International Journal of Instruction *January 2026 ● Vol.19, No.1*
e-ISSN: 1308-1470 ● www.e-iji.net *p-ISSN: 1694-609X*
pp. 457-476

Article submission code: 20250527120120
Received: 27/05/2025 Revision: 16/08/2025
Accepted: 29/08/2025 OnlineFirst: 05/10/2025

Exploring Saudi English-Major Students' Attitudes Towards English as an International Language: A Qualitative Perspective

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This study explores the attitudes of Saudi English-Major Students toward English as an International Language (EIL). EIL reflects the global spread of English, representing diverse linguistic and cultural identities. Despite its relevance, research on EIL in the Middle East—particularly Saudi Arabia—remains limited. To address this gap, the study employed a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with 25 male English-major students at Majmaah University. Thematic analysis revealed that learners had a solid understanding of EIL but showed a preference for British and American Englishes. While valuing intercultural communication and the global utility of English, students also expressed a strong desire to preserve their Arabic linguistic and cultural identity. The data also highlighted mixed emotions—motivation to learn English coexisted with anxiety and de-motivation, influenced by teaching quality and curriculum difficulty. These findings have implications for English language education policy, curriculum design, and teacher training in Saudi Arabia. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between global English use and local identity in the Saudi context.

Keywords: English learners' attitudes, EIL, Saudi English learners, native and non-native English, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

English is the most important language in the world, which also facilitates the globalisation. The use of English as the main medium for communication among various cultures has resulted in the creation of many new locally modified varieties of English. Among these are Indian English, Chinese English, and emerging Saudi English as highlighted by Mahboob and Elyas (2014) and Fernando (2023). English is also used as a lingua franca in situations and countries where its users come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds across the world. Thus, it can be argued that English is no longer a singular and monolithic entity, limited to native or Western linguistic and cultural norms and backgrounds (Crystal, 2003, Graddol, 2006, and AlRawi et al. 2022). In other words, English has become a plural entity. Such a pluralistic identity of English language engenders many interesting sub-concepts. Among these are such as the global use of English, intercultural communication, local Englishes and the alignment of English in language education system (Schneider, 2007). However, the

Citation: Abahussain, M. O. (2026). Exploring Saudi English-major students' attitudes towards English as an international language: A qualitative perspective. *International Journal of Instruction*, *19*(1), 457-476.

concept of English as an International Language (EIL) also implies that English language and its associated learning have grown into a multifaceted concept, as pointed out by Kachru and Nelson (2006) and Jenkins and Leung (2017).

An important element to consider alongside the concept of EIL is the attitude of English language learners, who are second-language (L2) learners in this study. L2 learners' attitudes are believed to play an important role in the success of L2 learning processes, as emphasised by Dornyei (2019), and Gardner (1985, 2019). However, much like English language has become more multifaceted, what was once conceptualised as simply learners' favourable and unfavourable attitudes towards English is now seen as a more sophisticated concept. Garrett (2010) and McKenzie and McNeill (2022) argue that L2 learners' attitudes also include the three key aspects of cognitive, affective and behavioural opinions regarding L2 learning. In short, both EIL and L2 learners' attitudes are complex and multifarious concepts. This complex nature is the possible reason that there are no agreed definitions of both concepts, Azjen (2005) and Jenkins (2007). Both concepts are further complicated by a number of other factors. Among these are L2 learners' school and university level, rural or urban background, socioeconomic situation, and linguistic and cultural environment.

Considering the above information, this study targets the students of BA Male (English majors) Students of Majmaah University of Saudi Arab, to explore their attitudes towards EIL. The exploration of the L2 learners' attitudes towards EIL is important for two reasons. First, on an optimistic note, the State of Saudi Arab is in struggle to train the Saudi population in general and the younger generation in particular to embrace the challenges of globalisation and fast changing modern world. Moreover, the promotion of their local Arabic and culture in line with Saudi Vision 2030 reform plan are initiated. The Vision 2030 is encouraging to enhance English-language proficiency of the L2 learners. Second, L2 learners in Saudi Arabia still hold a diverse array of opinions regarding English and its learning, both in support and opposition, despite these initiatives, as noted in the studies of Alkaff (2013) and Khan (2016).

Such variations in L2 learners' attitudes towards the English language and its learning in the Saudi English-language education system may be the result of various factors. Among these factors are differences in culture, religion, educational and historical background across Saudi Arabia and among its L2 learners (Al-Jarf, 2008 and Elyas & Picard, 2010). Such a variance in L2 learners' attitudes highlights the need to conduct more empirical research. Additionally, such research may offer comprehensive insights into how young generation studying in the tertiary level, view EIL. Recent updates in the conceptualisation of EIL, L2 learners' attitudes, and such recent initiatives by the Saudi government, may have had a considerable influence on L2 learners' attitudes towards EIL, as investigated in this study.

Most of the existing studies in this field in general, and notably in Saudi Arabia, are limited to very narrow conceptualisations of both L2 learners' attitudes, which are seen as either favourable or unfavourable towards English. Such narrow view of L2 learners' attitudes can be found in recent studies such as those by Khan (2016) and Hussain (2024). The complex nature of both L2 learners' attitudes and EIL necessitates the

application of a more suitable but less commonly adopted qualitative research method in the world including Saudi Arabia as suggested by Fernando (2023). The qualitative research method allows this study to discover interesting and significant variables related to L2 learners' attitudes towards EIL. First, relevant studies in the fields of L2 learners' attitudes and EIL are critically reviewed, and then the research question and methodology of the study are introduced.

Research Questions

After reviewing the background of this study, the following research question was developed:

What are the attitudes towards EIL among the BA Male English-major learners of Majmaah University of Saudi Arab?

Literature Review

The Concept of L2 Learners' Attitudes

This section focuses on explaining L2 learners' attitudes, followed by an explanation of EIL, alongside a critical review of the relevant studies on both concepts. Learners' attitudes are considered an important individual variable in L2 learning. These attitudes have a powerful influence, seen as a kind of unwritten L2 policy-making benchmark (Holliday, 2005). Additionally, and perhaps more important as Gardner (2010) claims that L2 learners' attitudes can serve as a strong catalyst for bringing about behavioural changes among learners. However, these attitudes are not easy to define. L2 attitudes are ranging from the narrow scope of favourable and unfavourable attitudes Gardner and Lambert (1972) to the cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects as documented by Baker (1992). The concept of L2 learners' attitudes has been further complicated by the numerous interchangeable words used in the field, such as 'views', 'perceptions', 'beliefs' and 'mindsets'. Expanding on the key but varied aspects of L2 learners' attitudes, Baker (1992) explains that these attitudes cover opinions regarding L2 and its various aspects. Among these are attitudes towards L2 learning, L2 accent, L2 culture, L2 teachers, L2 communities, L2 learning environment, L2 preferences and learning new languages. Such a broad scope concerning L2 learners' attitudes towards EIL is conceptualised and targeted in this study. Thus, it can be argued that the current study may provide more comprehensive implications for English-language education in Saudi Arabia than earlier studies that are limited to a narrow conceptualisation of L2 learners' attitudes towards English.

The Concept of EIL

In a similar manner to L2 learners' attitudes, there is no agreed definition of EIL, which may be the result of a couple of reasons. The first reason is that numerous terms are used to describe EIL. Among these are such as World Englishes (Kirkpatrick, 2007), English as an International Language (McKay, 2018), English as a Global Language, (Crystal, 2003), and English as a Lingua Franca (Asmari, 2014). The second reason is that many new themes, such as changing English phonemes system (Jenkins, 2000), the adjustment of the traditional English teaching and learning methodologies (McKay,

2003), have contributed to the emergence of new and equally complex field of EIL. Despite the complexity, Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model of World Englishes (1985, 1997 and 2005) can considerably help in understanding the global use, spread, learning, teaching, even researching of English.

Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model of World Englishes

In his model, Kachru (1985, 1992, and 2005) divided the spread of English across the world into three main circles. The Inner Circle contains countries where English has the status of a native language (ENL), such as the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and Canada. The Englishes spoken in these countries, particularly American and British English are often used in non-native countries for learning and teaching including Saudi Arab (Al-Megren, 2018). However, these native speakers of the native countries are in minority now as the non native speakers have exceeded the native speakers as pointed out earlier by Crystal (2008).

The Outer Circle contains countries that were previously British colonies such as India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, where English is considered a second language (ESL), meaning that English is an official language. English is also extensively used in education, commerce and diplomacy. The third circle is labelled the Expanding Circle, which includes countries that were not colonised by the British, among which are Saudi Arabia, China and Japan. In these countries, English is considered a foreign language (EFL), which means that its use is limited to the diplomatic sphere and it is not used extensively.

Despite its usefulness, this model has been criticised by many experts such as Rose and Galloway (2019) and Fernando (2023). They have pointed out that it still propagates the idea of the supremacy of native speakers and their Englishes. This notion of supremacy places native Englishes, as well as native speakers and their cultures, in a more influential position over the local languages and cultures across the world, as underlined by Mahboob and Liang (2014). Moreover, it is no longer the case that English has a limited status and usage in EFL countries, so there are no major differences between ESL and EFL countries with regard to the utilisation of English (Graddol, 2006). Additionally, there are many more local English varieties that have recently emerged and are not included in this model. Although it has shortcomings, the model does reveal that English is no more the property of the native countries alone. English belongs to every person in the world who uses it for communication, enriched with numerous linguistic and cultural variations as consistently argued by (Kachru, 1985 and 2005). The model also incorporates the notion of developing intercultural communicative competencies in the English users spread across the globe. This is an idea related to EIL that is also conceptualised in the current study.

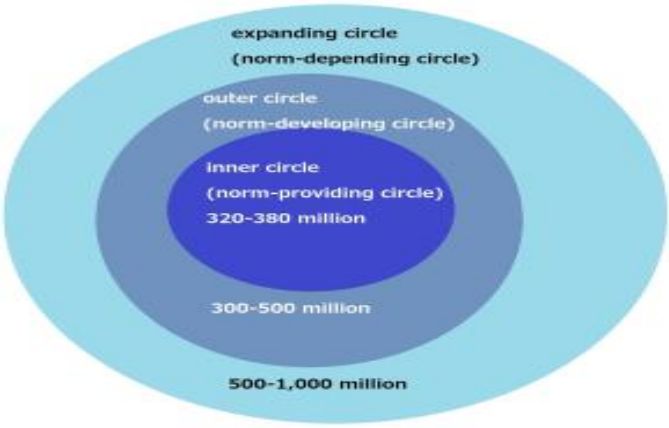

Figure 1
Kachru's three concentric circles model of World Englishes

Empirical Studies on L2 Learners' Attitudes towards L2

L2 Learners' Attitudes towards L2 in the Inner Circle

Early fundamental studies on L2 learners' attitudes in the context of Europe, such as Giles (1970), and Tucker and Lambert (1969) are limited to a narrow view of these attitudes. They are also restricted to school-level L2 learner. The quantitative research approach was the preferred choice for investigating these attitudes. Moreover, these studies focused on native standard and non-standard Englishes only. Thus, it can be argued that these studies did not target L2 learners' attitudes towards the non-native Englishes, as investigated in the current study.

L2 Learners' Attitudes towards EIL in the Outer Circle

Bernaisch and Koch (2016) in India and Bernaisch (2012) in Sri Lanka conducted research on L2 learners' attitudes. These studies found that L2 learners have positive attitudes towards their local Indian and Sri Lankan Englishes. However, they view British and American Englishes more favourable to learn. Studies such as Rudby et al. (2008) and Rataj (2023) in Singapore also concluded that L2 learners preferred British English over their local Singaporean, Malay and Indian Englishes. However, they also had an understanding of using and developing their local Englishes, reflecting their inclination towards the ownership of their local Englishes. Recent research conducted by Mazaree and Mahmud (2023) in Malaysia also concluded that the L2 learners had positive attitudes towards EIL. They also preferred British and American Englishes, although they recognised and liked their local Malaysian English. However, they did not consider their local variety to be correct English.

L2 Learners' Attitudes towards EIL in the Expanding Circle

Research has also been undertaken in the countries of the Expanding Circle. Rashid and Nemati (2023) in Iran, McKenzie (2008) and Galloway (2013) in Japan, and He (2015) in China have all conducted studies, examining L2 learners' attitudes towards EIL.

Despite the diverse results of these studies, there were some common interesting findings. These studies discovered that the L2 learners mostly preferred American English, followed by British English. Moreover, they understood the status of EIL and were interested in learning English in order to be part of the global community. They were also aware of their local varieties, such as Chinese and Japanese Englishes, but still considered native Englishes to be more suitable for teaching and learning.

