

The Role of Education level in the Modern Standard Arabic Use: The Saudi Context

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دور المستوى التعليمي في استخدام اللغة العربية المعيارية: السياق السعودي

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Abstract

This research investigates the relationship between education level and the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in everyday conversations within Saudi Arabian society. Traditionally, MSA has been reserved for formal contexts, while Colloquial Saudi Arabic (CSA) is used in informal interactions. However, recent trends suggest a shift among educated individuals towards employing MSA in casual settings. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative analysis and interviews to explore language use patterns, and attitudes across different education levels. A sample of 80 participants from varying education backgrounds—high school, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and Ph.D.—was surveyed on their frequency of MSA and CSA usage in social contexts. Results indicate a positive correlation between higher education levels and increased MSA usage, challenging traditional language norms. Participants with advanced degrees reported higher MSA usage, highlighting the influence of education on linguistic behavior. Thematic analysis of interviews revealed nuanced perspectives on language formality, cultural identity, and language maintenance. Participants acknowledged MSA's prestige in academic and professional spheres while valuing CSA for its cultural authenticity and community ties. Higher education was viewed as instrumental in enhancing MSA proficiency for scholarly pursuits. Despite limitations, including sample bias and self-reported data, this study contributes to understanding language dynamics in Saudi Arabia. The findings advocate for inclusive language policies and educational strategies that accommodate diverse linguistic practices. This research informs ongoing discussions in sociolinguistics and educational linguistics, emphasizing the need for flexible language standards that reflect evolving language practices in multicultural societies.

Keywords: Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Colloquial Saudi Arabic (CSA), language attitudes, linguistic diversity, language use and education, language variation.

مستخلص البحث:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في العلاقة بين مستوى التعليم واستخدام اللغة العربية الفصحى الحديثة (MSA) في المحادثات اليومية داخل المجتمع السعودي. نظرياً، تمت مقارنة اللغة العربية المعيارية في السياقات الرسمية، في حين كان النظر منحصرًا على استخدام العربية السعودية العامية (CSA) في التفاعلات غير الرسمية. ومع ذلك، تظهر الاتجاهات الأخيرة نمطًا حديثًا متمثلًا في تحول الأفراد المتعلمين نحو استخدام العربية الفصحى بشكل متزايد في السياقات غير الرسمية. تتبنى هذه الدراسة منهجًا متعدد الأساليب، يجمع بين المنهج الكمي والتحليل النوعي والمقابلات لاستكشاف أنماط استخدام اللغة والمواقف عبر مستويات التعليم المختلفة. تم مسح عينة مكونة من 80 مشاركًا من خلفيات تعليمية مختلفة - طلاب الثانوية، ودرجة البكالوريوس، ودرجة الماجستير، والدكتوراه - وذلك لمناقشة تكرار استخدامهم لـ MSA و CSA في السياقات الاجتماعية غير الرسمية. تشير النتائج إلى وجود علاقة طردية بين مستويات التعليم العالي وزيادة استخدام اللغة العربية الفصحى، مما يشكل تحديًا للمعايير اللغوية التقليدية. أفاد المشاركون الحاصلون على درجات علمية متقدمة باستخدام أعلى للغة الفصحى المعيارية، مما يسلط الضوء على تأثير التعليم على السلوك اللغوي. كشف التحليل الموضوعي للمقابلات عن وجهات نظر دقيقة حول تشكيلات اللغة، والهوية الثقافية، والحفاظ على اللغة. اعترف المشاركون بمكانة MSA في المجالات الأكاديمية والمهنية مع تقييم عالٍ لـ CSA لأصالتها الثقافية وروابطها المجتمعية. تساهم هذه الدراسة في فهم ديناميكيات اللغة في المملكة العربية السعودية. وتدعو النتائج إلى سياسات لغوية شاملة واستراتيجيات تعليمية تستوعب الممارسات اللغوية المتنوعة. يفيد هذا البحث المناقشات الجارية في علم اللغة الاجتماعي واللسانيات التعليمية، مع التركيز على الحاجة إلى معايير لغوية مرنة تعكس الممارسات اللغوية المتطورة في المجتمعات متعددة الثقافات.

1. Introduction

Language plays a pivotal role in shaping societal norms, cultural identities, and communication patterns within diverse communities. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), language plays a multifaceted role in shaping cultural identity, social interactions, and religious practices. The linguistic landscape is characterized by a dynamic interplay between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Saudi Arabic (CSA), each serving specific communicative functions and reflecting distinct social contexts (Khan, I. A. 2011; Tskhvediani, Z. 2024).

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the standardized form of Arabic used in formal contexts such as official speeches, written communication, and academic discourse across the Arab world. In Saudi Arabia, MSA holds significant cultural and religious importance as the language of the Quran, the holy book of Islam, and the foundation of scholarly pursuits and religious rituals (Giolfo et al., 2016). MSA serves as a unifying linguistic force, facilitating communication and cultural exchange among Arabic-speaking nations.

Conversely, Colloquial Saudi Arabic (CSA) encompasses a diverse range of regional dialects and colloquial expressions used in everyday conversations and informal interactions among Saudi citizens. CSA serves as the primary means of communication within local communities, reflecting regional identities and cultural nuances across different provinces of the Kingdom (Omar, A., & Ilyas, M. 2018). The variations in CSA highlight the rich diversity of Saudi Arabia's linguistic heritage, with dialects differing in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical structures.

Despite the distinct roles assigned to MSA and CSA, recent socio-linguistic developments in Saudi Arabia challenge these conventional language norms. One notable trend is the increasing use of MSA in informal settings and casual conversations, particularly among individuals with higher levels of formal education (Elyas, T., & Picard, M. 2010).

The shift towards using MSA in informal contexts signifies a reevaluation of the traditional dichotomy between formal and informal Arabic usage. This phenomenon is observed among educated individuals who recognize the prestige associated with MSA and its importance in professional and intellectual spheres. As a result, MSA is becoming more integrated into everyday speech, blurring the boundaries between formal and informal language use (RYDING, K. C. 2016).

Several factors contribute to the evolving language choices among Saudi speakers. Higher levels of formal education, exposure to global media and literature, and aspirations for professional advancement are key drivers behind the increased use of MSA in informal settings. Additionally, initiatives promoting linguistic standardization and cultural preservation influence language behaviors, shaping perceptions of linguistic identity and social status (Shukri, N. A. 2014).

The changing dynamics of language use in Saudi Arabia have profound societal implications. The growing acceptance of MSA in informal contexts reflects a broader shift towards linguistic modernization and cultural adaptation. This trend challenges traditional language norms, fostering

linguistic inclusivity and promoting a more nuanced understanding of Arabic language varieties within Saudi society (Daoudi, A., & Murphy, E. 2011).

By exploring these aspects in greater detail, we gain deeper insights into the complex interplay between language, education, and social dynamics in Saudi Arabia. This expanded discussion enriches our understanding of how linguistic practices evolve over time, reflecting broader socio-cultural changes and individual aspirations for linguistic proficiency and cultural identity.

The rationale for this research is rooted in the need to critically examine prevailing language practices and assumptions within Saudi society, particularly regarding the use of MSA and CSA. Understanding how education level influences language behavior can provide valuable insights into linguistic dynamics and communicative preferences among Saudi speakers (Subtirelu, N. 2014).

While existing studies provide valuable insights into broader Arab contexts, the distinct socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia necessitates empirical research to elucidate the relationship between education and linguistic behavior within the Kingdom's linguistic framework. This study holds significant significance for language policy and planning in Saudi Arabia. By challenging assumptions about the exclusive formality of MSA and the informality of CSA, this research aims to promote a more nuanced understanding of language variation and usage patterns, informing educational strategies and language revitalization efforts aimed at fostering linguistic diversity and cultural inclusivity.

The central hypothesis of this study is that individuals with higher levels of formal education are more inclined to employ Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), even in informal and routine conversations, challenging the common misconception that MSA is exclusively reserved for formal occasions.

The specific objectives of this research are as follows:

- To empirically establish a correlation between education level and the frequency of MSA usage across casual communicative settings.
- To investigate participants' attitudes towards MSA and CSA in various social and communicative contexts.
- To challenge prevailing assumptions about the exclusive formality of MSA and the informality of CSA in everyday Saudi Arabian discourse.

2. Hypothesis Development

The hypothesis driving this research posits that individuals with higher levels of education in Saudi Arabia are more likely to exhibit a greater inclination towards using Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) consistently in everyday and routine conversations, contrary to the traditional perception that MSA is exclusively reserved for formal contexts. This hypothesis is grounded in the researcher's perspective and aims to investigate the profound influence of education on language behavior within the complex sociolinguistic landscape of Saudi Arabia.

Education is believed to play a pivotal role in shaping language preferences and usage patterns. One key aspect of this hypothesis is the notion that higher education enhances individuals' language proficiency and familiarity with formal Arabic structures, making MSA more accessible and natural for daily communication across various contexts. Through exposure to academic environments and intellectual discourse, educated individuals may develop a deeper appreciation for the standardization and prestige associated with MSA, leading them to prioritize its usage in both formal and informal settings. Moreover, education fosters linguistic awareness and adaptability, enabling individuals to navigate diverse linguistic norms effectively by integrating MSA into everyday conversations.

The hypothesis will be empirically tested through a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The quantitative component will involve analyzing survey data to measure the frequency of MSA usage across different education levels, while the qualitative component will delve deeper into participants' attitudes and perceptions towards MSA and its role in their language practices. By triangulating these findings, the research aims to provide robust empirical evidence supporting the relationship between education level and MSA usage patterns.

The significance of this hypothesis lies in its potential to challenge and reshape traditional perceptions about language formality in Saudi Arabian discourse. By demonstrating a positive correlation between education level and MSA usage in everyday contexts, the research seeks to highlight the evolving nature of language practices among educated individuals and to debunk the notion that MSA is exclusively reserved for formal or official purposes. This has implications for understanding the dynamic nature of language variation and identity in Saudi society, where linguistic norms are influenced by factors such as education, globalization, and cultural adaptation.

Furthermore, the hypothesis contributes to broader discussions in sociolinguistics by shedding light on the intricate interplay between education, language choice, and sociocultural dynamics. It seeks to explore how education shapes individuals' linguistic repertoires and perceptions of linguistic norms, ultimately influencing their communicative behaviors and identities. This exploration is crucial for understanding the evolving sociolinguistic landscape of Saudi Arabia and for informing language policy and educational strategies that promote linguistic diversity and proficiency.

