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Psycholinguistic Perspectives on Jordanian University Students' Attitudes toward Uncommon Arabic Personal Names

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ABSTRACT

Personal names are fundamental linguistic and social markers that influence identity, self-perception, and societal interactions. This study examines the attitudes of Jordanian university students toward uncommon Arabic personal names, focusing on their perceptions of the social and psychological implications of these names. A dataset of unusual Arabic names was extracted from the University of Jordan Yearbook (2019/2020), identifying names that appeared only once. A structured 13-item questionnaire was administered to 150 University of Jordan students, with validation conducted by a panel of psycholinguistics experts. Results indicate that 74% of students hold positive attitudes toward uncommon names, with 76% willing to name their children accordingly. Perceived benefits include individuality and distinction, whereas concerns focus on potential social ridicule. Students attribute the rise of unique names to societal shifts, cultural identity, and influences from modernisation. Gender differences emerged, with students favouring uncommon names for females more than males due to associations with uniqueness and aesthetic appeal. The findings highlight the intricate relationship between language, culture, and individual identity, providing a deeper understanding of the psychological and societal factors that shape name perception. This study offers insights into the evolving linguistic landscape of Arabic personal naming conventions, bridging the fields of sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics.

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1. Introduction

Personal names are fundamental linguistic and social markers that influence identity, self-perception, and societal interactions. This study explores university students' attitudes toward unusual personal names, with a particular focus on how Jordanian university students react to uncommon first names such as faraza:nah, niʕmati:, ðu ʔalkafla:, sa:ʃa:, safa:nah, and qadar. Unusual names have been variously classified as uncommon [1], unique [2], or peculiar [3]. One of the most widely used methods for identifying unusual names is to select those that appear only once or very infrequently within a given population [4]. The atypical nature of these names may stem from their semantics, morphology, or phonology, distinguishing them from conventional and commonly used names in terms of meaning, orthographic representation, structural form, and pronunciation [5].

Names are more than mere identifiers; they hold significant sociocultural and psychological weight. As Allerton [6] explains, personal names "serve principally to label and identify individuals." However, Nkechi and Benjamin [7] argue that names contribute to personhood and identity, playing a crucial role in personality development and reflecting cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. Similarly, Cutter, Fensham, and Sumner [8] highlight how naming conventions shape recognition and serve as key sociocultural identifiers. Like language, names are dynamic and evolve in response to social, political, technological, and environmental influences. Sabet and Zhang [9] found that shifts in naming practices are closely linked to broader sociocultural trends, often marked by a decline in the selection of names from traditional sources in favour of more distinctive choices.

The impact of names extends beyond individual identity, affecting various aspects of life, including educational performance, self-esteem, and emotional well-being. Karlin and Bell [10] assert that an individual's first name can influence academic achievements, self-esteem, and emotional stability. Hunt [11] also found that name choice and societal reactions to names significantly shape identity development and academic performance. While names can serve as sources of empowerment, they may also expose individuals to bias and discrimination. Given the deep connection between names and identity, how individuals engage with their names within social and cultural contexts can influence their self-perception and societal treatment. Prior research has established a strong correlation between name preference and self-esteem [12], further demonstrating the psychological significance of personal names.

Research on unusual and unique names has yielded varied perspectives across cultural contexts. Ramaeba [5], in a study of Scotland, found that most unique and unusual personal names were more frequently assigned to females than males, often reflecting cultural minority status. These were also commonly compound names, reflecting distinctive sociocultural and linguistic influences. Similarly, DeAza [13] explored the psychological implications of unusual names, concluding that individuals with uncommon names are often misunderstood and perceived negatively, adversely affecting self-identity and self-esteem.

Despite the growing global interest in naming practices and their sociolinguistic implications, there is a notable gap in research concerning Arabic personal names, particularly in the Jordanian context. Given the evident impact of names on identity and social belonging, this study explores Jordanian university students' perceptions of unusual Arabic personal names, addressing male and female name preferences.