L2 Learners' Attitudes towards EIL in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia

Empirical studies conducted in the Arab world have shown both positive and ambivalent attitudes towards English and English as an International Language (EIL). For instance, Malallah (2000) in Kuwait found that while students acknowledged the instrumental value of English in education and employment, there were concerns regarding its cultural impact. Similarly, Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) in Yemen observed a strong instrumental orientation among engineering students, with English being viewed as essential for academic and professional advancement.

In Lebanon, Banat (2021) reported that students showed high levels of exposure to English through media and social networks, which contributed to a more positive view of English as a global language. However, issues of linguistic identity and the dominance of Western culture were raised as concerns. Karahan (2007), examining Turkish students, found that while they appreciated the academic utility of English, they also perceived it as a threat to the Turkish language and culture — a sentiment echoed by many students across the Arab region.

A study by Zaidan (2011) in Jordan explored university students' perceptions of English and found a positive orientation linked to its utility in academia, media, and employment. However, the study also identified reluctance to engage with English beyond formal education, especially where learners perceived it as culturally loaded. Meanwhile, Rababah (2015) in Oman examined English learners' responses to native and non-native accents and revealed a marked preference for British English, alongside a lack of familiarity with local or alternative varieties.

In the United Arab Emirates, Troudi and Jendli (2011) examined how cultural identity shaped language attitudes. Their qualitative study found that Emirati students often saw English as necessary for academic success and career development but remained resistant to adopting Western cultural norms associated with English-language instruction. Similar findings were echoed in Bataineh and Baniabdelrahman's (2006) work in Jordan, which revealed students' pragmatic acceptance of English for communication and international exams, tempered by concerns over linguistic imperialism.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, prior research presents conflicting findings. Studies such as Alkaff (2013), Alsubaie (2021), and Hussain (2024) indicated positive attitudes among learners, often motivated by academic and professional goals. However, Khan (2016) found resistance and negative attitudes, particularly linked to cultural identity concerns and anxiety related to L2 learning.

More recent studies, such as Al-Dosari (2011) and Almegren (2018), explored students' attitudes toward native (British and American) and non-native Englishes, revealing a

continued preference for native varieties, yet increasing awareness of World Englishes and local adaptations like Saudi English (SauE). Alzahrani (2023) advanced this further by highlighting a shift toward valuing localized English usage among Saudi learners, reflecting a more nuanced and confident linguistic identity.

Despite these contributions, many of the above studies suffer from a limited scope—focusing on surface-level attitudes or only certain aspects of EIL. Moreover, most research remains quantitative in nature, lacking the depth needed to capture the complexity of learners' cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes. Therefore, this current study contributes to the field by offering a qualitative, in-depth exploration of Saudi students' attitudes toward EIL—encompassing their awareness of global Englishes, cultural negotiations, linguistic preferences, and the socio-psychological factors shaping their learning experiences.

METHOD

In order to address the research question, the following research approach was followed.

Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative research method was adopted in this study for three reasons. First, as mentioned above, both L2 learners' attitudes and EIL are complex and multifaceted concepts, so better investigated by a more in-depth qualitative approach as recommended by Dornyei (2007). Second, most of the existing studies in this field have adopted quantitative research approach including in Saudi Arabia (Fernando, 2023), so a qualitative approach could offer more interesting findings. Third, L2 learners at the university level, as opposed to the school level, being mature and exposed to the multifarious use of English, could reveal interesting insights in this study. A qualitative research method is recommended for scholars exploring complex concepts, as targeted in the current study, according to Silverman (2005) and Cohen et al. (2011).

Population and Sample

The population was L2 learners at Majmaah University, Saudi Arabia. A convenience sampling method was utilised because it can help in collecting large and extended datasets quickly (Dornyei, 2007), as required in this study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The nature of this study is complex and somewhat sensitive due to the need to gather information about the L2 learners' local cultures and their opinions on other sensitive topics, such as Western culture. So, semi-structured interviews, as suggested by Robson (2011), are an appropriate choice for not only collecting detailed data but also establishing good rapport with the participants. Research ethics, such as the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, were also considered, in accordance with the suggestions of Dornyei (2007). The semi-structured interview protocol was developed keeping in view the concept of EIL, L2 learners' attitudes and also studies conducted on the L2 learners attitudes towards the various aspects of EIL and L2 learners' attitudes.