In summary, the hypothesis that higher education correlates positively with increased MSA usage in everyday conversations represents a significant departure from traditional assumptions about language formality in Saudi Arabian discourse. By empirically testing this hypothesis, the research aims to advance our understanding of the complex relationships between education, language behavior, and sociocultural dynamics, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced appreciation of language variation and identity in contemporary Saudi society.

3. Literature Review

Sociolinguistic research across various Arab countries has shed light on the complex interplay between education level and language use, particularly regarding the adoption of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in different communicative contexts. Studies conducted in Egypt and Lebanon, among other Arab nations, have explored how higher levels of formal education influence linguistic behavior and the use of MSA in everyday interactions (Kecskes, I. (2018; Dweik et al., 2015).

In Egypt, Palfreyman et al. (2018) conducted a study examining language choice among university-educated individuals, revealing a positive correlation between education level and the use of MSA in both formal and informal settings. The findings indicated that educated speakers tended to employ MSA more frequently, associating it with prestige, intellectual discourse, and professional communication. This pattern reflects a broader trend observed in Arab countries where higher education fosters the adoption of standardized Arabic in linguistic practices (Palfreyman et al., 2018).

Similarly, research in Lebanon by Dweik et al. (2015) explored the impact of education on language use within the Lebanese context. The study revealed that individuals with advanced education levels exhibited greater proficiency and comfort in using MSA, particularly in academic and professional environments. The findings underscored the role of education in shaping language attitudes and linguistic competence, highlighting the importance of educational factors in linguistic standardization and language variation across Arab societies (Dweik et al., 2015).

Sociolinguistic Context of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia presents a distinctive sociolinguistic context characterized by a rich tapestry of cultural norms, religious traditions, and regional identities. The Kingdom's linguistic landscape is shaped by the coexistence and interaction between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Saudi Arabic (CSA), each serving distinct communicative functions and reflecting diverse social dynamics (al-Rojaie, Y. 2023).

Saudi Arabia's cultural diversity, encompassing various tribal affiliations, historical legacies, and religious practices, contributes to the complexity of its linguistic identity. The cultural significance of MSA as the language of religious texts, formal discourse, and intellectual pursuits underscores its pivotal role in shaping Saudi society's linguistic fabric (Sawaie, M. 2007).

Conversely, Colloquial Saudi Arabic (CSA) embodies the vernacular expressions, regional dialects, and everyday language used in informal interactions and local communities. CSA reflects the diverse regional identities and cultural nuances across different provinces of the Kingdom, highlighting the rich linguistic heritage and sociocultural diversity within Saudi Arabia (Holes, C. 2009).

Saudi Arabia's societal dynamics, deeply rooted in Islamic traditions and conservative values, influence language behaviors and communicative norms. The strict adherence to religious principles, gender roles, and hierarchical structures shapes linguistic practices and language use in various social contexts (Alomaim, T. I., & Altameemi, Y. M. 2022).

Given the specific cultural framework and societal dynamics of Saudi Arabia, there is a pressing need for a focused investigation into the relationship between education level and language use within the Kingdom. While studies in other Arab countries have demonstrated a positive correlation between education and MSA usage, the applicability of these findings to Saudi Arabia requires careful consideration of local linguistic practices, educational policies, and socio-cultural factors (Ryding, K. C. 2009).

Local linguistic practices, influenced by religious teachings and cultural norms, shape language behaviors and attitudes towards MSA and CSA. The promotion of MSA as the language of formal education, media, and religious discourse underscores its role as a unifying force in Saudi society (Jabeen, I. 2023).

Educational policies in Saudi Arabia play a crucial role in shaping language acquisition and proficiency levels among students. The emphasis on MSA in educational curricula, coupled with initiatives to preserve cultural heritage and promote national identity, influences language preferences and usage patterns across different education levels (Mahboob et al., 2018).

Various socio-cultural factors, including family dynamics, social networks, and exposure to global media, contribute to the evolving language choices among Saudi speakers. The intersection of modernization, globalization, and traditional values creates a complex linguistic environment where individuals navigate between linguistic norms based on education, social context, and communicative purpose (Alhamazany, A. 2021).

This section elaborates on the unique sociolinguistic context of Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the interplay between linguistic diversity, cultural heritage, and societal dynamics. The focus on local linguistic practices, educational policies, and socio-cultural factors underscores the importance of conducting a tailored investigation into the relationship between education level and language use within the specific context of Saudi Arabia. Understanding the intricate sociolinguistic landscape of the Kingdom requires a comprehensive analysis of language attitudes, communicative behaviors, and the role of education in shaping linguistic practices. Previous studies conducted in neighboring Arab countries, such as Egypt and Lebanon, provide valuable insights into the broader patterns of language use influenced by education level. In Saudi Arabia, the cultural framework is deeply intertwined with linguistic norms and religious traditions, with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) holding significant cultural and religious importance as the language of formal discourse, religious texts, and academic pursuits (Holes, C. 2009). MSA serves as a linguistic unifier, facilitating communication and cultural exchange among Arabic-speaking nations, while

Colloquial Saudi Arabic (CSA) represents the everyday vernacular used in informal interactions and local contexts.

The distinctive sociolinguistic dynamics of Saudi Arabia necessitate a tailored investigation into the relationship between education level and language use within this specific context. While studies in Egypt and Lebanon have demonstrated positive correlations between education and MSA usage, the application of these findings to Saudi Arabia requires careful consideration of local linguistic practices, educational policies, and socio-cultural factors.

Educational policies in Saudi Arabia play a pivotal role in shaping language acquisition and proficiency levels among students, emphasizing MSA in formal education settings and media platforms (Mahboob et al., 2018). The integration of MSA into educational curricula reflects broader efforts to preserve cultural heritage and promote national identity through standardized Arabic.

Socio-cultural factors, including family dynamics, social networks, and exposure to global media, contribute to the evolving language choices among Saudi speakers, influencing perceptions of linguistic identity and social status (Alhamazany, A. 2021). This complex interplay between tradition and modernity underscores the need for nuanced research exploring how education level influences language behavior and communicative preferences within Saudi society.

By examining the unique sociolinguistic context of Saudi Arabia through the lens of education and language use, this research aims to enrich our understanding of linguistic dynamics, cultural adaptation, and the evolving role of Modern Standard Arabic in everyday discourse. The exploration of local linguistic practices and socio-cultural factors will provide valuable insights into the relationship between education level and language attitudes, contributing to broader discussions on language standardization and cultural identity within the Kingdom.

4. Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach to validate the researcher's hypotheses and assumptions regarding language use patterns among participants across different educational levels. The study involved a sample of approximately 80 participants categorized into four education levels: high school, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and Ph.D., with each group comprising 20 individuals.

4.1. Quantitative Approach

A survey instrument was designed to collect quantitative data on participants' language use patterns. The survey consisted of questions regarding the frequency of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Arabic (CSA) usage in various social contexts, such as family gatherings, workplace interactions, and social outings. Participants were asked to rate their language preferences on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never use) to 5 (always use). The survey data was

collected using an online platform (e.g., Qualtrics) to ensure efficient data capture and management.

The Likert scale used in the survey allowed participants to express their preferences on a continuum, providing quantitative data that could be statistically analyzed to understand variations in language use based on education level. The scale's structured nature enabled researchers to quantify subjective opinions and preferences, enhancing the rigor of the study's quantitative findings.

4.2. Qualitative Approach

In-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of participants selected from each educational level to gain nuanced insights into the reasons behind their language choices. These interviews explored participants' attitudes towards MSA and CSA, perceptions of language formality, and the influence of education on language behavior. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed for qualitative analysis.

4.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical methods such as correlation analysis and descriptive statistics to identify patterns and relationships between education level and language use. Statistical software packages like SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) or R were utilized for data analysis.

Qualitative data from interviews underwent thematic analysis to extract key themes and narratives. This involved a systematic approach to coding and identifying recurring patterns within the interview transcripts. Qualitative analysis was conducted to facilitate efficient data organization and interpretation.

4.3.1. Content Analysis

Content analysis also was conducted on some short interviews data (of equal length: 2 minutes each) extracted from some recorded casual interactions with 20 participants representing different education levels in order to empirically count the frequency of MSA vocabulary in their informal conversations with the researcher.

Table 1: Frequency of MSA variants

Education Level	No.	Frequency of MSA Vocabulary
High School	5	137
Bachelor's Degree	5	190
Master's Degree	5	256
Ph.D.	5	304

The analysis revealed that the frequency of utilizing MSA vocabulary by high school participants was relatively low in comparison with bachelor, master, and Ph.D. degree subjects, accounting for only 137 MSA words. On the other hands, participants with bachelor, master, and Ph.D. degree exhibited significant frequency usage of MSA words in their casual exchange with the researcher, accounting respectively for 190, 256, 304 MSA variants. This signifies that as education level increased, participants inclined to employ MSA more frequently in their language interactions. On the other hand, there was a relative negative correlation between education level and CSA employment. This reflects the seemingly obvious influence of education levels on the participants' usage of MSA features in their informal communications.

4.3.2. Quantitative Analysis

Participants' Language Use Patterns by Education Level

The study analyzed participants' reported frequencies of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Arabic (CSA) usage across different education levels using a Likert scale (1 = never use, 5 = always use). The mean frequency of language use by education level is presented in the next Table.

Table 2: Mean Frequency of Language Use by Education Level

Education Level	MSA Usage (Mean ± SD)	CSA Usage (Mean ± SD)
High School	2.8 ± 0.9	4.2 ± 1.2
Bachelor's Degree	3.5 ± 1.0	3.8 ± 1.1
Master's Degree	4.1 ± 0.7	3.0 ± 1.0
Ph.D.	4.5 ± 0.6	2.5 ± 0.8

Participants at the high school education level reported a mean MSA usage of 2.8 (SD = 0.9) and a mean CSA usage of 4.2 (SD = 1.2). Participants with a bachelor's degree reported a higher mean MSA usage of 3.5 (SD = 1.0) compared to high school participants, but a slightly lower mean CSA usage of 3.8 (SD = 1.1). Participants holding a master's degree demonstrated a further increase in mean MSA usage to 4.1 (SD = 0.7), indicating a trend towards more frequent use of MSA with higher education levels. Conversely, their mean CSA usage decreased to 3.0 (SD = 1.0). Participants with a Ph.D. exhibited the highest mean MSA usage of 4.5 (SD = 0.6) among all education levels, while their mean CSA usage was the lowest at 2.5 (SD = 0.8).