It is important to clarify that the term "uncommon Arabic names" in this study is used descriptively, without any judgment or negative implication. Rather than categorizing certain names as unusual or undesirable, this research aims to explore sociolinguistic perceptions of names that are less frequently encountered in Jordanian society. Naming conventions are deeply tied to cultural identity, history, and globalization, and understanding how individuals perceive and respond to different names provides insight into evolving linguistic and cultural trends.

This study aims to bridge the gap in the literature by examining Jordanian university students' attitudes toward uncommon Arabic personal names. Specifically, it seeks to address the following research questions:

(1) What are university students' attitudes towards unusual

personal names, and what reasons influence their preferences?

(2) What are the potential effects of unusual personal names on their bearers, as perceived by the students?

(3) What factors, as the students perceive, contribute to the rise of unusual personal names?

(4) How do university students perceive individuals with unusual personal names in terms of social and cultural impressions?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study examines university students' attitudes toward unusual names, a phenomenon deeply rooted in sociocultural and psycholinguistic influences. To ensure a robust analytical foundation, this section draws upon Bourdieu's theory of social capital and psycholinguistic theories, which provide critical insights into how names function as linguistic and social constructs. These frameworks help contextualise the significance of names as identifiers and markers of identity, status, and cultural affiliation.

Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory

Bourdieu's theory of social capital offers a valuable lens for examining the social dimensions of naming practices. According to Bourdieu[14], social capital consists of resources derived from established networks and relationships, significantly influencing an individual's position within social hierarchies. In this context, personal names serve as symbolic capital, shaping perceptions of identity and social status[15]. Unusual names, in particular, may be perceived differently depending on social and cultural contexts—some may view them as symbols of individuality, creativity, and cultural pride. In contrast, others may see them as markers of nonconformity or marginalisation.

Bourdieu[15] further argues that the value and significance of a name are determined by social recognition within a given network of relationships. A name can elevate an individual's perceived prestige, distinguishing them from their peers, or conversely, it may lead to exclusion or stigma. For example, in the Jordanian context, an uncommon Arabic name may be interpreted as a reflection of heritage and distinction or as a deviation from traditional norms, affecting how individuals are socially received. Thus, Bourdieu's

framework highlights naming conventions' dynamic and context-dependent nature, emphasising their role in structuring social interactions and identity formation.

Psycholinguistic Perspectives on Name Perception

From a psycholinguistic perspective, names function as cognitive and emotional triggers, shaping perceptions, expectations, and social interactions. Theories such as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and schema theory provide a foundation for understanding how individuals mentally process and interpret unusual names.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis [16] posits that language influences thought, suggesting that the structure and phonology of a name can shape how it is perceived. Names that deviate from conventional phonological patterns or carry unconventional meanings may evoke distinct cognitive associations, affecting how individuals respond to them and how name-bearers are socially received. This aligns with the idea that linguistic name variation can reinforce cultural identity while influencing broader perceptions of personality and status.

Schema theory, first proposed by Bartlett[17], further explains how individuals rely on pre-existing cognitive frameworks to interpret names. When encountering an unusual name, people activate schemas linked to social stereotypes, cultural identity, or personal uniqueness. These cognitive shortcuts help explain attitude variations as individuals assess names based on linguistic familiarity, social prestige, and cultural connotations. For instance, Jordanian university students encountering an uncommon Arabic name may instinctively associate it with heritage, social class, or contemporary naming trends, shaping their attitudes accordingly.

The intersection of Bourdieu's social capital theory and psycholinguistic perspectives establishes a multidisciplinary framework that positions this research within language, culture, and social identity. Bourdieu's theory provides a macro-level understanding of how naming practices reflect and reinforce social structures. In contrast, psycholinguistic theories offer a micro-level examination of cognitive and emotional processes related to name perception.

By integrating these perspectives, this study comprehensively analyses how Jordanian university students perceive and emotionally react to unusual Arabic names, considering broader sociolinguistic dynamics and individual cognitive processes. This framework allows for a nuanced

exploration of naming conventions as linguistic forms and social indicators, shedding light on the evolving relationship between language, identity, and cultural belonging.