The participants were approached through their respective university departments and they were fully briefed both in writing and verbally about the nature and purpose of the

study. They were also given the choice to leave and not participate in the interview. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a comfortable room within the department. The participants were given the choice of speaking in Arabic or English. Most of the students gave their interviews in English, whereas five were interviewed in Arabic and their responses were translated. The translated interviews were checked by two colleagues in the department for the purpose of authentication (Dornyei, 2007). Furthermore, the interviews were labelled, recorded and transcribed. Subsequently, the transcribed interviews were analysed manually with the help of coding to reveal the underlying patterns and meanings, such as themes concerning the L2 learners' attitudes towards EIL (Cohen et al,. 2011).

FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of the interviews revealed five interesting themes of the L2 learners' attitudes towards EIL, as presented below.

L2 Learners' Motivations to Learn English

Although the participants' motivations were not a target of this study, they did reveal the following interesting and important insights. On an optimistic note, Participant E mentioned positive motivations for learning English:

> *I like English a lot and I'm also interested in learning English as it is very important for my studies, jobs and also to live in a modern international world.*

This statement indicates a positive attitude, motivation and instrumental orientation towards learning English, as defined by Gardner (1985) and noted by Ali et al., where learners see English as a tool for practical advancement. Participant L emphasized a social motivation:

> "I want to speak English fluently because I want to travel and communicate with people from different countries."

However, most of the participants showed anxiety regarding L2 learning and the prevalence of English, as reflected in the following statement from Participant F:

> *I am worried and afraid of English, the native speakers and those students who are in my class… which includes my classmates and teachers.*

Participant Y reported:

> *"I lost interest in learning English because of the difficult pronunciation, and some teachers didn't encourage me. The syllabus is also too hard."*

Such findings point to demotivating factors such as teaching style, curriculum design, and classroom atmosphere — concerns echoed in Dornyei and Ushioda (2021) and Sakai and Kikuchi (2009).

Similarly, the majority of the participants (23 of 25) expressed de-motivation concerning L2 learning and its various factors, which was likewise found by Dornyei (1998). As stated by the participant H:

> *I was distracted from learning English… because of the teachers' bad attitudes and the difficult syllabus....because of the difficult nature of English, especially how to pronounce it.*

Interestingly, a few students displayed resilience, despite challenges. Participant Q shared:

> *"Sometimes I feel shy or scared to speak, but I force myself because I know English is important for my life and my goals."*

This complex mix of motivation and anxiety confirms that L2 learning is an emotional journey shaped by personal, social, and institutional forces.

L2 Learners' Understanding of EIL

Almost all participants (23 out of 25) demonstrated a clear understanding of English as an International Language (EIL). Their responses reflected awareness of English being a global language used across different domains such as education, media, business, and technology.

For example, Participant D explained:

> *"English is spoken in every country and in Saudi Arabia. English is used a lot in education in our country and in other countries. It is a language which can be heard in every corner of the world."*

Similarly, Participant H noted:

> *"Everyone in the world knows that English is the only language used in each country by many people, especially educated people. In our country (Saudi Arabia), we have a lot of opportunities to learn and use English."*

Participant S also emphasized:

> *"You can't go online or watch TV or travel without knowing English. Even if people don't speak it well, they know it matters. It's the language of the modern world."*

Such responses were filled with phrases like "in every country," "used in education," "language of the world," and "modern world," which indicate the students perceive English not as a foreign language, but as a global tool. This supports previous findings by Jenkins (2003), Galloway (2013), and Hussain (2024), which show that learners today associate English with global access and opportunity.

However, a few students expressed concerns about the dominance of English. Participant R reflected:

> *"It is good to learn English for jobs and studies, but we must not forget Arabic… sometimes English feels too dominant."*

This tension points to an internal negotiation of identities, where English is both a gateway and a challenge.

L2 Learners' Attitudes towards Varieties of English

In total, 22 of the participants were well aware of the numerous varieties of English, especially the British and American Englishes. Additionally, they expressed a desire to learn these native, notably British, American and Australian Englishes. Similarly, the

majority of the participants showed their comprehension of the use of their own dialects of Arabian English, as reflected in the following statement from Participant C:

> *There are many kinds of English in many countries. I like British and American Englishes very much and try to speak like them but can't.*

Likewise, Participant A also explained:

> *I like Western Englishes and also Western English teachers… because their Englishes are excellent and sound good when they speak. However, I am also comfortable with my own Arabian way of speaking English.*

Yet, despite the admiration for native accents, many participants acknowledged the existence of localized English varieties.

Participant N explained:

> *In our country (Saudi Arabia), we also speak in our own style of English. Indian and Turkish people also speak in their own style in their countries."*

Some showed increasing confidence in using Saudi-oriented English. Participant T stated:

> *"Sometimes we speak English with Arabic words or in our accent. That is okay. It is our way of speaking."*

Such statements indicate that the participants had an understanding of both native and the local emerging Saudi-oriented English, labelled as (SauE), Mahboob and Elyas (2014) and Alzahrani (2023). These findings are in line with the study of He and Li (2009) in China and of Al-Dosair (2011) in Saudi Arabia.

Most of the participants also explained their reasons for preferring British and American Englishes, as reflected in the words they chose to speak about them. Among these words were 'perfect', 'more correct', 'educated' and 'polished', as also reported by Alemgren (2018). Furthermore, although the majority of the participants showed tolerance towards other local Englishes, especially Saudi English and others like Indian and Malaysian Englishes, they were not interested in them as a learning medium, as shown by Participant K:

> *I know there are many kinds of English… Indians speak their own style of English and Turkish people and we also have our own… Yes, all types are good but I shall learn the English of Western people.*

L2 Learners' Attitudes towards Developing Intercultural Communicative Competencies

A significant number of participants (21 of 25) expressed enthusiasm about developing communication skills that allow them to interact with speakers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This interest indicates an emerging intercultural awareness — a key component of EIL.

Participant M reflected:

> *The English language is now the language of everyone in the world, so I must learn how to talk in English with different people.*

Similarly, Participant P also declared:

> *Now, knowing only one English is not enough… I should know how Chinese and Malaysian people speak English, alongside the English of Western (native) people.*

Participant J echoed:

> *"When I watch people from other countries on YouTube, I try to understand how they speak English. They all speak differently. It's interesting to see different accents and styles."*

This desire to communicate with diverse groups aligns with the notion of intercultural communicative competence, which emphasizes flexibility and sensitivity in cross-cultural communication (Sonda, 2011). It also shows that students are moving beyond the binary of "native vs. non-native" English, embracing the multiplicity of English forms across contexts.

Some participants linked intercultural communication to career readiness. For example, Participant U explained:

> "*In the future, I want to work in a big company where I will meet people from India, the Philippines, maybe Europe… so I need to understand all kinds of English."*

These responses suggest that students not only recognize the global nature of English, but also understand the practical value of developing adaptable communication strategies — a sign of linguistic maturity.

L2 Learners' Attitudes towards Native Cultures and Their Own Linguistic and Cultural Orientations

While the learners were largely positive about learning English, nearly all participants (24 of 25) expressed a strong desire to maintain and promote their Arabic language and Islamic cultural identity. This complex relationship between global engagement and local rootedness reveals the hybrid identities many students are negotiating.

Participant P asserted:

> *English is a good language and I am interested in learning English. However, my own Arabic is far better as it is used in my family, country and religion. With this in mind, English has become my second priority.*

Likewise, Participant B noted:

> *The Western culture is attached to English, so it will damage our Saudi Arabic language and also its culture, which is unacceptable.*

Some expressed the internal conflict this duality creates. Participant H reflected:

> *Sometimes, I become confused with how to keep a balance between using and learning English and Arabic… The reason is that learning English will bring me closer to the Western world and other cultures.*

Such findings are also reflected in the research of Alsubaie (2021) and Hussain (2024). However, while most of the participants (24 of 25) did not want to adopt the Western culture, they were keen to understand Western scientific innovation, professionalism and advancement only. As revealed by Participant O:

> *The people from the West are highly efficient in their own fields. They are competent and also well advanced, so I would like to learn and adopt these great qualities while learning English… but not at all their cultures… because they are liberal in their lifestyles.*

This perspective reflects what Norton and Kamal (2003) term "glocal identity" — learners selectively integrating global competencies while safeguarding local values. It also supports Latif and Alhamad's (2023) discussion of the tensions between Arabicisation and Englishisation in Saudi higher education.

L2 Learners' Motivations to Learn English

Although the participants' motivations were not a target of this study, they did reveal the following interesting and important insights. On an optimistic note, Participant E mentioned positive motivations for learning English:

> *I like English a lot and I'm also interested in learning English as it is very important for my studies, jobs and also to live in a modern international world.*

This statement indicates a positive attitude, motivation and instrumental orientation towards learning English, as defined by Gardner (1985) and noted by Ali et al., where learners see English as a tool for practical advancement. Participant L emphasized a social motivation:

> "I want to speak English fluently because I want to travel and communicate with people from different countries."

However, most of the participants showed anxiety regarding L2 learning and the prevalence of English, as reflected in the following statement from Participant F:

> *I am worried and afraid of English, the native speakers and those students who are in my class… which includes my classmates and teachers.*

Participant Y reported:

> *"I lost interest in learning English because of the difficult pronunciation, and some teachers didn't encourage me. The syllabus is also too hard."*

Such findings point to demotivating factors such as teaching style, curriculum design, and classroom atmosphere — concerns echoed in Dornyei and Ushioda (2021) and Sakai and Kikuchi (2009).

Similarly, the majority of the participants (23 of 25) expressed de-motivation concerning L2 learning and its various factors, which was likewise found by Dornyei (1998). As stated by the participant H:

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Interestingly, a few students displayed resilience, despite challenges. Participant Q shared:

> *"Sometimes I feel shy or scared to speak, but I force myself because I know English is important for my life and my goals."*

This complex mix of motivation and anxiety confirms that L2 learning is an emotional journey shaped by personal, social, and institutional forces.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the attitudes of Saudi university students—specifically BA male English majors—towards English as an International Language (EIL). Using qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, five major themes were identified. The discussion that follows interprets these findings in relation to the existing literature, the Saudi context, and broader global discussions in the field of World Englishes and second language (L2) acquisition.

Global Understanding of EIL and English Ownership

The findings show that most participants recognized English as a global language that transcends national boundaries. Students used terms like "everyone in the world," "modern world," and "language of opportunity," suggesting an internalized awareness of the role of English as a lingua franca. This supports Crystal's (2003) and Jenkins' (2007) argument that English has transformed from a colonial language to a global resource. Importantly, learners did not see English as belonging only to native speakers but understood it as a shared tool used worldwide.

However, some expressed concern about English dominating Arabic language and culture. This tension reflects Al-Jarf's (2008) and Elyas and Picard's (2010) findings that many Saudis navigate a dual identity—embracing English for education and economic advancement while maintaining strong allegiance to their Arabic-Islamic heritage. Thus, the students' understanding of EIL was both pragmatic and critical: English was viewed as useful, but not culturally neutral.

Attitudes toward Native and Non-Native Varieties of English

The preference for British and American Englishes—seen as "correct," "polished," and "standard"—mirrors what Bernaisch and Koch (2016) observed in India and Sri Lanka. Participants viewed these varieties as models to emulate, reinforcing the idea that native-speakerism remains a dominant ideology in English language learning, even in the Expanding Circle.

At the same time, many students acknowledged the presence of local English varieties, including Saudi English (SauE), as discussed by Mahboob and Elyas (2014) and Alzahrani (2023). This reveals an evolving linguistic awareness. While native Englishes are still seen as aspirational, students are beginning to view localized Englishes as legitimate expressions of identity and practicality. Such findings align with Kachru's (1985) concept of World Englishes and with Schneider's (2007) dynamic model of postcolonial English development.

Interestingly, some students rejected non-native Englishes from other regions (e.g., Indian or Malaysian English), indicating a complex hierarchy of acceptability among

English varieties. This reflects the continued prestige gap between native and non-native varieties and suggests the need for pedagogical interventions to raise awareness of linguistic diversity and promote tolerance.

Intercultural Communicative Competence and Global Connectivity

A strong majority of students demonstrated a desire to improve their communication with people from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They understood that mastering only one form of English is not sufficient in a globalized world. This supports Jenkins and Leung's (2017) call for EIL-based pedagogy to focus on intercultural intelligibility rather than native-like accuracy.

The students' interest in understanding Chinese, Indian, and Southeast Asian Englishes reveals their awareness of global interconnectedness, particularly through media, digital platforms, and work-related aspirations. These findings align with Sonda (2011), who found that Japanese learners also valued exposure to multiple English varieties to better navigate international settings.