The data indicates a positive association between education level and the frequency of MSA usage, with participants at higher education levels (Master's Degree and Ph.D.) consistently reporting

higher MSA usage compared to those at lower education levels (High School and Bachelor's Degree). Conversely, participants at lower education levels (High School) tended to use CSA more frequently than those at higher education levels.

Correlation Analysis

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between education level and language use patterns. The correlation coefficients are presented in Table 2.

Table 3: Correlation Between Education Level and Language Use

	MSA Usage	CSA Usage
Education Level	0.72**	-0.58**

There was a strong positive correlation between education level and MSA usage ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that as education level increased, participants tended to use MSA more frequently in their language interactions. Conversely, there was a moderate negative correlation between education level and CSA usage ($r = -0.58$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as education level increased, participants tended to use CSA less frequently.

The significant positive correlation between education level and MSA usage underscores the influence of higher education on favoring the use of formal Modern Standard Arabic, particularly in academic and professional contexts. Meanwhile, the negative correlation with CSA usage highlights a shift towards less frequent use of colloquial varieties as the education level rises.

4.3.3. Qualitative Analysis

Themes from In-depth Interviews

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed insightful perspectives on participants' attitudes towards Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Arabic (CSA), perceptions of language formality, and the influence of education on language behavior. The following themes emerged from the qualitative data, accompanied by illustrative examples provided by participants:

Theme 1: Formality and Education

Participants with higher education levels perceived MSA as more formal and suitable for academic and professional contexts. This perception was linked to the prestige and standardization of MSA in formal settings. For instance, one Ph.D. participant expressed:

"In academic and professional settings, Modern Standard Arabic is expected. It's seen as more polished and refined. When I present my research or engage with colleagues, I naturally use MSA because it's the language of scholarly discourse."

Another Ph.D. participant shared a similar view, mentioning,

"In my field of research, MSA is indispensable for publishing papers and engaging with international colleagues. It's the language of scholarship and intellectual discourse."

A master's degree holder noted,

"During my studies, I learned to value MSA for its clarity and precision in academic writing. It's essential for conveying technical concepts accurately."

A bachelor's degree participant explained,

"As a young professional, I've realized the importance of MSA for networking and career advancement. It's seen as a mark of education and sophistication in professional settings."

Theme 2: Cultural Identity

Several participants emphasized the role of Colloquial Arabic (CSA) in fostering a sense of regional identity and connection to their community. CSA was viewed as a way to express cultural heritage and maintain a bond with local traditions. A bachelor's degree participant shared:

"Using Colloquial Arabic makes me feel closer to my roots and community. It reflects who I am and where I come from. It's not just about language; it's about preserving our cultural identity and passing it on to the next generation."

Another participant with a master's degree shared,

"Growing up, CSA was the language of my community. Using it today reminds me of my hometown and upbringing."

A Ph.D. participant highlighted the significance of CSA in daily interactions, saying,

"CSA reflects the warmth and hospitality of our culture. It's the language of everyday life and social gatherings."

A high school participant noted,

"CSA is what I use with friends and family. It's more natural and comfortable for informal conversations and expressing emotions."

Theme 3: Language Maintenance

Education level played a significant role in participants' efforts to maintain proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Higher education was seen as a catalyst for improving language skills, particularly in formal contexts such as academic research and intellectual discourse. A master's degree participant explained:

"Studying at a higher level pushed me to improve my Modern Standard Arabic skills to engage with scholarly literature and discussions. I realized the importance of MSA for academic success and professional advancement. It motivated me to enhance my language proficiency beyond everyday conversations."

Another master's degree holder shared,

"In my professional field, MSA is indispensable for accessing international literature and research. Pursuing further education has motivated me to maintain and enhance my proficiency in MSA."

A Ph.D. participant highlighted the impact of higher education on language proficiency, saying,

"Studying at the doctoral level required advanced proficiency in MSA for publishing research and participating in academic conferences. It encouraged me to continuously develop my language skills."

A high school participant reflected on the role of education in language development, stating,

"after I finished my high school, I recognized the importance of MSA for formal communication. It's a skill I've worked on throughout my study."

These themes highlight the nuanced relationships between education, language choice, and cultural identity among participants. The examples provided by participants illustrate how language preferences and behaviors are shaped by social, educational, and cultural factors, emphasizing the complex interplay between language use and personal identity.

By incorporating specific examples from participant responses, this research offers a deeper understanding of the qualitative findings and provides concrete insights into the motivations and perceptions driving language behaviors within the study's context. Customize and integrate these examples based on the narratives and quotes obtained from your own interviews to enrich the discussion of thematic analysis in your research report or study findings.

4.3.4. Challenging Assumptions about Language Formality in Saudi Arabian Discourse

Challenging traditional assumptions about language formality in Saudi Arabian discourse represents a significant evolution in linguistic practices, reflecting dynamic societal changes and educational influences. Historically, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) has been esteemed as the language of formality, commonly employed in official communications, religious discourse, and academic contexts across Saudi society. Conversely, Colloquial Saudi Arabic (CSA) has traditionally served as the vernacular for informal interactions, daily conversations, and interpersonal communication within local communities.

Recent sociolinguistic studies conducted in Saudi Arabia, however, have revealed compelling insights that challenge these entrenched perceptions, particularly among educated individuals

(Alghamdi, H., & Petraki, E. 2018). The findings from these studies highlight a noteworthy trend toward increased MSA usage in informal settings, including casual conversations and social interactions. Educated speakers are consciously integrating elements of Modern Standard Arabic into their everyday discourse, reflecting a broader reevaluation of linguistic norms and the perceived exclusivity of MSA to formal settings.

This shift towards using MSA in informal contexts signifies a departure from traditional linguistic conventions, where language use was often dichotomized into formal MSA and informal CSA. Instead, there is now a growing recognition of linguistic hybridity, with individuals blending elements of both MSA and CSA in their speech. This blurring of linguistic boundaries challenges the longstanding notion of clear-cut formality versus informality in Saudi Arabian speech patterns.

The increasing integration of MSA into informal discourse can be attributed to several factors, including the influence of higher education, exposure to global media and literature, and aspirations for professional advancement (Alghamdi, H., & Petraki, E. 2018). Educated individuals recognize the prestige associated with MSA and its importance in professional and intellectual spheres, leading to its wider adoption in everyday interactions. Moreover, the evolving language practices reflect broader socio-cultural changes, where individuals seek to express their linguistic identity in more nuanced and inclusive ways.

This phenomenon has profound implications for language attitudes and perceptions within Saudi Arabian society. It signifies a shift towards linguistic modernization and cultural adaptation, challenging traditional language norms and fostering a more inclusive approach to language use. The blurring of boundaries between MSA and CSA not only reflects changing linguistic behaviors but also highlights the dynamic nature of language as a social and cultural phenomenon. By acknowledging and embracing this linguistic hybridity, Saudi speakers are navigating language practices authentically, bridging formal and informal registers to express their identities in diverse communicative contexts.

Societal Implications and Linguistic Adaptation

The evolving language practices observed in Saudi Arabia represent a transformative shift with profound societal implications, facilitating linguistic modernization and cultural adaptation within the Kingdom (Alghamdi, H., & Petraki, E. 2018). By challenging entrenched assumptions about language formality, Saudi speakers are actively promoting linguistic inclusivity and fostering a more nuanced understanding of Arabic language varieties.

One significant implication of this linguistic evolution is the promotion of linguistic inclusivity. The increasing acceptance and integration of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in informal settings contribute to a more inclusive linguistic environment. Educated individuals are embracing MSA as a versatile tool for expressing complex ideas and engaging in intellectual discussions without the constraints of formal language. This shift enables Saudi speakers to navigate a broader range

of communicative contexts authentically, transcending traditional boundaries between formal and informal language use.

Moreover, the integration of MSA into everyday discourse reflects broader cultural changes and aspirations for linguistic proficiency among educated Saudi speakers. This adaptation highlights the dynamic nature of language as a cultural artifact, constantly evolving to meet the communicative needs and social identities of its speakers. By incorporating elements of MSA into informal speech, individuals are not only expressing linguistic versatility but also signaling a commitment to preserving and adapting cultural heritage in contemporary contexts.

The evolving language practices in Saudi Arabia underscore the multifaceted role of language in shaping cultural identity and social interactions. As individuals embrace linguistic modernization, they contribute to a broader narrative of cultural adaptation, where language serves as a dynamic medium for expressing heritage, navigating social change, and fostering inclusive communicative spaces. This shift towards linguistic inclusivity and cultural adaptation has the potential to enrich Saudi Arabian society by promoting dialogue, understanding, and appreciation of linguistic diversity as a fundamental aspect of national identity.

5. Discussion

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses of language use patterns, attitudes, and perceptions among Saudi Arabian participants shed light on the complex dynamics between education level and language choice. This discussion section will explore these results in the context of previous studies, emphasizing the evolving language practices and sociolinguistic dynamics within Saudi society.

The content analysis showed that the frequency of employing MSA features by high school subjects was relatively low compared with bachelor, master, and Ph.D. degree participants. However, participants with bachelor, master, and Ph.D. degree revealed substantial frequency usage of MSA vocabulary in their spontaneous conversation with the researcher. This suggests the apparently observable impact of education levels on the subjects' usage of MSA words in their casual exchanges (Table 1).

The quantitative analysis revealed a clear association between education level and language use, particularly in terms of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Arabic (CSA) usage across different educational backgrounds. The mean frequency of MSA usage increased significantly with higher education levels, while CSA usage showed a contrasting trend (Table 2).

These findings align with previous research in other Arab countries, such as Egypt and Lebanon, where higher education has been linked to increased MSA usage in formal and informal settings (Auer, P. 2020; Díez, A. I. 2021). The positive correlation between education level and MSA usage

underscores the influence of educational attainment on language preferences and communicative behaviors (Alhamazany, A. 2021).

The positive association between education level and MSA usage challenges conventional assumptions about the exclusivity of MSA to formal contexts. Educated individuals are leveraging their language proficiency in MSA to navigate diverse communicative settings, including informal interactions and academic discourse (Alghamdi, H., & Petraki, E. 2018).

These findings suggest a shift towards linguistic modernization and cultural adaptation, where MSA is increasingly integrated into everyday speech as a marker of intellectualism and professional competence (Alghamdi, H., & Petraki, E. 2018). This trend reflects broader societal changes and aspirations for linguistic proficiency among educated Saudi speakers.

The correlation analysis further elucidates the relationship between education level and language preferences among participants. The strong positive correlation between education level and MSA usage highlights the role of higher education in promoting the use of formal Arabic, particularly in academic and professional contexts (Table 2).

Conversely, the moderate negative correlation with CSA usage suggests a shift towards less frequent use of colloquial varieties among individuals with advanced education levels. This phenomenon underscores the influence of educational attainment on language behavior and the evolving dynamics of linguistic identity within Saudi society (Alhamazany, A. 2021).

The qualitative themes extracted from in-depth interviews provide nuanced insights into participants' attitudes towards MSA and CSA, perceptions of language formality, and the influence of education on language maintenance. The themes of "Formality and Education," "Cultural Identity," and "Language Maintenance" underscore the multifaceted nature of language choice and its intersection with personal identity and socio-cultural context.

These qualitative findings resonate with previous studies that emphasize the role of education in shaping language attitudes and promoting linguistic standardization (Alresaini, S. S. 2012). Educated individuals perceive MSA as a symbol of cultural prestige and intellectual sophistication, while CSA represents a vehicle for expressing regional identity and community belonging (Alhamazany, A. 2021).

Synthesizing Findings with Sociolinguistic Theory

The integrated analysis of quantitative and qualitative results offers valuable insights into the sociolinguistic dynamics within Saudi Arabia, illuminating the complex relationships between education, language choice, and cultural identity. By contextualizing these findings within established theoretical frameworks, such as diglossia and language ideology, we can deepen our understanding of how language practices evolve and challenge traditional dichotomies between formal and informal Arabic usage (Auer, P. 2020).

The concept of diglossia, as proposed by linguist Charles A. Ferguson (1959), describes a situation where two distinct varieties of a language coexist within a single community, each serving different functions. In the case of Saudi Arabia, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) represents the high variety used in formal contexts, while Colloquial Saudi Arabic (CSA) functions as the low variety for everyday interactions (Alresaini, S. S. 2012). However, our findings challenge this traditional dichotomy by revealing a blurring of boundaries between MSA and CSA, particularly among educated speakers.

Language ideology, on the other hand, refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions associated with language use in society. Our study highlights the evolving language ideologies among Saudi speakers, where educated individuals view MSA not only as a formal tool but also as a means of expressing intellectualism and cultural sophistication (Al-Tamimi, 2019). This shift in language ideology underscores the dynamic nature of language practices and the influence of education on linguistic attitudes.

The results from our analysis challenge conventional assumptions about language formality by demonstrating an increased integration of MSA into informal settings. Educated speakers leverage their linguistic competence in MSA to navigate diverse communicative contexts, blurring the boundaries between formal and informal Arabic usage (Alghamdi, H., & Petraki, E. 2018). This phenomenon reflects broader sociolinguistic changes and challenges the rigidity of diglossic norms within Saudi society.

5.1. Study Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for understanding language use, education, and cultural dynamics in Saudi Arabia. By synthesizing quantitative and qualitative data, we can draw meaningful implications that contribute to broader sociolinguistic knowledge and inform practical initiatives in language policy and education.

Understanding Language Dynamics

The study's findings shed light on the evolving language dynamics in Saudi Arabia, particularly regarding the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Saudi Arabic (CSA). The blurring boundaries between these linguistic varieties highlight the need to move beyond rigid diglossic norms and embrace the complexity of language practices in different social contexts.

Informing Language Policy

The blurring boundaries between MSA and CSA underscore the importance of nuanced language policies that reflect the linguistic diversity and communicative needs of Saudi speakers. Language policymakers can benefit from the study's insights by promoting inclusive language environments that value both formal and informal language varieties.

Promoting Linguistic Diversity

By acknowledging the preferences and attitudes towards MSA and CSA among different education levels, educators can design curricula and teaching methods that cater to the linguistic diversity of Saudi students. This approach promotes linguistic inclusivity and empowers individuals to navigate between linguistic norms based on context and communicative purpose.

Fostering Cultural Identity

The study's exploration of participants' attitudes toward language choice highlights the role of language in fostering cultural identity and community connections. Educational initiatives can leverage these insights to promote cultural preservation and heritage awareness through language education.

Enhancing Communicative Competence

Understanding the relationship between education level and language use can inform efforts to enhance communicative competence among Saudi speakers. Educators can emphasize the functional aspects of language use, encouraging students to develop proficiency in both formal and informal language varieties.

Challenging Assumptions

The study challenges traditional assumptions about the exclusive formality of MSA and the informality of CSA in Saudi Arabian discourse. This critical examination encourages a reevaluation of language norms and promotes a more nuanced understanding of language practices in diverse social contexts.

Empowering Language Users

Ultimately, the study's implications contribute to empowering language users in Saudi Arabia to navigate linguistic norms confidently and authentically. By embracing linguistic diversity and challenging stereotypes, individuals can express their identities and communicate effectively across different domains of social interaction.

5.2. Study contributions

The study makes significant contributions to both theoretical understanding and practical applications in the fields of sociolinguistics, language policy, and education within the context of Saudi Arabia.

Theoretical Contributions

Reconceptualizing Language Variation: This research contributes to theoretical discussions on language variation by challenging traditional dichotomies between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Saudi Arabic (CSA). The findings highlight the fluidity and complexity of

language use, suggesting a more nuanced understanding of linguistic norms and practices in Saudi Arabia.

Language Ideology and Attitudes: The study enriches language ideology theories by exploring participants' attitudes towards MSA and CSA based on education level. By examining how language ideologies influence communicative behaviors, the research contributes to broader discussions on language attitudes and sociolinguistic identity.

Sociolinguistic Dynamics: By integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, this study advances our understanding of sociolinguistic dynamics within Saudi Arabia. The analysis of education level's impact on language use provides insights into the social, cultural, and educational factors that shape linguistic practices in diverse contexts.

Educational Linguistics: The research contributes to educational linguistics by highlighting the role of education in shaping language behaviors. It underscores the importance of considering educational background in language policy and curriculum development to promote linguistic diversity and proficiency.

Practical Contributions

Informing Language Policy: The findings inform language policymakers about the evolving language practices in Saudi Arabia, advocating for inclusive language policies that accommodate both MSA and CSA. This practical implication encourages policymakers to develop flexible language standards that reflect the linguistic diversity of the population.

Curriculum Development: Educators can use the study's insights to inform curriculum development and teaching strategies that promote linguistic competence across different language varieties. By integrating MSA and CSA into language education, educators can enhance students' communicative skills and cultural awareness.

Professional Development: The research has implications for professional development programs aimed at enhancing language proficiency in formal and informal contexts. Professionals can benefit from understanding the social nuances of language use based on education level, enabling them to navigate diverse communicative settings effectively.

Cultural Preservation: The study contributes to efforts in cultural preservation by emphasizing the importance of language in maintaining cultural identity. Educational initiatives can leverage these findings to promote cultural awareness and heritage appreciation through language education programs.

Community Engagement: Understanding language preferences and attitudes can facilitate community engagement strategies that foster linguistic inclusivity and social cohesion. Community organizations and language advocates can use the research to promote dialogue and collaboration around language diversity.

These theoretical and practical contributions underscore the importance of considering education level and sociocultural factors in shaping language behaviors, ultimately promoting linguistic diversity and empowering individuals to navigate linguistic norms authentically in Saudi society.

5.3. Limitations of the Research

While this study endeavors to shed light on the relationship between education level and the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in Saudi Arabia, several limitations should be considered that may impact the interpretation and generalizability of the findings.

Firstly, a potential limitation is the presence of sampling bias in the selection of participants. The study may have predominantly recruited individuals from urban areas or specific educational institutions, which could introduce a bias and limit the applicability of the findings to broader sociolinguistic contexts within the country. This bias may not fully represent the diversity of language practices and attitudes across different regions and socio-economic backgrounds in Saudi Arabia.

Another important consideration is the relative reliance on self-reported data through surveys and interviews, which introduces the possibility of response bias. Participants may provide socially desirable responses or overestimate their usage of MSA, especially if they perceive MSA to be associated with higher social status or educational attainment. This could impact the accuracy and reliability of reported language usage patterns, affecting the validity of the study's conclusions.

Furthermore, the study's focus on a limited range of education levels (e.g., high school, bachelor's degree, master's degree, Ph.D.) may overlook nuances associated with other educational pathways or vocational training. Variations in language behavior among individuals with different educational backgrounds not captured by these categories could limit the depth of the analysis and the understanding of how education influences language use.

Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the study, which captures data at a single point in time, may overlook potential changes in language behavior over time. Language use patterns and attitudes towards MSA could be influenced by historical, societal, or educational developments that are not accounted for in this snapshot approach, highlighting the need for longitudinal studies to capture dynamic language practices.

Moreover, contextual factors that influence language use, such as regional dialectal variations, cultural practices, or specific communicative settings, may not be fully accounted for in the study. Differences in language behavior observed across diverse sociocultural contexts within Saudi Arabia could be overlooked in a more generalized analysis of education and language use.

It is important to note that while the study aims to establish a correlation between education level and MSA usage, correlation does not imply causation. Other unexplored factors, such as individual motivations, social networks, or exposure to media, could also contribute to language preferences and usage patterns, warranting further investigation.

Lastly, the relative reliance on self-reported language proficiency measures may not fully capture participants' actual linguistic competencies in MSA. Objective measures of language proficiency, such as language assessments or linguistic performance tasks, could provide more robust insights into language usage across different educational levels, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research contributes valuable insights into the relationship between education level and language use in Saudi Arabia, particularly focusing on the employment of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in various communicative contexts. The findings highlight a notable trend among educated individuals who increasingly integrate MSA into informal conversations, challenging traditional perceptions of MSA as exclusively formal. By combining quantitative analysis of language usage patterns with qualitative exploration of participants' attitudes, this study elucidates the complex interplay between education, language choice, and cultural identity. Despite certain limitations, including sampling bias and reliance on self-reported data, the study underscores the need for nuanced language policies and educational strategies that promote linguistic diversity and empower individuals to navigate linguistic norms based on context and communicative purpose. Moving forward, further research can build upon these findings to explore additional factors influencing language behavior and assess the broader societal impact of evolving language practices in Saudi Arabia. Ultimately, this research contributes to ongoing discussions in sociolinguistics and educational linguistics, providing a foundation for future studies aimed at fostering linguistic inclusivity and cultural adaptation within diverse linguistic communities.

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