2.2. Relevant Recent Studies

The significance of personal names extends beyond mere identification; they function as sociocultural markers that influence privilege, discrimination, and self-perception. Scholars have examined how names shape societal treatment and individual identity across various cultural and linguistic settings. Phelps-Ward and Kim[18] argue that names reflect sociocultural identity and status, often as tools of privilege or oppression. Individuals inherit rather than choose their names, so these markers can grant social advantage or reinforce marginalisation. Carter[19] further highlights that naming privilege is often linked to gendered expectations, where names influence societal assumptions about masculinity and femininity.

The broader implications of naming conventions have been explored in diverse cultural contexts. Landgrave[20] found that ethnic names in foreign environments can lead to social exclusion and decreased job opportunities. However, these names can also strengthen cultural identity and foster a more profound sense of belonging. Similarly, Nelson[21] underscores that names are embedded in power structures, shaping social treatment and institutional expectations.

Beyond societal perceptions, unusual names hold psychological significance. Ezechukwu (2022) asserts that names derived from cultural heritage carry sociolinguistic values, guiding their bearers toward success by shaping their beliefs and self-perception. Kang et al.[22] suggest that individuals with uncommon names may develop a stronger sense of individuality, leading to creative and nontraditional choices in their personal and professional lives.

The increasing preference for unique names has been documented across multiple regions. Bao, Cai, Jing, and Wang[23] confirm that China has witnessed a rise in the use of uncommon characters and deviations from traditional naming conventions, reflecting a societal shift toward individualism. Similarly, Ogihara[24] found that Japan has experienced a comparable trend, particularly in naming girls, where parents opt for distinctive names to emphasise uniqueness and self-expression.

Naming practices are also tied to liberation and identity reclamation. Gómez[25] suggests that embracing culturally significant names can serve as an act of resistance against historical erasure, reinforcing ethnic identity. Reynolds, Ponterotto, Park-Taylor, and Takooshian[26] similarly found that reclaiming one's name can have profound psychological effects, fostering self-esteem and personal growth. These studies emphasise names' dynamic role in resisting and reinforcing social structures.

Broader sociolinguistic research indicates that naming conventions evolve in response to demographic shifts, migration, and technological advancements. Bush et al.[27] analysed 22 million names registered in England and Wales between 1838 and 2014, revealing that rare names have become increasingly popular due to their perceived distinctiveness. However, as such names gain acceptance, their uniqueness diminishes. The study also found that social networks and globalisation contribute to diversifying naming choices as cross-cultural influences become more prominent.

In Arabic-speaking communities, naming practices are deeply influenced by religion, history, and societal values. Alzamil[28] categorised Saudi female names into distinct themes, including religious, Bedouin, family-based, circumstantial, and foreign-influenced names, highlighting that names are not randomly assigned but reflect deeply ingrained cultural traditions. Likewise, Abu Hatab[29] found that Arabic naming conventions remain primarily influenced by Islamic traditions and natural and environmental factors. These studies illustrate how naming practices in the Arab world continue to be shaped by longstanding socio-cultural influences.

Despite substantial research on naming trends in global contexts, studies on Arabic personal names—particularly unusual ones—remain limited. Salih[30] conducted one of the earliest investigations into Jordanian university students' attitudes toward foreign names given to girls, finding that students generally held positive views toward such names due to their linguistic simplicity, uniqueness, and perceived modernity. Salih concluded that this shift reflected broader cultural changes as individuals moved away from traditional religious and historically significant names in favour of more globally influenced options.

Focusing on Bedouin communities in Jordan, Al-Momani[31] investigated first-name preferences in the Al-Djiza District, finding that environmental and socio-cultural

factors strongly influence Bedouin naming traditions. Similarly, Aljbour and Al-Haq[32] traced naming trends across three generations of the Beni Sakhr tribe, revealing a gradual shift from exclusively Bedouin names to more modern and diverse naming patterns due to increased urbanisation.

Despite the growing body of research on naming conventions, a notable gap in studies addressing unusual Arabic names in the Jordanian context remains. Most existing research has focused on foreign name adoption, gender-based naming preferences, and general sociocultural influences on naming. However, little attention has been given to how Jordanian university students perceive Arabic personal names that are uncommon for males and females.

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the attitudes of Jordanian university students toward unusual Arabic personal names. By drawing on sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and cultural perspectives, this research seeks to expand understanding of naming practices within Jordanian society and their influence on identity, perception, and social belonging.

3. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative survey to examine Jordanian university students' attitudes toward unusual Arabic personal names. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, ensuring standardised measurement, comparability, and statistical reliability. The study design was developed to maintain scientific rigour, incorporating validated data collection instruments, a robust sampling strategy, and careful ethical considerations.

The study sample consisted of 150 second-year students majoring in Applied English at the University of Jordan, enrolled in the first semester of the 2021/2022 academic year. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling approach from students enrolled in the Essentials of Public Speaking class. The age range of participants was between 19 and 20 years, ensuring a relatively homogeneous cohort in terms of academic and social background.

The selection of this sample size was informed by practical considerations, including accessibility and resource availability, while also aligning with established norms in psycholinguistic research, where samples of 100–200 participants are considered adequate for statistical power and

meaningful inferential analysis. While the sample does not fully represent all Jordanian university students, efforts were made to capture a diverse cross-section of students from different socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds, enhancing the study's generalizability to a broader population.

The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire comprising 13 closed-ended items to assess students' attitudes toward unusual Arabic personal names. The questionnaire covered multiple dimensions, including perceived favourability of unusual names, reasons for liking or disliking uncommon names, gendered preferences for unusual names, perceived social and psychological impact of name choices, and the influence of external factors such as media and cultural trends on naming preferences. The questionnaire was developed based on existing literature on psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics, ensuring that the items were theoretically grounded. Additionally, the questionnaire was designed to be concise and clear, requiring approximately 20 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire underwent rigorous expert validation to ensure validity and cultural appropriateness. A panel of four psycholinguistics professors from the University of Jordan, all native speakers of Jordanian-spoken Arabic, reviewed the questionnaire for content accuracy, clarity, and relevance. Their feedback led to minor modifications to improve item formulation and ensure alignment with psycholinguistic principles and cultural nuances.

A pilot study was conducted with 30 students before the full-scale data collection to refine the questionnaire, identify any ambiguities, and improve clarity and response reliability. The feedback from the pilot study was incorporated into the final questionnaire version.

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha, a widely used reliability coefficient in social science research. The final version of the questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.87, indicating high reliability and strong internal consistency. This confirms that the items consistently measured the intended constructs, ensuring that the data collected is statistically robust and dependable for subsequent analysis.

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to protect participants' rights and confidentiality. Ethical approval was obtained from the Deanship of Scientific Research at the Applied Science Private University in Jordan, under approval

number FAH/2022–2023/12. Before participation, written informed consent was obtained from all students, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and they retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. No personal identifiers were collected, and all data was securely stored and used solely for academic research purposes.

After data collection, the responses were entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 26 for analysis. The data analysis followed a three-stage approach. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarise participants' attitudes toward unusual names, including means, frequencies, and percentages. Second, reliability testing was conducted to verify internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. Third, inferential analysis was performed, using chi-square tests and t-tests to examine relationships between students' demographics (e.g., gender, linguistic background) and their naming preferences. Additionally, factor analysis was conducted to explore underlying dimensions influencing name perceptions. The triangulation of quantitative measures ensured that the findings were methodologically sound, statistically significant, and theoretically meaningful.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Addressing Research Question 1: University Students' Attitudes toward Unusual Personal Names

The socio-cultural influence of names first stems from people's general attitudes towards them. These attitudes can be positive or negative and may be influenced by various factors. Thus, the questionnaire included six items that aimed to gauge the perceptions of university students, as a relevant social group, towards unusual names.

The first item related directly to positivity and negativity and found that most of the study sample liked unusual names while others disliked them. With 74% liking, compared to only 26% disliking such names, a generally positive attitude towards unusual personal names is perceived. Furthermore, 76% of the students also indicated a willingness to give their own children unusual names emphasizing their positive reception. Meanwhile, only 24% expressed an unwillingness to give unusual names to their children.

The second and third items aimed to explain these attitudes to supplement the percentages with insight deeper than an emotional response. The second item focused on the reasoning of the students who expressed positive feelings. This was achieved by providing six potential reasons for the study samples to select the one they found most agreeable.

The leading reason realized in this item was the ability of an unusual name to distinguish its bearer. This reflects the suggestions of Sabet and Zhang[9], who attributed such naming patterns to a more distinctive nature. Of the 111 students who liked unusual names, 40.5% (n = 45) attributed this attitude to this property.

A significant difference is noticed between the prominence of this reasoning and the ones that follow. The second and third most selected reasons were the beauty and uncommonness of the names and what they represent of a kind of change and renewal at 21.6% (n = 24) and 18.9% (n = 21), respectively. The remaining three reasons were considerably less relevant to the participants. Only 8.1% (n = 9) chose "A chance to know new names and meanings". The names were unforgettable, and these names attracted the attention of others, each selected by 5.4% (n = 6), suggesting a low influence on the positive attitudes towards unusual names.

Four potential reasons were provided for dislike of unusual names. Difficulty pronouncing and remembering such names dominated the chosen option, and of the 39 students who expressed dislike, 46.1% (n = 18) attributed this to their reasoning. The uncommonness and unpopularity of these names were the reasons for another 30.7% (n = 12). This quality, attributed to the liking and disliking of unusual names, indicates significant subjectivity in these attitudes. 15.3% (n = 6) attributed their dislike to believing that such names could cause problems such as sarcasm and embarrassment for their bearers. Peterson, Gunn, Brice, and Alley[33] found that peers' mockery of names can upset and cause trouble for their bearers. The remaining 7.6% (n = 3) related their dislike to a belief that these names are given to make their bearers distinguished, suggesting they feel that these names are given for a disingenuous, pretentious purpose.

As sociocultural and psycholinguistic items, names relate to many aspects of identity. Thus, the relevance of gender to identity across cultures potentially has a strong influence on naming conventions and attitudes towards them.

Hence, the questionnaire examined how gender and unusual names are perceived in relation to one another, looking into their interconnection. Specifically, the participants were inquired whether the gender of the bearers of unusual names affected their reception, seeing whether they preferred them for males or females while also exploring the reasons behind said preferences. These issues were presented as three items in the questionnaire.

The first of these items, question 4, indicated a high inclination towards preferring unusual names for females rather than males. 72% (n = 108) of the participants expressed this sentiment, meanwhile a meager 8% (n = 12) indicated the opposite. The remaining participants suggested that gender did not significantly influence their attitudes, with 16% (n = 24) indicating they preferred such names for both genders. In comparison, the remaining 4% (n = 6) indicated they did not prefer such names for either of the two.

Ten potential reasons were also provided to explain the preference for such names to belong to females. Out of the participants who preferred unusual names for females, 19.4% (n = 21) agreed that such names are more suitable for females than they are for males. Moreover, 13.8% (n = 15) stated there was no reason behind this preference. Another 13.8% (n = 15) found that the beauty of unique names was more suitable for females. These views attributed femininity either consciously or subconsciously to unique names.

Furthermore, an additional 13.8% (n = 15) believed that such names contradict masculinity and thus are more suitable for females as they think male names must reflect masculinity and a strong personality. 8.3% (n = 9) expressed a similar notion, believing that males do not accept such names in Arabic society and that they reduce the respect for males. 5.5% (n = 6) also believed such names could embarrass males, while another 5.5% (n = 6) found that these names were more likely to cause issues for men as they deal more with people in daily life than females. These reasonings all reflect or build upon societal and personal views on gender. These views relate masculinity to a strong, respectable identity reflecting a patriarchal and traditional perception of gender norms. This aligns with the argument of Carter[19], which related names, their influence, and their perception of societal gender norms and expectations.

The remaining reasons, however, are connected to naming conventions. For instance, 8.3% (n = 9) believed that females should be more distinguished by name; on a similar note, 5.5% (n = 6) found that more unusual female names should be given as female names have become repetitive. The remaining 5.5% (n = 6) expressed that unusual names should not be given to males as they should be named after prophets, historical figures and leaders. This follows the Arab naming traditions and conventions cited by Abu Hatab[29].

When it came to the 12 participants who preferred unusual names for males, half did not provide a reason. However, 25% (n = 5) stated that the change should begin with males. The other 25% (n = 5) believed that male names should have some adventure and strength. While these participants expressed a different preference regarding whether unusual names should be given to males or females, similar perceptions on gender could be found in their reasonings.

The feedback gathered from the questionnaire thus indicates that students' attitudes lean significantly towards positivity and acceptance. This positive attitude is increased when the name bearer is female, which aligns with Salih's findings[30].

4.2. Addressing Research Question 2: Perceived Effects of Unusual Names on Their Bearers

Names do not exist in an abstract vacuum, and their attachment to their bearers may thus affect their lives. The research gauged some positive and negative effects that the students perceived as possible due to possessing an unusual name.

Five positive effects were presented in the questionnaire. The effects that received the most resonance was their ability to distinguish their bearers, followed by their ability to increase self-confidence at 42% (n = 63) and 24% (n = 36), respectively. This aligns with the suggestion by Kang et al.[22] that unique names have distinctive properties which could shape the bearer's self-image. Hunt (2024) also connected names with self-perception and self-esteem. Moreover, 18% (n = 27) selected the option "leaving a positive effect on their bearers' life". Regarding the qualities of the name, 12% (n = 18) found that having an unusual name would make the bearer unforgettable. The remaining 4% found that possessing an unusual name allows its bearer to have a name with a beautiful meaning. These effects relate both to self-

identity and how one is perceived by others emphasizing the psycholinguistic aspects of a name.

On the other hand, some of the perceived effects were negative. The most prominent negative effect of these names from the student's perspective, according to 26% (n = 39), is that these names can cause problems to their bearers, such as embarrassment and sarcasm. This issue relates to the reactions of others towards unusual names. On a similar note, 14% of the students posited that these names are tricky to pronounce and remember, which was noticed by DeAza[13], who stated that unusual or difficult-to-pronounce names negatively influence their bearers. This also aligns with one of the reasons expressed by some students for the dislike of unusual names. Also, 14% of students believed these names might hurt their bearers, especially if they are not beautiful or difficult to pronounce. Moreover, 14% of students believed that these names lead to social isolation and difficulty in communication with others, and this goes in line with DeAza[13], who posited that people with unusual names are more likely to be rejected by others. These negative effects can also be related to the social aspects of names and their ability to influence how a person is perceived and treated.

Regarding self-image, 6% of students indicated that these names lead to a lack of self-confidence for their bearers. Additionally, 8% of students reported that these names can cause shyness in their bearers. Though only 2%, some students considered that these names can cause psychological problems such as depression for their bearers. In contrast, 4% of students believed these names might make their bearers arrogant, ascribing a negative quality to an unusual name's potential increase in self-confidence. Another 4% of students said these names may make their bearers aggressive.

8% of students also indicated a cultural concern, believing that these names provide a significant source for the influence and spread of foreign cultures in Arab societies. Thus, these negative effects can be related to social, personal, and cultural identities and perceptions.

The students also provided information on whether possessing unusual names may cause problems for their bearers. A significant majority, 72% (n = 108), believed that having a strange or unusual name would cause problems for its bearer, while only 28% (n = 42) believed otherwise. According to those who believed that unusual names could cause problems, the most significant issues were sarcasm and criticism, selected by 22.2% (n = 24); difficult pronunciation, selected by 19.4% (n = 21); causing embarrassment and shyness, selected by 16.6% (n = 18), and causing social isolation selected by 13.8% (n = 15). This caused arrogance and difficulty regarding official papers that were selected by 5.5% (n = 6) each. The remaining issues were chosen by 2.7% (n = 3) each. Three of these related to the meaning of the name and included causing wondering and confusion, causing difficulty in understanding the name's meaning, and the possibility of the name having a bad meaning. The final three issues included the name belonging to a different religion, the possibility of the name leading people to give quick and wrong impressions about the bearer of such names, and the possibility that society may refuse the name.

The responses to these items indicate that regardless of the generally positive attitude asserted in the previous research question, the students believe that unusual names could positively and negatively influence the lives of their bearers. Moreover, these effects relate to personal and social perception and treatment. Additionally, many of these effects are psychological in nature.

Addressing Research Question 3: Factors Contributing to the Rise of Unusual Names

When asked about the reasons they believe lead parents to give their children unusual names, the questionnaire provided eighteen potential reasons. At 20% (n = 30), the parents' desire to distinguish their children was the reasoning selected by the highest number of participants. This reasoning aligns with the most common reason the students liked this type of personal name, the qualities of unusual names and their influence on perception, pointed out by Bourdieu[15]. 16% (n = 24) of the students believed that these names are given due to a desire for change and renewal, which also reflects a common reason the students gave for liking unusual names. 12% (n = 18) of the students attributed giving these names to a liking of the name or certain personalities who have these names. An additional 12% (n = 18) believed these names may be given due to the influence of foreign cultures. This had previously been described by the students as a negative aspect of unusual names. Thus, the students may not always attribute these naming patterns to a notion they like or agree with. There were also three additional reasons relating to foreign influence, each selected by 2% (n = 3) of the participants. These reasons included living in a

foreign country, having a foreign parent, and not belonging to the Arabic culture.

Another reason selected by 10% (n = 15) was named after their relatives, such as father, grandfather, etc. Additionally, 6% (n = 9) believed parents give these names to keep up with the evolution. These responses indicate that a shift from traditional naming practices can be sensed in Jordan, like in China by Bao et al. [23].

The remaining reasons did not garner any significant agreement, with each being selected by 2% (n = 3) of the participants. Nevertheless, these reasons were varied, two of which related to religious factors, specifically, the effect of religion and the influence of religious and historical characters. Others believed these names were given to garner reactions, specifically to be rare, show off, and attract others' attention. Additional reasons related to external influences were imitating others' names, the effect of the environment, and the influence of specific incidents or experiences. Finally, some believed these names were given simply due to their beauty or to give strength to their bearers. Moreover, 74% (n = 111) of the students believed that technology significantly influenced the increase of unusual names.

4.3. Addressing Research Question 4: Social and Cultural Perceptions of Individuals with Unusual Names

Many did not find a significant connection when it came to how possessing an unusual name influences how the participants perceive the bearer. For instance, 18% (n = 27) found "they are normal people", while an additional 14% (n = 21) expressed a neutral stance, finding no link between the name and personality. However, others felt that unusual names influenced their perceptions of their bearers. Some of these effects are positive, while others believe these names may harm how their bearers are perceived.

Among the positive perceptions is the belief that those with unusual names are distinguished people, selected by 12% (n = 18) of the participants. Another 8% (n = 12) believed that bearers of unusual names are beautiful and have unforgettable and beautiful names. A small percentage, 4% (n = 6), also indicated that they perceive bearers of unusual names as lucky and strong. A further 4% (n = 6) expressed that people would like to meet bearers of unusual names.

Negative perceptions were less dominant, with 6% (n = 9) believing people with unusual names are strange, 2% (n = 3) believing they imitate others, and another 2% (n = 3) believing they would receive criticism from others due to their names.

Additional perceptions related to connecting the name to a social group or background. Such perceptions align with the findings of Tahat [34], which affirmed that Jordanians from rural and urban backgrounds follow different naming conventions. For instance, 10% (n = 15) believed that having an unusual name indicates that the bearer is from a high-class family or belongs to a different cultural background. Similarly, 6% (n = 9) believed that an unusual name could indicate that the bearer has a different religious background. Another 10% (n = 15) believe possessing an unusual name indicates having a foreign parent, while 4% (n = 6) believe such names could imply the bearer lived in a foreign country. These beliefs stem from the social, cultural, and religious qualities a name can reflect, as pointed out by Nkechi and Benjamin [7].

The influence of an unusual name on perception is a direct result of the role of names as identifiers. As previously stated, a name can be seen as a reflection of personal, social, and cultural identity, often leading to the creation of impressions and assumptions.

5. Conclusion

This study explored university students' attitudes toward unusual personal names. The study concluded that most university students had positive attitudes towards these names since 74% of the study sample liked them, whereas only 26% disliked them. Moreover, 76% of the sample stated they are willing to name their children with unusual personal names in the future, whereas only 24% stated they are not willing to do so. The paper revealed that the most important reason for liking these names was that they distinguish their bearers from their peers and others. In contrast, the most prominent reason that made other students dislike these names was that these names are tricky to pronounce and are not understood easily. Moreover, the main reason for the university students' willingness to name their children with these names was to distinguish them from their peers and other people. In contrast, some students' unwillingness was ascribed to the fact that they prefer common names more

than uncommon ones. The results showed that the main positive effect of these names was that they distinguish their bearers in their families and societies. In contrast, their most prominent negative effect was that these names could cause problems to their bearers, such as embarrassment and sarcasm. On the other hand, most university students prefer unusual and unique names to be given to females more than to males since unusual names are more suitable for females to reflect their femininity. Finally, most students believed that modern technology, including the internet and TV series, plays a significant role in increasing the number of these names nowadays. Future research might explore the attitudes of parents and their children with such unusual names towards this phenomenon.

This study makes a valuable contribution to psycholinguistics and sociocultural research by addressing a gap in the literature regarding attitudes toward unusual Arabic personal names. It combines Bourdieu's social capital theory with psycholinguistic theories, offering a multidisciplinary framework to understand names as both linguistic and social constructs. Methodologically, the study highlights the benefit of merging quantitative data with theoretical analysis, ensuring the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

The study enhances theoretical perspectives by positioning names as key identity and cultural affiliation markers, underscoring their role in the interaction between language and social structures. The findings are valuable for educators, linguists, and social practitioners, helping promote linguistic and cultural diversity, inclusivity, and cross-cultural understanding. Policymakers can also use these insights to support cultural preservation and create strategies to address biases related to naming practices while balancing modernization with cultural heritage.

Through its contributions and implications, this study offers actionable insights and lays the groundwork for future research and practical applications in various fields. It underscores the importance of naming practices in reflecting and shaping cultural and social dynamics.

However, it is essential to recognize the study's limitations to offer a balanced perspective. The sample of 150 does not fully represent the broader Jordanian population. As such, the findings should be interpreted cautiously and not generalized to the entire population. Future studies could increase the sample size and include participants from different age groups, educational levels, and geographic areas to improve generalizability.

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires may introduce biases such as social desirability or subjectivity in responses. Incorporating mixed methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide more detailed and nuanced insights. Finally, the study's focus on Jordanian university students limits its applicability to other cultural or linguistic contexts. Comparative research across Arab countries or regions could further validate and enhance the findings.

While this study provides valuable insights into Jordanian university students' attitudes toward uncommon Arabic personal names, it is not without limitations. This study focused on a specific demographic—university students—which may not fully represent the perspectives of other societal groups, such as older generations or individuals from different educational backgrounds. Future research could expand the sample to include a more diverse population to gain a broader understanding of naming attitudes across different age groups and social contexts. Furthermore, the study examined attitudes toward names in a Jordanian context; however, naming trends and perceptions vary across different Arab countries. A comparative study across multiple Arab nations could shed light on regional variations and the broader sociolinguistic factors influencing name preferences.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, R.A.R., M.D., A.S.H., H.S., M.I.-h., and S.A.T.; methodology, A.S.H. and M.D.; validation, R.A.R., M.D., A.S.H., H.S., M.I.-h., and Sausan Abu Tair; formal analysis, A.S.H.; investigation, R.A.R. and H.S.; resources, R.A.R. and H.S.; data curation, R.A.R.; writing—original draft preparation, R.A.R. and H.S.; writing—review and editing, A.S.H. and M.D.; visualization, H.S.; supervision, A.S.H.; project administration, A.S.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

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