficult
    b. Difficult
    c. Neutral
    d. Easy
    e. Very easy

4. Do you have trouble finding Arabic references and resources in your major?

    a. Definitely
    b. Very probably
    c. Probably
    d. Probably not
    e. Definitely not

5. Are the Arabic resources currently provided sufficient for your needs?

    a. Definitely
    b. Very probably
    c. Probably
    d. Probably not
    e. Definitely not

6. Do your instructors use Ammiyya in explaining concepts?

    a. Very frequently
    b. Frequently
    c. Occasionally
    d. Rarely
    e. Never

7. How do you feel about the instructors' usage of Ammiyya in explaining concepts?

    a. Satisfied
    b. Very satisfied
    c. Neutral

    d. Dissatisfied

    e. Very dissatisfied

8. Are you aware of a shift between Fus-ha and Ammiyya during the class?

    a. Not at all aware

    b. Slightly aware

    c. Somewhat aware

    d. Moderately aware

    e. Extremely aware

9. How difficult is it to speak Fus-ha fluently?

    a. Very difficult

    b. Difficult

    c. Neutral

    d. Easy

    e. Very easy

10. How often do you use Fus-ha in your discussion with your classmates and instructors?

    a. Never

    b. Almost never

    c. Occasionally/Sometimes

    d. Almost every time

    e. Frequently

11. How confident do you feel in answering open-ended and critical-thinking - based

questions in Fus-ha?

    a. Not confident at all

    b. Slightly confident

    c. Somewhat confident

    d. Fairly confident

    e. Completely confident

12. Can you interview people who speak only English if Arabic is your language of

Instruction?

    a. Never

    b. Rarely

    c. Sometimes

    d. Often

    e. Always

13. Will you be able to pursue your post-graduate studies abroad if your language of

instruction is Arabic?

    a. Definitely

    b. Very probably

c. Probably
d. Probably not
e. Definitely not

14. Will you be able to find a job opportunity if you graduate with Arabic as the language of instruction in your major?

   a. Definitely
   b. Very probably
   c. Probably
   d. Probably not
   e. Definitely not

15. How did your previous experiences in studying Arabic at school contribute to shaping your linguistic and intellectual abilities?

   a. Very important
   b. Important
   c. Fairly important
   d. Slightly important
   e. Not important

16. How would you evaluate your previous experiences in studying Arabic at school?

   a. Very Good
   b. Good
   c. Barely Acceptable
   d. Poor
   e. Very Poor