

English and Culture in Qatar: A State-of-the-Art Review of Linguistic and Educational Transformation (2014 – 2024)

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Abstract: The current article presents a state-of-the-art review of peer-reviewed research published between 2014 and 2024 on English language use and cultural transformation in Qatar, authored by scholars affiliated with Qatari institutions and indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. The review synthesizes a decade of empirical research to examine the sociocultural implications of English language instruction, particularly its role in reshaping linguistic hierarchies, cultural identity, and educational policy. Eighteen empirical studies were selected for their focus on English education and its broader societal effects. Drawing on postcolonial and sociolinguistic frameworks, the review identifies six thematic clusters: (1) English, identity, and power dynamics in schools; (2) student perspectives on bilingualism and language policy; (3) English in higher education and the workplace; (4) informal and digital avenues of English learning; (5) challenges in Arabic–English translation, including metaphorical and rhetorical disparities; and (6) English hegemony and its impact on national identity. The findings reveal English’s dual function as both a medium of global mobility and a mechanism of cultural dominance, often at the expense of the epistemological and symbolic standing of Arabic. By explicitly linking linguistic practices to broader sociopolitical dynamics, this review contributes original insight into the ideological dimensions of English use in Qatar, offering practical implications for language policy, bilingual education, and cultural preservation in postcolonial settings.

Keywords: English, EMI, cultural transformation, bilingualism, sociolinguistics, Qatar

A growing body of empirical research has studied language not merely as a conduit for communication but as a repository of culture, a structuring force in social organization, and a powerful apparatus for constructing ideologies and identities. Scholars have persistently emphasized the centrality of language in shaping cultural identity and mediating power relations across a range of sociopolitical domains, given that language fundamentally conditions how societies perceive themselves and others. Kramsch (1998) and Duranti (1997) argue that language

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mediates cognitive classifications, behavioral norms, and social values, thereby embedding itself into the epistemic frameworks of everyday life. In parallel, sociolinguists such as Bourdieu (1991) and Ricento (2006) maintain that language not only reflects but also produces the historical, political, and social matrices within which it is situated.

In the current review, we draw primarily on postcolonial critiques of epistemic hegemony and Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital to examine language as a form of power. Within this framework, the expansion of English across key social and educational fields in Qatar can be read not merely as a pedagogical development but as a sociopolitical process. Research in education, sociolinguistics, and anthropological linguistics demonstrates that English is deeply embedded in broader neocolonial and geopolitical agendas, contributing to the marginalization of Arabic in the Gulf. These dynamics of hegemony and resistance are particularly visible in Qatar's educational policy landscape, where Arabic is increasingly decentered and progressively displaced (Alahmed, 2020; Kamrava, 2017). The ascendant status of English as a lingua franca is, at its core, a manifestation of linguistic and cultural hegemony (Aljehani & Modiano, 2025). Given these intricacies, it is important to probe the sociocultural implications encoded in the prioritization of English language instruction across multiple domains (Kamrava, 2017).

In the Gulf and, more specifically, in Qatar, English has come to constitute a form of symbolic capital at the forefront of public, academic, and commercial sectors by virtue of its association with progressive agendas and global connectivity (Hillman & Eibenschutz, 2018; Mustafawi et al., 2021). Comparable patterns have been documented beyond the Gulf as well; Martínez (2022) found that among Puerto Ricans in Detroit, Spanish was associated with roots, heritage, and cultural identity, whereas English was linked to work, school, and economic advancement. English now serves as the core language of instruction in higher education, particularly within Western branch campuses in Education City. Its acquired status as the de facto language of governance, digital platforms, and corporate enterprises has raised concerns about its cultural repercussions and transformative potential.

Nevertheless, the linguistic transformation underway is no transient phenomenon; rather, it constitutes an enduring sociocultural reality that has coexisted with Arabic, constitutionally enshrined as the official language and historically embedded in national, religious, and moral identity. While Arabic continues to retain symbolic value, it has been increasingly reduced to a ceremonial presence (Chakraoui, 2024; Reynolds, 2021). The coexistence of English, in this context, reveals a deeper ideological and cultural ambivalence. Consequently, a tangible divide emerges in educational policy, classroom practices, and language ideologies, where the proliferation of English is increasingly accompanied by concerns over cultural estrangement and the gradual erosion of Qatari linguistic and cultural heritage (Alkateeb, 2023; Chakraoui, 2024; Johnston et al., 2014). The current review seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To analyze how the institutionalization of English has restructured social, academic, and cultural hierarchies in Qatar.
- To interrogate the role of English as both an instrument of global adaptation and a vehicle of cultural hegemony, particularly in bilingual educational environments.
- To examine how informal and digital channels, especially in an increasingly virtual and globalized context, have recalibrated notions of culture, identity, and belonging among Qataris through the deployment of English.

These objectives frame the review's contribution to ongoing debates on language policy, identity, and cultural negotiation in Qatar's multilingual, postcolonial context. The review is strategically limited to Qatar-affiliated scholarship on English, culture, and identity in an effort to

characterize locally embedded knowledge production within Qatar's higher-education and research ecosystem. Given that the search was limited to Scopus and Web of Science to support replicable retrieval and consistent indexing, relevant studies indexed elsewhere, or published in non-indexed venues, may not have been captured, which constitutes a methodological limitation.

Background: English and Cultural Transformation in Qatar

The interrelation between language and culture is dialectical, shaped by overlapping systems of meaning, power, and identity. Within the Qatari context, the institutionalization of English and its pervasive expansion across educational, professional, and digital domains poses a double bind: while English is valorized as a symbol of economic mobility, global engagement, and educational access (Mustafawi et al., 2021; Reynolds, 2021), it simultaneously displaces Arabic from influential discursive arenas, contributing to growing concerns over cultural erosion and linguistic marginalization. Nowhere is this more evident than in academic institutions, where English-medium instruction (EMI) has become the dominant paradigm, transforming both the linguistic habitus and the symbolic economies of knowledge.

Viewed through a postcolonial lens, the ascendancy of English is not merely pragmatic but epistemic. It signals a shift in which indigenous discursive traditions and modes of knowing are supplanted by Anglo-Western linguistic and intellectual frameworks (Alkateeb, 2023; Raza et al., 2021). This process, described as epistemic displacement, is particularly pronounced in the transition from Arabic-medium schooling to English-dominated higher education, where students often encounter linguistic estrangement, identity dissonance, and curricular misalignment with local epistemologies (Johnston et al., 2014; Waterval et al., 2018).

While the existing literature has examined EMI, bilingualism, and language attitudes in Qatar, it remains largely fragmented and thus focused on isolated variables rather than the broader ideological formations they inhabit. Few studies have systematically interrogated the cumulative cultural, cognitive, and identity-related implications of English dominance. This review addresses that lacuna by synthesizing a decade of empirical research to reveal how English functions not only as a communicative medium but as a vehicle of symbolic power. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital and postcolonial critiques of cultural hegemony (Reynolds, 2021; Alkateeb, 2023), this analysis situates EMI within a global regime of knowledge production that both reinforces existing hierarchies and complicates Qatar's dual allegiance to Arabic as a constitutional cornerstone and English as a marker of modernity.

Methodology

In keeping with the methodological conventions of state-of-the-art reviews, this section outlines the procedures employed to identify, select, and thematically organize peer-reviewed research relevant to English language use and cultural transformation in Qatar. The review adopts a descriptive, state-of-the-art orientation that maps theme-based developments in the literature, synthesizing recent empirical work without formal critical appraisal, while documenting the current state of scholarship and signaling directions for future research (Shah & Campbell, 2023). Drawing on peer-reviewed literature indexed in Scopus and Web of Science and authored by scholars affiliated with Qatari institutions, the review aims to present a comprehensive account of the field's current contours, key debates, and thematic concentrations. This mapping is intended to

clarify the scholarly landscape and establish a foundation for identifying research gaps and proposing future lines of inquiry. The review is restricted to English-language publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. We acknowledge that this delimitation introduces an Anglophone filter that may marginalize Arabic-language scholarship, grey literature, and locally situated knowledge, thereby shaping the scope of the evidence reviewed and constituting a methodological limitation.

Literature Search and Selection Strategy

This state-of-the-art review employed a structured and systematic search strategy to identify relevant studies that explore the intersections of English language usage, education, and cultural transformation in Qatar. The literature search was conducted using the two major bibliographic databases, Scopus and Web of Science, selected for their comprehensive indexing of peer-reviewed literature, supporting a transparent, replicable search and ensuring consistent indexing and exportable metadata. In Scopus database, the search utilized a combination of relevant keywords and Boolean operators, including “language” AND “cultur*” AND “English” OR “ELT” OR “TESOL” and in Web of Science database, the keywords and Boolean operators included “Language” AND “Cultur*” AND “Qatar” AND “English” OR “ELT” OR “TESOL.” Both searches covered the studies published between 2014 and 2024. This time frame reflects the review’s aim to examine a decade of research aligned with recent educational and sociolinguistic transformations in Qatar. A total of 77 articles - 54 retrieved from Scopus and 23 from Web of Science were imported into Covidence, a systematic review management platform that facilitated duplicate checks, reviewer assignment, screening, and audit trail documentation. Identifying and removing 13 duplicate articles, Covidence enabled a transparent and streamlined workflow throughout the selection process. The first screening round involved a review of titles and abstracts. Based on relevance to the study’s objectives and strict inclusion criteria, 22 articles were shortlisted for full-text screening.

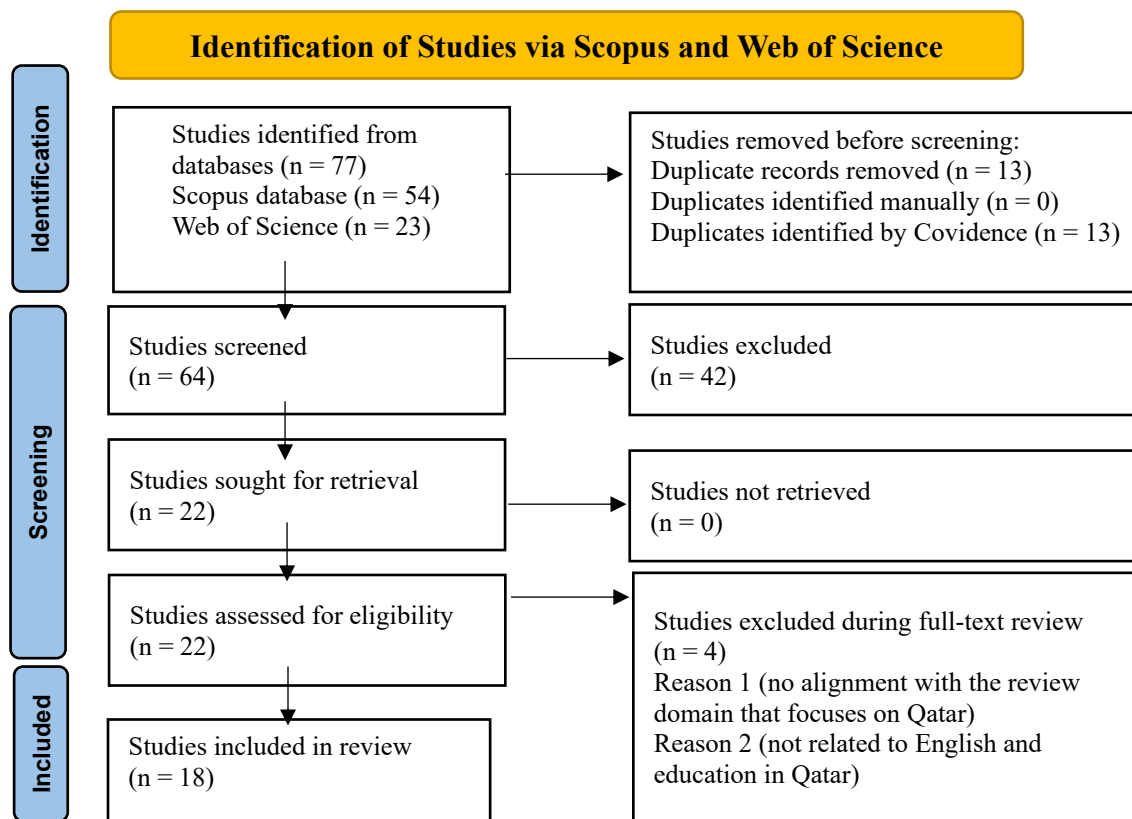
During the second round, full-text articles were assessed against the review’s predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Section 3.3). Four studies were excluded at this stage for not aligning with the thematic focus on English language instruction or cultural transformation in Qatari academic contexts. Specifically, these articles addressed topics such as accreditation frameworks in higher education, professional skepticism in accounting, multilingual communication in healthcare during COVID-19, and gendered patterns in email use. While situated in Qatar, these studies focused on institutional or professional domains unrelated to the review’s core concern with language, education, and cultural identity.

Data Extraction Procedures

Data extraction followed a pre-specified, standardized data-charting protocol; the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were used to report the identification, screening, and inclusion process (Page et al., 2021). A PRISMA flow diagram (see Figure 1) detailed the systematic process containing the initial identification of studies, screening phases, eligibility assessments, and the final inclusion of studies. Extracted data incorporated citation details, abstract content, thematic keywords, research methodology, and key study findings relevant to language and cultural transformation in Qatar. The Covidence platform facilitated data extraction and documentation, allowing for consistent screening decisions and traceable data handling.

To contextualize patterns across the corpus, we charted descriptive methodological features, including stated research design, data sources, analytic approach, and reporting clarity. Studies were classified according to their research methodology (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods), and we coded whether and how each study addressed empirical grounding, contextual relevance to Qatar, and its stated contribution to understanding the interplay between English, culture, and identity. Importantly, these descriptors were used for mapping and interpretation only; no formal quality appraisal was conducted, and no study was excluded or weighted on the basis of methodological quality.

Figure 1
PRISMA Flow Diagram



Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were carefully constructed to ensure thematic alignment with the review’s objectives (see Table 1). Only empirical studies related to English language use and cultural transformation within the Qatari context were considered. Inclusion was defined by the presence of at least one author’s affiliation with a Qatar-based institution at the time of publication. This boundary operationalizes the review’s strategic focus on Qatar-affiliated knowledge production rather than functioning as a quality filter; studies were not selected, excluded, or weighted on the basis of author affiliation.

Table 1*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer-reviewed research articles • Language: English • Country: Qatar • Articles authored or co-authored by affiliates of Qatari educational institutions • Empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) • Papers published in 2014–2024. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles about non-Qatari contexts only • Irrelevant domains: medical, nursing practices, sports, and physical education • Articles without a clear link to both language and culture • Studies without empirical evidence • Studies that focus on English in Qatar without considering its impact on culture

Overview of Included Articles

The 18 studies analyzed in this review are summarized in Table 2. Each entry includes the authors, a brief description of the study, the methodological approach, and the variables examined in relation to English and cultural dynamics in Qatar.

Table 2*Overview of Articles Included in the Review*

Authors	Summary	Research Method	Country
1. Al-Adwan & Abuorabaledwan (2019)	Arabic-English translation and the challenges of preserving Arabic rhetorical conventions.	Qualitative	Qatar
2. Alkateeb (2023)	British Council's cultural influence and ideological implications via ELT.	Qualitative	Qatar
3. Almannan (2020)	Translation accuracy and precision through semiotic analysis.	Qualitative	Qatar
4. Alós et al. (2017)	Ad translation strategies, cultural transfer, and their impact on cross-cultural branding.	Qualitative	Qatar
5. Alsadi (2016)	Qatari EFL learners struggle with English metaphors due to cultural differences between Arabic and English.	Mixed Methods	Qatar
6. Hillman & Eibenschutz (2018)	English use and Qatar's linguistic super-diversity have effects on identity formation and culture.	Qualitative	Qatar
7. Johnston et al. (2014)	Information literacy and EFL students and its impact on language proficiency.	Qualitative	Qatar
8. Khatin-Zadeh et al. (2023)	Cross-cultural metaphors of time and their different conceptualizations.	Mixed Methods	Qatar + Intl.
9. Mubarak et al. (2023)	Emojis and hate speech in Arabic tweets on social media.	Quantitative	Qatar
10. Mustafawi et al. (2021)	Qatar University students' attitudes to English & Arabic in professional and academic settings.	Quantitative	Qatar
11. Olimat et al. (2023)	How culturally sensitive Arabic content in Netflix shows is subtitled for English-speaking audiences.	Qualitative	Jordan + Qatar

Table 2

Continued

12. Raza et al. (2021)	How cultural diversity, administrative structures, and institutional policies impact leadership effectiveness in English language education.	Qualitative	Qatar
13. Reynolds (2021)	Intercultural communication in TNHE and how educators and students negotiate linguistic and cultural identities.	Qualitative	Qatar
14. Samara et al. (2024)	Cultural interpretations of bullying across mediums and how linguistic factors influence its definitions.	Mixed Methods	Qatar + UK
15. Summers et al. (2019)	Evaluation of survey translations across cultures and their reliability in measuring attitudes toward science.	Quantitative	Qatar
16. Toriida et al. (2020)	How digital tools support independent learning among English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students in Qatar.	Mixed Methods	Qatar
17. Waterval et al. (2018)	Cross-border EMI in medical education and students' experiences in cross-border curriculum partnerships.	Mixed Methods	Qatar + Intl.
18. Yahiaoui et al. (2020)	Compares the effectiveness of dubbing and subtitling in translating satire from English into Arabic and how different translation modalities and language varieties affect humor.	Qualitative	Qatar

Data Analysis and Thematic Synthesis

Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was employed to systematically analyze and synthesize the qualitative data extracted from the selected studies. To ensure a rigorous and comprehensive approach, Braun and Clarke's (2022) revised six-step guide to reflexive thematic analysis was thoroughly reviewed and meticulously followed throughout the analysis process. The application of these steps was further complemented by Miles et al.'s (2014) framework of qualitative data analysis, involving simultaneous data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.

The analytical process began with a deep familiarization with each article, involving multiple readings and reflective engagement with its theoretical orientations, methodologies, and findings. The two authors jointly conducted coding and theme development. Each author independently coded the initial set of studies, after which we compared codes and discussed points of divergence until consensus was reached. Theme refinement occurred collaboratively in several iterative rounds. Throughout the process, both authors kept brief reflexive notes to document analytic decisions and ensure transparency. Initial codes were then systematically generated, capturing both explicit (semantic) and underlying (latent) meanings relevant to the review's focus on English, education, and cultural transformation in Qatar. These codes were organized into candidate themes through iterative clustering, based on conceptual coherence and shared patterns. The candidate themes were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure internal consistency and thematic distinctiveness, with the entire dataset revisited to validate each emerging theme.

Once the thematic structure was stable, each theme was defined and named to reflect its analytical scope and relevance. The naming process was guided by the need for clarity, nuance, and fidelity to the underlying data. The final phase involved the production of a comprehensive narrative, integrating illustrative insights from the reviewed literature to contextualize each theme within the broader socio-educational and linguistic landscape of Qatar. This rigorous process resulted in the identification of six interrelated thematic clusters, encompassing the diverse ways English interacts with cultural identity, institutional policy, bilingual practices, and informal digital spaces in Qatar. These clusters are presented in Table 3 and elaborated through both tabular and interpretive forms to offer a clear and critical synthesis of the findings.

Table 3
Thematic Categorization of the Reviewed Studies

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Associated Articles	Focus Summary
Language, Identity & Power Dynamics in Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discursive behavior and language in Qatari schools • The role of English in reshaping academic hierarchies 	Samara et al. (2024); Raza et al. (2021)	Explores English's role in shaping student identity and administrative structures in schools.
Student Perspectives & Bilingualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English and identity for Qatar University students • Student attitudes to English as a medium of instruction • English information literacy and language proficiency in academic contexts 	Mustafawi et al. (2021); Summers et al. (2019); Johnston et al. (2014)	Examines student attitudes toward bilingualism and the cultural implications of EMI.
English in Higher Education and the Workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English as a medium for inter-communal communication • English as a medium of instruction and cultural adaptation • Medical students' experiences in cross-border curriculum partnerships • Digital tools and self-directed English learning 	Mustafawi et al. (2021); Hillman & Eibenschutz (2018); Waterval et al. (2018); Toriida et al. (2020)	Discusses English as dominant in academia and professional life, and its cultural consequences.
Learning English Beyond the Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural shifts and evolving communication models • Translating culturally sensitive content from social media, ads, and apps • Implications for English language education 	Alós et al. (2017); Yahiaoui et al. (2020); Mubarak et al. (2023); Olimat et al. (2023)	Analyzes digital and informal English exposure through media, branding, and social platforms.
Cultural Shifts in Arabic–English Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translational challenges from Arabic to English • Metaphorical conceptualization and culture • Implications for English language education and translation practice 	Al-Adwan & Abuorabiedwan (2019); Alsadi (2016); Khatin-Zadeh et al. (2023); Almann (2020)	Investigates translation challenges and cultural loss in Arabic-English textual conversions.
English Hegemony and National Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The British Council and the institutionalization of English hegemony 	Alkateeb (2023); Reynolds (2021)	Critiques the institutionalization of English and its impact on

• English-medium instruction and cultural displacement in higher education

local identity and epistemology.

Findings and Discussion

The reviewed studies indicate that English in Qatar is associated with complex relationships among language use, identity, and cultural change. Across the corpus, English proficiency is linked to educational mobility, professional opportunity, and cross-cultural engagement, while some studies also report concerns about its implications for Arabic and for cultural attachment. The review further suggests that English operates not only within schools but also across social, digital, and professional contexts, where it intersects with broader questions of language use, belonging, and cultural continuity. The discussion that follows synthesizes these patterns while noting that some themes are discussed in greater depth because they are supported by a larger and more conceptually rich body of empirical studies. Conversely, themes with fewer publications receive more concise treatment.

English, Identity, and Power Dynamics in Schools

Beyond its role as a medium of instruction, English in Qatar serves as a vehicle for reshaping social and academic hierarchies, impacting identity development, and influencing students' cultural insights (Raza et al., 2021). Across the reviewed studies, cultural and societal norms are discussed as shaping how cultural perspectives are interpreted and expressed in educational settings. This function of English aligns with Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic capital, where linguistic competence in English emerges as an asset deeply embedded within social hierarchies and power relations. As this theme is supported by a small number of studies, the claims presented here should be interpreted as indicative rather than generalizable.

Discursive Behavior in Qatari Schools

In Qatari schools, discursive hierarchies are shaped by language medium and embedded cultural norms. Studies on bullying terminology among the circles of Arab resident students in Qatar reveal distinctive linguistic and power models in Arabic and English across different institutions. In Arabic-medium schools, students define bullying contextually, while their counterparts in English-medium schools employ more categorical definitions (Samara et al., 2024). Samara et al. (2024) suggest that cultural norms shape how bullying is understood and discussed across Arabic- and English-medium settings. This divergence underscores how these cultural variations, particularly within Arab societies, influence the understanding of bullying and its manifestations. The lack of a direct Arabic equivalent for the English term "bullying" further complicates the issue. While terms like "trespass" (Ta'adi) and "harm" (Az'a) are used to refer to bullying-related behaviors, they fail to fully capture the concepts of intentionality and power imbalance inherent in the English definition of bullying, as does "Tanammor" (Samara et al., 2024).

This linguistic variance may help explain why some power-imbalance behaviors are less readily problematized in everyday discourse. As an interpretive implication, such framings can position bullying as a power exercise or a *rite of passage* rather than as a reportable problem.

The Role of English in Reshaping Academic Hierarchies

Academic hierarchies in Qatari educational institutions appear closely intertwined with English as a status symbol of power. Raza et al. (2021) studied the complex cultural perceptions surrounding the place of English among policymakers, instructors, and program leaders. English proficiency is often framed as essential for academic and professional advancement. However, it poses challenges to the country's local cultural identity. Administrators encounter dilemmas pertaining to adjusting curricula while being mindful of Qatari cultural specificities and standardized international frameworks (Raza et al., 2021). The Western-designed textbooks used in English-medium instruction institutions and classes are identified as a recurrent site of tension. Moreover, the issue of native speakerism in the hiring of English teachers perpetuates a predominant power paradigm.

Taken together, the reviewed studies suggest that English functions not only as a communicative resource but also as a socially stratifying one within Qatar's educational landscape. We interpret these patterns as indicative of how language policy and institutional practices may contribute to the ongoing renegotiation of cultural identities and social structures.

Student Perspectives and Bilingualism

Students' experiences and perceptions lie at the heart of understanding how language policy, identity, and educational outcomes intersect in Qatar. Interpreting these accounts across studies, students reflect the broader sociopolitical tensions between global linguistic capital and cultural rootedness. Their views on English are not merely instrumental but are entangled with questions of belonging, authenticity, and epistemological access.

English, Identity, and Cultural Attachment

Mustafawi et al. (2021), in their study at Qatar University (QU), explored the symbolic and practical roles of English in shaping students' academic and personal trajectories. While students generally view English as a gateway to professional success, many simultaneously express concern over its growing dominance and its perceived threat to Arabic and cultural identity. Arabic is seen by QU students as inseparable from their national and religious heritage. This duality can be read as a tension between the utilitarian appeal of English and the perceived responsibility to preserve Arabic, a pattern commonly reported in bilingual societies shaped by postcolonial transitions. This ambivalence underscores what Bourdieu (1991) describes as a linguistic habitus, where students' internalized attitudes toward English and Arabic reflect broader ideological structures governing symbolic capital.

English Proficiency and Academic Challenges

Students' attitudes toward English as a medium of instruction (EMI) reveal further complexities. In English-medium educational systems, many Qatari students struggle with comprehension and academic engagement due to limited English proficiency (Johnston et al., 2014). Summers et al. (2019) noted a policy shift in 2012, where Arabic was reinstated as the primary language of instruction in some institutions, reflecting broader anxieties about cultural transformation and linguistic displacement. Additionally, inadequate English proficiency restricts students' ability to engage critically with academic materials, limiting their information literacy

and research capabilities (Johnston et al., 2014). Mustafawi et al. (2021) point out that many students must frequently code-switch between Arabic in their social and cultural lives and English in academic contexts, a process that imposes cognitive strain and contributes to identity fragmentation.

These perspectives align with Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital, which frames language as a form of social power that determines access to educational and economic opportunity. English in Qatar thus functions as both an enabling tool and a gatekeeping mechanism. At the same time, students' unease about the diminishing status of Arabic highlights ongoing postcolonial tensions surrounding authenticity, cultural preservation, and epistemological dominance.

English in Higher Education and the Workplace

Waternival et al. (2018) and Hillman and Eibenschutz (2018) examined the role of higher education and professional English language use in Qatar. These studies underscore that language use and identity formation in Qatar are multifaceted processes shaped by the country's sociocultural context. The implementation of English in Qatar's educational system reflects the country's effort to keep abreast of technological change, economic development, and globalization. Toriida et al. (2020) saw an association between digital learning resources and Qatari cultural identity. In a linguistically super-diverse society, English serves as a bridge between local and expatriate communities, facilitating communication and integration (Hillman & Eibenschutz, 2018).

English as a Medium for Inter-communal Communication

In Qatar's professional and academic settings, English usage has surpassed Arabic in workplaces, higher educational institutions, and corporate businesses (Mustafawi et al., 2021). Given that expatriates substantially outnumber the citizens, approximately at an 80:20 ratio, English has emerged as the default lingua franca mediating interethnic communication in Qatar's super-diverse society, facilitating pragmatic exchange while simultaneously obscuring local linguistic ecologies. For instance, financial establishments, international corporations, and healthcare industries heavily rely on English for daily operations (Hillman & Eibenschutz, 2018). Hence, Qatar's linguistic super-diversity accounts for the coexistence of English varieties among its composite ethnic groups. The interaction between Indian, Gulf, Arabic-inflected, and Western English accents has contributed to the formation of distinct regional variations of English. However, while English facilitates intergroup communication, concerns are raised about its potentially hegemonic influence on Arabic, which complicates a nuanced understanding of the broader cultural and linguistic processes shaping identities in Qatar today. Notwithstanding its economic rewards, the pervasive use of English is often perceived as having consequential implications for Qatar's linguistic and cultural heritage (Hillman & Eibenschutz, 2018).

The symbolic importance retained by Arabic in national and religious discourse, in the face of English authority in academic and professional settings, has reinforced a linguistic hierarchy (Waternival et al., 2018; Mustafawi et al., 2021). The disconnect between students' linguistic backgrounds and the language of instruction in higher education underscores this tension. Many Qatari students who transition from Arabic-medium schools to English-medium universities encounter challenges with cultural adaptation (Waternival et al., 2018).

English as a Medium of Instruction and Cultural Adaptation

While English, as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), enhances career prospects, it can be a hindrance to students whose primary language is Arabic (Waterval et al., 2018; Summers et al., 2019). When transitioning from Arabic-anchored secondary education to university programs conducted entirely in English, many Qatari students not only have to make linguistic adjustments but also cultural ones (Johnston et al., 2014). In the field of medical education, cross-border curriculum partnerships specifically center on the challenges of the English language as a medium of instruction. These partnerships align medical training programs with worldwide requirements, demanding students to navigate complex English lexis and pedagogical methods exported from Western institutions (Waterval et al., 2018). For many students, the language barrier not only impedes academic understanding and engagement but also affects their sense of academic identity and belonging (Waterval et al., 2018; Summers et al., 2019).

The wider discussion about language policy in Qatar positions it at the crossroads between modernization and cultural identity. While English-medium education follows global standards, it may contribute to the diminishing visibility of Arabic in academic and intellectual discourse (Hillman & Eibenschutz, 2018). Reconciling the benefits of English education with the imperative to maintain Arabic as a medium of cultural representation, policymakers face ongoing challenges. Mustafawi et al. (2021) and Toriida et al. (2020) called for the enactment of targeted English-language scaffolding programs to bridge the gap between Arabic and EMI programs.

Digital Tools and Self-directed English Learning

The role of digital learning in EMI settings continues to evolve alongside the growing integration of online tools into Qatari educational environments. This shift has significantly influenced English language learning by supporting self-regulated and autonomous learning practices (Toriida et al., 2020). Students increasingly rely on digital platforms, e-learning tools, and mobile applications to supplement their English acquisition outside the traditional classroom and without direct teacher supervision. However, disparities persist in terms of access, engagement, and the effective use of these technologies. Students with higher levels of English proficiency are generally better equipped to benefit from such tools (Toriida et al., 2020).

Research by Waterval et al. (2018) supports these findings, showing that many learners struggle to transition effectively to self-directed learning when dealing with English-language academic content. To address these challenges, it is essential to develop structured scaffolding systems that support all learners, particularly those with lower proficiency. As Toriida et al. (2020) argue, implementing comprehensive digital literacy programs is critical for ensuring that students at varying skill levels can navigate and benefit from digitally mediated educational environments. The promise of digital learning tools, therefore, depends on the extent to which institutions implement targeted scaffolding systems that address linguistic and technological inequalities. As Qatar continues to navigate its educational future, the challenge remains how to harness the economic and intellectual benefits of English-medium instruction without compromising the centrality of Arabic in shaping national identity and academic inclusion.

Learning English Beyond the Classroom

The rise of extracurricular and online platforms, including social media, streaming services, and branding websites, has extended English learning beyond traditional classroom contexts. As a

result, the teaching and learning of English have become more complex, shaped by students' informal linguistic exposure outside formal education. