

## ARTICLE

# The Complex Dynamic Behind Arabic Second-Language Motivation in Foreign Muslims Studying in Saudi Arabia

Badriyya Al-onazi<sup>1</sup> , Danya Shaalan<sup>2\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Language Preparation, Arabic Language Teaching Institute, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, Riyadh 11671, Saudi Arabia

<sup>2</sup> Department of Applied Linguistics, College of Languages, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, Riyadh 11671, Saudi Arabia

## ABSTRACT

Muslims have second-language (L2) motivation to learn Arabic, as it is the liturgical language (LL) of their religion. Instruments quantifying Arabic L2 motivation arising from identity, the L2 learning environment, and desire for Saudi integration (“integrativeness”) have been developed for non-Saudi Muslims studying at Arabic Learning Institutes (ALIs) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), considered the center of the Islamic world. This analysis aims to answer the research question: For non-Saudi Muslims studying at KSA’s ALIs, what is the evidence of validity and reliability of the Saudi integrative instrument, and how can this explain the competing L2 motivations revealed in previous research? A mixed methods study of non-Saudi Muslims at an ALI in KSA was conducted, where participants completed the Saudi integrative instrument and other instruments, and were interviewed about their L2 motivation. Participants expressed strong religious L2 motivation, perceiving KSA as a model Islamic society. They strongly desired interaction with Saudis, but were inhibited from conversing in the local vernacular, as the ALIs teach classical Arabic. These dynamics explain why that ALI learners were uncomfortable communicating in Arabic, while also feeling very strong Saudi integrativeness. ALI leaders are encouraged to revise their instructions to help learners develop their L2 fluency in the local vernacular outside of the ALI curriculum. Existing research about L2 Arabic learning has not considered integrativeness as a potential L2 motivation, as much L2 Arabic learning takes place in non-Arabic-speaking countries, making this research study unique.

**Keywords:** Second-Language Learning; Classical Arabic; Modern Standard Arabic; L2 Motivation; Saudi Arabia

### \*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Danya Shaalan, Department of Applied Linguistics, College of Languages, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, Riyadh 11671, Saudi Arabia; Email: DAAAlshaalan@pnu.edu.sa

### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 1 May 2025 | Revised: 26 May 2025 | Accepted: 12 June 2025 | Published Online: 3 July 2025  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i7.9818>

### CITATION

Al-onazi, B., Shaalan, D., 2025. The Complex Dynamic Behind Arabic Second-Language Motivation in Foreign Muslims Studying in Saudi Arabia. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(7): 66–76. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i7.9818>

### COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2025 by the author(s). Published by Bilingual Publishing Group. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

# 1. Introduction

Because Arabic has the unique status of being the liturgical language (LL) of Islam while also being a heritage language (HL) of many countries, motivations to study second language (L2) Arabic may include a religious dimension<sup>[1-3]</sup>. Because Muslim L2 Arabic learners may be primarily motivated by religion, this can impact their L2 motivations arising from other sources, such as interest in the social and cultural aspects of Arabic and Arabic-speaking countries, and the desire to interact with others in Arabic<sup>[1,4,5]</sup>. The aim of this research is to better understand the complex interplay between the different L2 motivations Muslims have for learning Arabic when studying in an Arabic-speaking country.

## 1.1. Sources of L2 Motivation

Several sources of L2 motivation have been supported by well-developed lines of research. The L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) was proposed and researched extensively by Dörnyei along with Ushioda<sup>[6,7]</sup>. In the L2MSS, L2 mastery is primarily motivated by identity, starting with the learner's idealized future image of themselves utilizing the L2 they are learning, and extending to the learner's idealized future image of how to meet others' expectations when using the L2<sup>[6]</sup>. Additional sources of L2 motivation were identified by Gardner based on studies of L2 learners of French in French-speaking Canada<sup>[8]</sup>. Gardner identified "instrumental" motivation, referring to L2 motivation arising from the need to gain L2 skills for instrumental reasons, such as performing work or attending college<sup>[8,9]</sup>. Gardner also identified "integrative" motivation, referring to motivation toward L2 mastery arising from the desire to communicate with the surrounding L2 community<sup>[8,9]</sup>. Although both instrumental and integrative motivation have been found to be important to L2 learning, integrative motivation has been shown to have a stronger impact on L2 achievement<sup>[10,11]</sup>. In addition to these sources of L2 motivation, researchers have acknowledged that the L2LE also plays a significant role in L2 motivation, in that its influence involves attitudes toward the teacher, course structure and curriculum, teaching methods, and peers<sup>[6,9,12]</sup>.

## 1.2. Motivation to Learn Arabic as a Second

## Language

Although many L2 motivation research studies focus on learners of English as a foreign language (EFL)<sup>[13,14]</sup>, a number of studies have researched L2 motivation associated with learning Arabic<sup>[2,4,5,15-20]</sup>. Motivation toward EFL must be seen differently than motivation to study L2 Arabic due to Arabic's unique status<sup>[2,3,5,15]</sup>. The term HL refers to a language that is adopted due to culture, and the term LL means a language used for religious purposes<sup>[2,5]</sup>. While English and Arabic are both HLs, Arabic has the additional dimension of being the LL for Islam<sup>[13,21]</sup>.

Because Arabic is a LL as well as a HL, additional sources of motivation to learn L2 Arabic must be considered. Studies of predominantly Muslim samples have demonstrated that Muslims are typically motivated to learn Arabic to become closer to Islam because of its status as the religion's LL<sup>[2,3,19]</sup>. However, in a recent review of factors affecting L2 Arabic motivation, the role of Arabic being the LL of Islam as a motivator for Muslims was not discussed<sup>[22]</sup>. Other studies of L2 Arabic acknowledge this dynamic, including one focused on attitudes and motivations of non-Muslim learners of L2 Arabic in Malaysia<sup>[23]</sup>.

Some studies acknowledge that Muslims learning Arabic may have different L2 motivations than non-Muslims. The current study is unique because it examines the source of L2 motivation for non-Saudi Muslims who choose to study Arabic in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Razem and Pandor<sup>[11]</sup> conducted a study of 24 undergraduates learning L2 Arabic at a private university in Dubai, where Arabic is spoken, of which 17% were Arab and 71% were Muslim. Authors found that integrative motivation was stronger than instrumental motivation, although both were present<sup>[11]</sup>. Alshammari and colleagues studied Muslim learners of L2 Arabic at Arabic Learning Institutes (ALIs) in the Arabic-speaking country KSA and found they were motivated through both desiring cultural and social exposure in KSA as well as for religious reasons<sup>[5]</sup>. By contrast, studies by Rosowsky and Jaspal and Coyle of Muslims studying Arabic in the United Kingdom (UK)<sup>[2,3]</sup>, an English-speaking country, found that the primary L2 motivation was religion. These results demonstrate that Arabic L2 motivation is highly contextual. Muslim learners of L2 Arabic are strongly motivated by their Islamic identity, but if they are in an Arabic-speaking country, inte-

grative motivation could also play a role <sup>[2,3,5,9,11,20]</sup>.

### 1.3. Arabic Diglossia and Integrativeness

The Qur'an and other holy texts are in Classical Arabic (CA) (in Arabic, *al-Fus'ha*) which is used when conducting religious activities <sup>[13]</sup>. Muslims studying L2 Arabic for religious purposes want to gain mastery of CA <sup>[2,3,5]</sup>. CA is distinct because speakers follow all the grammatical rules in their speech, including the pronunciation of *Harakaat*, meaning the letters' sound movements <sup>[21]</sup>. In contrast, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the official form of Arabic intended for use in formal settings, such as in media reports, sermons, and academic presentations <sup>[16,21]</sup>. Since MSA is not used in religious contexts, those studying L2 Arabic for religious reasons prefer to study CA rather than MSA <sup>[2-4,20]</sup>.

The existence of both CA and MSA has been termed diglossia in the Arabic language <sup>[1,24]</sup>. In addition to CA and MSA, the spoken, everyday use of Arabic (which includes local vernacular) is called "colloquial" or "slang" in English, but is technically termed *ammiyah* <sup>[4]</sup>. *Ammiyah* refers to the local dialect of Arabic-speaking people where Arabic is an HL <sup>[21]</sup>. In KSA, different Arabic dialects are spoken, such as *Najdi* dialect and *Hejazi* dialect <sup>[15]</sup>. Those learning L2 Arabic outside of an Arabic-speaking country will prefer CA if they are Muslim <sup>[1-3,25]</sup>, but are more likely to be exposed to MSA or ammiyah if they are undergoing formal instruction to learn conversational Arabic <sup>[17,23]</sup>.

### 1.4. Saudi Arabia's Arabic Learning Institutes

A series of studies has been conducted at KSA's ALIs to better understand their learners' Arabic L2 motivation <sup>[1,4,18-20]</sup>. KSA's ALIs offer a two-year educational program (Diploma Program) aimed at non-Saudis awarded government scholarships to study in KSA universities, as university instruction is in Arabic <sup>[5,15]</sup>. Because KSA is home to the Two Holy Mosques in Makkah and Madina, Muslims consider it the center of the Islamic world <sup>[26]</sup>. Hence, the KSA government promotes Arabic, prompting the Ministry of Education (MoE) to establish the ALIs <sup>[15,19]</sup>. Consequently, Muslims living outside of KSA are attracted to these scholarships, as participants complete the Diploma Program at their university's ALI while also completing their degree <sup>[19]</sup>.

Research on KSA's ALI Diploma Program learners aimed to develop and validate quantitative instruments measuring L2 motivation to use to improve Arabic education, and has been published <sup>[5,18-20]</sup>. These include an instrument that measures L2 motivation arising from identity, one that measures L2 motivation arising from the L2LE, and a final one that measures L2 motivation arising from the desire to integrate with the Saudi population <sup>[5,18-20]</sup>. To develop each instrument, a draft instrument was assembled using items from previous research and the scientific literature <sup>[5,18-20]</sup>. Each instrument was piloted at three different KSA ALIs, and results were analyzed to develop final instruments <sup>[5,18-20]</sup>. A summary of the instruments and their subscales is in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Instruments with Subscales Developed to Study L2 Motivation at Saudi Arabic Learning Institutes.

Instrument	Identity Motivation ( <i>ID-Mot</i> )	Motivation from the Second Language Learning Environment ( <i>L2LE</i> )	Motivation from Saudi Integrativeness ( <i>Int</i> )
Subscales	Cultural Exposure ( <i>CE</i> )	Classroom Environment ( <i>CEnv</i> )	Cultural Interest ( <i>CI</i> )
	Islamic ( <i>Islam</i> )	Teacher/ Curriculum ( <i>TC</i> )	Social Interest ( <i>SI</i> )
	Middle East Problems/ Politics ( <i>MEP</i> )	Personal Anxiety ( <i>Pers/Anx</i> )	Anti-integrative ( <i>Anti</i> )
	Instrumental ( <i>Instrum</i> )		Admire ( <i>Adm</i> )

Considering the subscales in **Table 1**, some seemingly contradictory results were obtained <sup>[5,18-20]</sup>. All participants were Muslim and scored high on the identity motivation (*ID-Mot*) instrument for the Islamic (*Islam*) subscale <sup>[20]</sup>.

In addition, they scored high on the cultural exposure (*CE*) subscale from *ID-Mot*, and the cultural interest (*CI*) and social interest (*SI*) subscales from the Saudi integrativeness (*Int*) instrument<sup>[18]</sup>. These findings were interpreted to mean that in addition to religious reasons learners were also motivated to learn L2 Arabic for cultural exposure, and wanted to integrate with the surrounding L2 population<sup>[18,20]</sup>.

However, from *Int*, there also arose an Anti-integrative (*Anti*) subscale, even though Admire (*Adm*) subscale scores were high<sup>[18]</sup>. Also, in the L2LE instrument (*L2LE*), though there were generally high scores for the Classroom Environment (*CEnv*) and Teacher/Curriculum (*TC*) subscales, there also arose a personal anxiety score (*Pers/Anx*)<sup>[19]</sup>. It was unclear from the quantitative results how to interpret these findings; specifically, it was unclear why learners felt personal anxiety in the classroom, or felt anti-integrative, when on other subscales, they expressed the desire to interact with others in Arabic and integrate into the Saudi population<sup>[5,18–20]</sup>.

To better understand these contradictory results, further research was conducted at one of the ALIs in the original study, which is located at a large public women's university in Riyadh<sup>[5]</sup>. To assess reliability of subscale scores over time, instruments were administered multiple times to Diploma Program learners, and *ID-Mot* and *L2LE* subscales were calculated and compared<sup>[5]</sup>. In addition, six participants were interviewed about their L2 motivation arising from their identity and from the *L2LE*<sup>[5]</sup>. The interview results were analyzed to shed light on why participants were experiencing personal anxiety in the *L2LE* even though they were satisfied with aspects of it, while simultaneously expressing the desire for cultural exposure<sup>[20]</sup>.

The qualitative results showed that the personal anxiety in the *L2LE* resulted from learners only knowing CA, which is not used in daily conversation<sup>[20]</sup>. Therefore, they felt uncomfortable speaking in the *L2LE*, even though they expressed interest in cultural exposure<sup>[20]</sup>. This lack of ability to converse with classmates the *L2LE* is mitigated by the fact that the ALI curriculum does not focus on teaching conversation<sup>[5]</sup>. Instead, learners are taught reading and writing in CA in the first year, and are guided into a deeper examination of the history and meanings in Arabic in the second year<sup>[5]</sup>. Learning CA in this particular *L2LE* could stifle integrative motivation, and it was

hypothesized that this may be responsible for the anti-integrative sentiment<sup>[18]</sup>.

When developing psychometric instruments in linguistics, it is important to study the reliability and validity of the instruments<sup>[27,28]</sup>. The field of linguistics has been criticized as lacking studies to verify the reliability and validity of instruments developed<sup>[27,28]</sup>. Reliability refers to the level of consistency in terms of the performance of instruments, meaning that repeated administration of instruments to similar cohorts should demonstrate consistent results<sup>[27,28]</sup>. Validity refers to the extent to which the instrument measures what it is purported to measure<sup>[27,28]</sup>. It has been recommended that the reliability and validity of linguistic instruments can be assessed through mixed methods studies to ensure the quality of the instruments developed<sup>[7,27,28]</sup>.

The current analysis uses the data from the study at the ALI in the women's university in Riyadh to answer the following research questions which have not yet been addressed: a) What evidence exists for or against the validity and reliability of the subscale measurements from the Saudi integrative instrument used at the ALIs? and b) how can this evidence be used to explain what appear to be contradictions in the results from this instrument and the other instruments in the previous analysis?

## 2. Materials and Methods

Using a mixed-methods approach has been recommended to afford an understanding of the complexity behind the many factors influencing L2 motivation<sup>[7]</sup>. The methods for this mixed-methods study have been described in detail elsewhere<sup>[5]</sup>. All research described was found to be exempt from oversight by the ethics board at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University prior to execution (Exemption #HAP-01-R-059). As described earlier, three instruments were developed for testing on KSA ALI learners in the Diploma Program: *ID-Mot*, *L2LE*, and *Int*, with the subscales listed in **Table 1**<sup>[5]</sup>. Initial pilot testing took place involving learners at three different KSA ALIs, including one located at Saudi's largest public women's university<sup>[5]</sup>.

Subsequently, in order to study validity and reliability of the developed instruments, multiple measurements were conducted on Diploma Program learners at the ALI at this women's university, which represent the data included

in this analysis<sup>[5]</sup>. Between March and November 2022, instruments were administered three times (Cohort 1  $n = 48$ , Cohort 2  $n = 29$ , and Cohort 3  $n = 39$ , respectively)<sup>[5]</sup>. The second time, respondents were offered to volunteer for an interview; six respondents were interviewed about their L2 motivation relating to identity, the L2LE and the desire for Saudi integrativeness<sup>[5]</sup>. Interviewee questions and a characterization of the respondents (identifying them by aliases) have been published elsewhere<sup>[5]</sup>. Importantly, items in the instruments as well as questions posed to interviewees were not worded so as to draw a distinction between CA, MSA, and ammiyah, and simply used the term “Arabic”. The aim of this article is to present an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative results pertaining specifically to the Saudi integrativeness instrument, and use these results to explain the conflicting L2 motivations uncovered in previous studies<sup>[5,18–20]</sup>.

## 2.1. Data Analysis

First, a descriptive analysis of the quantitative results from Int was presented to provide insight into the levels and reliability of subscale measurements. Although the study was underpowered, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if cohorts displayed a

statistically significant difference between scores;  $\alpha$  was set at 0.05. To make the mean subscale scores from all instruments comparable, the mean subscale scores on were divided by the maximum, standardizing the scores<sup>[5]</sup>. Selected standard mean scores were plotted over time and compared, and were considered in the context of qualitative themes and item wording to facilitate interpretation. Additionally, like in the previous analysis, qualitative themes arising from the interview data were considered to evaluate the validity of the subscales included in Int<sup>[5]</sup>. Themes also facilitated an understanding of the apparent contradictions in subscale scores, and the meaning of the *Anti* subscale<sup>[18]</sup>.

## 3. Results

As reported elsewhere, response rates for each data collection were 78% ( $n = 49$ ), 45% ( $n = 29$ ), and 54% ( $n = 39$ ), respectively<sup>[5]</sup>.

### 3.1. Quantitative Results

**Table 2** provides summary statistics for subscale scores for Int (for original instrument wording, see the work by Shaalan)<sup>[18]</sup>.

**Table 2.** Summary Statistics for Saudi Integrative Instrument.

Subscale	All Mean, sd*	Cohort 1 Mean, sd	Cohort 2 Mean, sd	Cohort 3 Mean, sd	ANOVA $p$ -Value **	Maximum Score Possible
Cultural Interest (CI)	13.5, 3.6	12.9, 3.6	13.4, 3.7	14.3, 3.5	0.2800	20
Social Interest (SI)	16.4, 2.8	16.0, 2.8	16.3, 3.2	16.8, 2.6	0.5370	20
Anti-integrative (Anti)	13.5, 4.3	13.9, 4.4	13.4, 3.8	13.2, 4.6	0.7640	25
Admire (Adm)	11.9, 2.2	11.5, 2.2	12.3, 2.2	12.0, 2.1	0.2930	15

\* Standard deviation. \*\*  $p$ -value from analysis of variance. Note: Sample size for the Saudi Integrative instrument: Cohort 1 = 37, Cohort 2 = 26, Cohort 3 = 35.

Per **Table 2**, mean subscale scores remained relatively flat, and all ANOVAs were not statistically significant, providing evidence of reliability. After standardization, although the mean *CI* subscale scores were high (Cohort 1: 65%, Cohort 2: 67%, and Cohort 3: 71%), the highest scores were seen on the *SI* (Cohort 1: 80%, Cohort 2: 82%,

and Cohort 3: 84%) and *Adm* (Cohort 1: 77%, Cohort 2: 82%, and Cohort 3: 80%) subscales. Though lower scores were seen with *Anti*, all were above 50% (Cohort 1: 56%, Cohort 2: 54%, and Cohort 3: 53%).

### 3.2. Qualitative Results



Thematic results were developed from interview data to explain quantitative results seen in Int. Participant Aamirah, a long-term KSA resident from Sri Lanka, helped explain why respondents scored high on *CI*, *SI*, and *Adm*:

*God willing, [Saudi] culture is nice and beautiful ... I did not know the Arabic language, but only when I saw I mean I met them, I want to speak this language because between the words in I mean I feel love.*

Although Instrum was lower than other subscale scores (Cohort 1: 66%, Cohort 2: 79%, and Cohort 3: 74%), participants still expressed the desire to use Arabic for communication<sup>[20]</sup>. Respondents wanted to speak with others in Arabic as described by Maryam:

*Also the Saudi neighbours, we talk to them and they talk to us... In India ... they do not study how to speak the language. It is easier, here [in Saudi Arabia] it is easier.*

Islamic L2 motivation was high in this group (Cohort 1: 94%, Cohort 2: 97%, and Cohort 3: 89%)<sup>[5]</sup>, and was the primary L2 motivation, as described by Aamirah:

*First, I started [learning Arabic] because of the Qur'an, to understand the Qur'an, it means the main reason. So I lived in Saudi Arabia and I want to talk to people ... and a problem because when I can read the Qur'an in the mosque and they ask Masha'Allah, I mean a beautiful reading.*

Aamirah expressed that because of the Qur'an she wanted to study L2 Arabic, and she also wanted to live in KSA and "talk to people". Participants often conflated Saudi customs and practices – especially with respect to speech - with Islamic identity, which is why they wanted to integrate into Saudi society.

However, Diploma Program learners studied CA and did not have conversational skills, they also expressed communication challenges in daily interactions. Long-term resident Aamirah provided a very nuanced reflection of the issue:

*Especially in Saudi Arabia ... the problem is between colloquial and al-Fus'ha... because learning in the institute means anywhere in al-Fus'ha, but with people in colloquial. This according to me means a problem however... Because when I learned al-Fus'ha, well, it is not difficult to know slang, I mean, we can differentiate between some words.*

Aamirah described very articulately the challenge of trying to use CA to communicate with others who use am-miyah. Long-term residents described different ways that

they overcame these conversational barriers<sup>[5]</sup>. However, all three short-term residents - described enhanced struggles with Arabic conversation that they felt pressured to overcome, with Yasmin attesting:

*One of the challenges that faced me in learning the Arabic language was not applying it, and I did not understand at the beginning of the grammatical rules how to use them in speaking the Arabic language, as well as listening skills ... Yes, mixing with [the Saudi people] helped me until it motivated me to increase my knowledge of their habits and I wished to be like them in the dialect of their speaking in Arabic.*

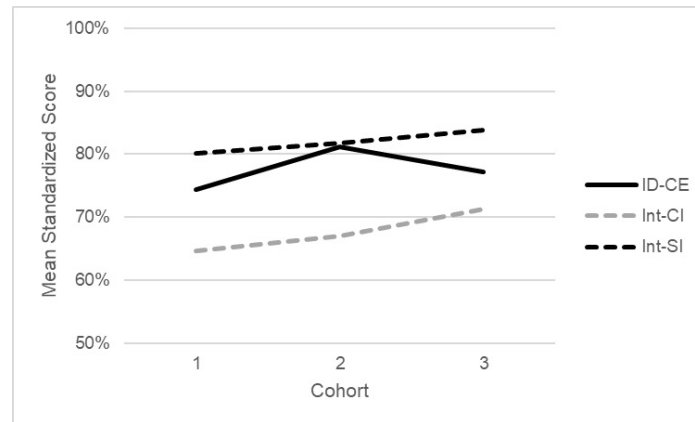
In terms of the Int subscales, standard scores above 50% on the *CI* subscale (Cohort 1: 56%, Cohort 2: 64%, and Cohort 3: 69%) indicated an interest in intellectual integration through understanding Saudi culture. High *SI* scores indicate interest in socializing with Saudis, and high *Adm* scores indicate superficial admiration for Saudi without a specific target. All cohorts had high standardized *SI* scores (Cohort 1 = 80%, Cohort 2 = 82%, and Cohort 3 = 84%) and *Adm* scores (Cohort 1 = 77%, Cohort 2 = 82%, and Cohort 3 = 80%). The relationship between these scores was revealed in answers provided by long-term resident Maryam:

*First, the people in Saudi Arabia [are a reason to learn Arabic]. When I go to the mosque in Ramadan and see Saudi women speaking Arabic, this is one reason [to learn Arabic].*

Maryam expressed admiration for Saudi women, and wanting to be like them, and that in order to do this, she needs to be able to interact with them. Their motivations are based on the idea that Saudis behave ideally as Muslims, and Saudi society represents an ideal Muslim society which should be studied, copied, and adopted.

### 3.3. Further Analysis to Resolve Contradictory Measurements

In this research, there was consistency among the *CE* subscale from *ID-Mot* and the *CI* and *SI* subscales from Int. The qualitative analysis suggested that the desire for Saudi cultural exposure and social integration arose from the desire to become closer to Islam by adopting Saudi cultural norms. **Figure 1** plots the standardized *CE*, *CI* and *SI* subscale scores for comparison.



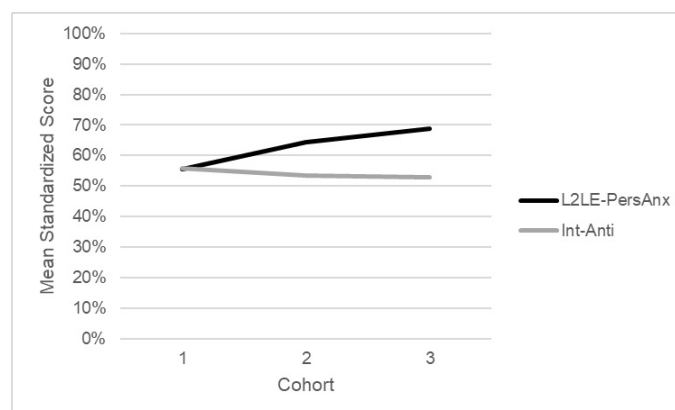
**Figure 1.** Mean Standard Scores for Cultural Exposure, Intellectual Integrative, and Social Integrative Subscales Over All Cohorts.

Note: ID-CE = identity motivation instrument, culture exposure subscale; Int-CI = Saudi integrative instrument, cultural interest subscale; Int-SI = Saudi integrative instrument, social interest subscale.

In **Figure 1**, it is clear that *CE* and *SI* are tracking together, but *CI* is consistently lower. This provides evidence that the desire for culture exposure and social integrativeness are linked, and are not as connected to a desire for intellectual integrativeness. This finding led to a comparison of the wording of the four items in each of the *CE*, *CI*, and *SI* subscales. In this comparison it was found that the items in *CE* focus on Arabic art, literature, culture, and the ability to travel worldwide and meet others (e.g., [I want to study Arabic] “because of my interest in Arab culture”). The *SI* items focus on learning Saudi culture, and integrating socially with Saudis (e.g., “I would like to meet Saudi people”). By contrast, the *CI* items focus on components of KSA less connected with societal behavior and norms, such as geography, history, and heritage (e.g., “I want to

study Arabic because I am interested in Saudi history”). From the item wording, it is easy to see that these ALI learners are more interested in participating in Saudi society than learning about Saudi Arabia as a country.

That the *PersAnx* level from *L2LE* and the *Anti* level from *Int* exceeded a 50% mean standard score over time was concerning, as these may reduce L2 motivation. In the qualitative analysis, no evidence supported the *Anti* subscale, but there was evidence behind the *PersAnx* subscale, in that respondents reported being nervous about speaking in Arabic with others due to their lack of fluency in “slang” or “colloquial”, as well as an overreliance on *al-Fus’ha* when communicating <sup>[5]</sup>. This suggested that *Anti* would track with *PersAnx* over time, which are plotted in **Figure 2**.

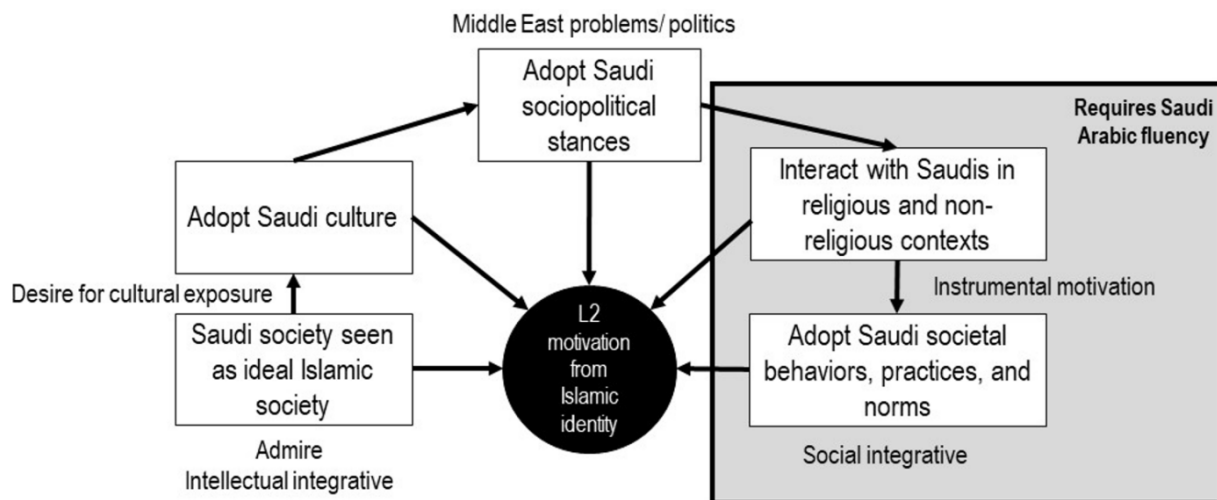


**Figure 2.** Mean Standard Scores for Personal Anxiety and Anti-integrative Subscales Over All Cohorts.

Note: L2LE-PersAnx = Arabic second language learning environment instrument, personal anxiety subscale; Int-Anti = Saudi integrative instrument, anti-integrative subscale.

As **Figure 2** shows, the mean standardized score for *PersAnx* was identical to *Anti* in Cohort 1 (56%), but over time, *Anti* decreased slightly to 53% and *PersAnx* increased to 69% in Cohort 3. This finding prompted a comparison of the item wording between *PersAnx* and *Anti* subscale wording. The three items in the *PersAnx* subscale portray the learners' concerns about being able to successfully carry on a conversation, comfortably listening, understanding, and responding in Arabic (e.g., "It worries me that other students

in my class seem to speak Arabic better than I do"). By contrast, *Anti* consists of items indicating that respondents are not interested in learning about Saudi history, society, heritage, geography, or cultural groups (e.g., "I am not interested in understanding Saudi society through learning Arabic"). This dichotomy is interpreted to illustrate the strength of Arabic L2 motivation arising from Muslim identity, in that this motivation strongly influences other L2 motivations – especially for Saudi integrativeness (see **Figure 3**).



**Figure 3.** Proposed Motivational Influences on Arabic Second Language Learners at Saudi Arabia's Arabic Learning Institutes.

As shown in the center of **Figure 3**, Islamic L2 motivation is the primary reason these learners are studying Arabic. However, this motivation is influenced by other factors. Factors shown on the left of the diagram outside the box do not have to do with integrating with Saudi society, while those inside the box are directly related to instrumental and integrative L2 motivation. ALI learners are highly integrative because they conflate Saudi society with an optimal Muslim society, and therefore want to copy Saudi behavior. In order to use Arabic to speak to others in Saudi society and fulfill instrumental and integrative L2 motivations, Saudi Arabic fluency is needed.

## 4. Discussion

This analysis of data from learners at KSA's ALIs found that the Saudi integrative instrument displayed evi-

dence of both reliability and validity. Over time, subscale scores did not vary much, providing evidence of reliability. Further, interview data supported validity of subscale scores, in that participants expressed a strong desire to interact with the Saudi L2 community around them, but were hesitant to do so because of their lack of knowledge of the local Arabic dialect, and their apprehension with using Arabic in speech since they lacked practice. Their lack of facility with speaking any type of Arabic gave rise to personal anxiety for speaking in the L2LE, and the appearance of being anti-integrative with the L2 community. The interview data showed that while participants were primarily motivated to study L2 Arabic for religious purposes, they also wanted to interact with local Saudis so they could learn and adopt their behavior, including speech, because they saw Saudi society as an optimal Muslim culture. This desire to interact in the L2 with Saudis to adopt Saudi cus-



toms arose from Islamic L2 motivation, but because learners were not equipped with conversational language skills, they faced barriers to interacting in the classroom and integrating with the L2 community. This dynamic explains the contradictory quantitative results seen across instrument subscale scores.

This complexity has been discussed in the context of other studies of L2 Arabic learning, but less focus has been placed on the role of learning to communicate using Arabic, regardless of the type of Arabic being studied. While learners at KSAs ALIs are satisfied with the curriculum that teaches CA, prior studies did not explore how lack of mastery of conversational Arabic impacts L2 learning<sup>[1,4]</sup>. In one mixed-methods study, ALI learners expressed that the main reasons they wanted to learn Arabic were so they could understand the Saudi people, and so they could know the language of the Qur'an<sup>[4]</sup>. However, in the same study, participants expressed feeling uncomfortable speaking Arabic because they didn't know the local dialect, and were not understood by others when speaking *al-Fus'ha*<sup>[4]</sup>. In another study, learners felt tension between wanting to understand *al-Fus'ha* for religious purposes while also wanting to learn the local vernacular so they could feel less embarrassed about interacting with the local L2 population<sup>[1]</sup>. Those studies did not identify what was revealed in this study, which is that ALI learners want to interact with the local Saudi population as part of religious L2 motivation, and are embarrassed and dissatisfied if they cannot. To improve the learning experience at KSA's ALIs, learners need instruction aimed at improving their ability to converse with Saudis in the local vernacular.

This study has both strengths and limitations. Its main strength is that it considers multiple quantitative and qualitative measurements in order to extricate the dynamic and interdependent motivations behind L2 Arabic language learning at KSA's ALIs. It also provides evidence of reliability and validity for Int, and exposes the issue of needing to specify CA, MSA or local vernacular when studying L2 Arabic learning and motivation. A major limitation of this research is that it only applies to learners at KSA's ALIs, and the instrument items and interview questions did not specify the type of Arabic. These results may be generalized to Muslim L2 Arabic learners studying in an Arabic-speaking country. The implication of these findings is that in order to improve satisfaction of foreign L2 Arabic

learners studying CA in an Arabic-speaking country, some conversational instruction should be included to equip learners to be able to converse with the local population.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study of KSA's ALI learners of L2 Arabic revealed that even though religion is a strong motivator to learn CA, when living in KSA, learners also want to interact with Saudis using the local vernacular, and this is also for religious reasons. This is a new finding, as the level of Saudi integrativeness of Muslim learners in KSA has to this date been unexplored in the scientific literature. Based on these findings, it is recommended that instructional leaders at KSA's ALIs find creative ways of introducing learners to educational resources that help them develop their L2 fluency in the local vernacular outside of the ALI curriculum.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, D.S.; methodology, D.S. and B.A.-o.; software, D.S.; validation, D.S. and B.A.-o.; formal analysis, D.S. and B.A.-o.; investigation, B.A.-o.; resources, B.A.-o.; data curation, D.S.; writing—original draft preparation, B.A.-o.; writing—review and editing, B.A.-o. and D.S.; visualization, D.S.; supervision, B.A.-o. and D.S.; project administration, B.A.-o. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## Funding

This work received no external funding.

## Institutional Review Board Statement

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to its exemption from oversight by the ethics board at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University prior to execution (Exemption #HAP-01-R-059).

## Informed Consent Statement

Participant consent was waived due to the research being educational in nature and therefore being found to be

exempt.

## Data Availability Statement

Data from this project has been posted on a public repository and can be downloaded from this link: <https://github.com/DethWench/Doing-the-data/tree/main/L2%20Arabic%20Instruments%20Manuscript>.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the participants who participated in the study.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] Al-Osaimi, S., Wedell, M., 2014. Beliefs about second language learning: the influence of learning context and learning purpose. *The Language Learning Journal*. 42(1), 5–24. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2012.661753>
- [2] Jaspal, R., Coyle, A., 2010. “Arabic is the language of the Muslims—that’s how it was supposed to be”: exploring language and religious identity through reflective accounts from young British-born South Asians. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*. 13(1), 17–36. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670903127205>
- [3] Rosowsky, A., 2021. The performance of multilingual and ‘ultralingual’ devotional practices by young British Muslims. *Multilingual Matters*: Bristol, UK. pp. 1–200.
- [4] Abdelhalim, S.M., Alqubayshi, H.A., 2020. Motivational orientation and language acculturation experienced by English speaking adults learning Arabic in Saudi Arabia. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies (TPLS)*. 10(9), 1032–1043. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1009.04>
- [5] Alshammari, A., Shaalan, D., Al-onazi, B., et al., 2024. Instruments measuring motivation to learn Arabic as a second language: evidence of validity and reliability. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*. 11(1), 1–11. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03381-y>
- [6] Dörnyei, Z., 2009. The L2 Motivational Self System. In: Dörnyei, Z., Ushioda, E. (eds.). *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*. *Multilingual Matters*: Bristol, United Kingdom. pp. 9–42.
- [7] Ushioda, E., 2020. Researching L2 motivation: Re-evaluating the role of qualitative inquiry, or the “wine and conversation” approach. In: Al-Hoorie, A., MacIntyre, P. (eds.). *Contemporary language motivation theory: 60 years since Gardner and Lambert (1959)*. *Multilingual Matters*: Bristol, United Kingdom. pp. 194–211.
- [8] Gardner, R., 1985. *The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery*. University of Western Ontario: London, Canada. Available from: <http://publish.uwo.ca/~gardner/docs/AMTBmanual.pdf> (cited 30 April 2025).
- [9] Masgoret, A., Gardner, R., 2003. Attitudes, motivation, and second language learning: A meta-analysis of studies conducted by Gardner and associates. *Language Learning*. 53(S1), 167–210. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9922.00227>
- [10] Gardner, R., MacIntyre, P.D., 1993. A student’s contributions to second-language learning. Part II: Affective variables. *Language Teaching*. 26(1), 1–11. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0261444800000045>
- [11] Razem, R.J., Pandor, J., 2023. The motivational orientations of undergraduate students to learn Arabic in a Dubai private university. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*. 14(1), 96–107. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1401.11>
- [12] Khajavy, G.H., MacIntyre, P.D., Barabadi, E., et al., 2018. Role of the emotions and classroom environment in willingness to communicate: applying doubly latent multilevel analysis in second language acquisition research. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 40(3), 605–624. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0272263117000304>
- [13] Alrahaili, M., 2018. Cultural and linguistic factors in the Saudi EFL context. In: Moskovsky, C., Picard, M. (eds.). *English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia: New insights into teaching and learning English*. Routledge: Oxfordshire, United Kingdom. pp. 85–101.
- [14] Moskovsky, C., Assulaimani, T., Racheva, S., et al., 2016. The L2 Motivational Self System and L2 achievement: A study of Saudi EFL learners. *Modern Language Journal*. 100(3), 641–654. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/modl.12340>
- [15] Alhamami, M., Almosa, A., 2023. Learning Arabic as a second language in Saudi universities: Ajzen’s theory and religious motivations. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*. 36(4), 509–532. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2023.2242912>
- [16] Almelhes, S., 2022. Motivational factors for learning

- Arabic as a second language abroad in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of the Faculty of Education - Menoufia University*. 2022(2), 39–64. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21608/muja.2022.243327>
- [17] Calafato, R., 2020. Learning Arabic in Scandinavia: Motivation, metacognition, and autonomy. *Lingua*. 246, 102943. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2020.102943>
- [18] Shaalan, D.A., 2023. Measuring Integrativeness as a motivation for second-language acquisition of Arabic in learners at Saudi Arabia's Arabic language institutes. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 13(12), 3097–3107. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1312.06>
- [19] Shaalan, D.A., 2023. Role of learning environment in Arabic as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 13(9), 2186–2194. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1309.04>
- [20] Shaalan, D.A., Al-onazi, B.B., Alshammari, A.K., et al., 2023. Instrument to measure identity motivation in Arabic second-language learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 13(5), 1105–1114. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1305.03>
- [21] Dajani, B., 2006. Arabic Language Learning and Motivation. *Proceedings of Multilingualism Across Europe*; 24–26 August 2006; Bolzano, Italy. pp. 77–88.
- [22] Miao, X., Wang, P., 2023. A literature review on factors affecting motivation for learning Arabic as a foreign language. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*. 11(6), 203–211. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4236/jss.2023.116014>
- [23] Aladdin, A., 2010. Non-Muslim Malaysian learners of Arabic (NMMLAs): an investigation of their attitudes and motivation towards learning Arabic as a foreign language in multiethnic and multicultural Malaysia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 9, 1805–1811. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.12.404>
- [24] Kamordeen, B.K., 2022. Diglossia in Arabic language. *Sri Lankan Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*. 5(1), 15–26.
- [25] Moraru, M., 2019. “Arabic is the mother tongue of Islam”: Religion and the reproduction of Arabic among second-generation British-Arab immigrants in Cardiff, UK. *Multilingua*. 38(3), 313–334. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/multi-2017-0093>
- [26] Al-Qahtani, A., 2015. Relationships between intercultural contact and L2 motivation for a group of undergraduate Saudi students during their first year in the UK [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Leeds: Leeds, United Kingdom. pp. 1–269
- [27] Razavipour, K., Raji, B., 2022. Reliability of measuring constructs in applied linguistics research: a comparative study of domestic and international graduate theses. *Language Testing in Asia*. 12(1), 1–16.
- [28] Sudina, E., 2023. Scale quality in second-language anxiety and WTC: A methodological synthesis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 45(5), 1427–1455. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263122000560>