Their desire to develop intercultural skills reflects an adaptive mindset. As future global professionals, these learners are already preparing for the sociolinguistic complexity of real-world communication. This suggests that Saudi EFL curricula should incorporate more exposure to diverse Englishes and real-world communicative tasks to nurture this competence.

Cultural Identity, Linguistic Loyalty, and the Glocal Perspective

The students expressed strong loyalty to Arabic language and culture while also valuing English as a means of global integration. This dual orientation echoes the concept of "glocalization" — integrating global language use while maintaining local cultural values (Norton & Kamal, 2003). Students drew clear boundaries between English as a linguistic tool and Western cultural values they deemed inconsistent with Islamic or Saudi norms.

This reflects what Latif and Alhamad (2023) describe as the tension between Arabicisation and Englishisation in Middle Eastern higher education. While Saudi Vision 2030 promotes English proficiency for global competitiveness, it also emphasizes the preservation of cultural and religious identity. The students in this study reflect that tension, positioning themselves as global citizens with strong local roots.

This finding has deep implications for language policy and teacher training in Saudi Arabia. English programs should explicitly address cultural identity, helping learners critically engage with English without feeling pressured to abandon their heritage.

Motivation, Anxiety, and the Emotional Landscape of L2 Learning

Although motivation was not the central focus of this study, the majority of students voiced their emotional relationship with English learning. Many were highly motivated, viewing English as key to academic, professional, and personal success. This aligns with Gardner's (1985) notion of instrumental motivation and with the findings of Ali et al. (2015), who observed similar orientations in Pakistani postgraduate learners.

However, students also reported high levels of anxiety and de-motivation, largely tied to teacher behavior, curriculum difficulty, and pronunciation challenges. These results

mirror Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2021) and Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) findings, which show that demotivation often stems from external sources such as poor instructional methods, unsupportive environments, or overly rigid materials.

The emotional duality observed in this study—motivation and anxiety coexisting—is not uncommon in EFL contexts. However, it highlights the need for student-centered approaches that build confidence and resilience. Teacher education in Saudi Arabia should focus on creating supportive classroom climates and on scaffolding learners through anxiety-provoking challenges.

Finally, the attitudes of Saudi university students toward EIL are neither wholly resistant nor blindly accepting. Instead, they reflect a mature, hybridized identity: learners value English for its global access, are aware of its varieties, embrace its communicative power, and are conscious of its cultural implications. They are actively engaged in reshaping English to suit their academic, social, and cultural contexts.

This nuanced picture calls for a shift in Saudi EFL pedagogy and policy—from native-speaker-centered models to EIL-oriented frameworks that emphasize inclusivity, intercultural awareness, and critical language engagement. The findings of this study reinforce the argument that L2 learners are not mere consumers of English, but co-constructors of its meaning and use in a globalized yet locally rooted world.

LIMITATION

This study has certain limitations. First, due to its qualitative nature, the findings of the study cannot be generalised. Second, only male L2 learners were recruited for this study. Therefore, there is a need to include more participants, especially female L2 learners. Furthermore, this study is limited to one university, but it may be extended to other universities, as well as schools in Saudi Arabia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the complex nature of L2 learners, L2 attitudes, EIL, and the unique linguistic and cultural features of Saudi Arabia, more sophisticated mixed method research approaches and data analysis tools like factor and regression analysis could be utilised in further investigations. There is a need to focus on more L2 learners and their voices in the Saudi Arabian L2 education system. L2 teachers should be trained in how to adjust their teaching practices in accordance with learners' attitudes, which are noted in the current study. Additionally, scholars should focus on how to motivate L2 students and address their various anxieties and de-motivating factors, which can hamper the L2 efficiency of learners, as mentioned by Hussain (2024). Moreover, L2 planning and policies should align universities' L2 curricula with the changing status of EIL, alongside the local and cultural realities of Saudi Arabia.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the L2 learners of a Saudi university and their attitudes towards EIL. A total of 25 male L2 learners were selected via a convenience sampling technique. Following a qualitative research approach with thematic analysis, the data reveals some interesting findings. Among these findings are L2 learners' positive

attitudes towards English, their awareness of EIL, their preference for learning in British and American dialects, their understanding of emerging local Englishes, their desire to promote their linguistic and cultural orientations and backgrounds, and their L2 anxieties and de-motivations about learning English.

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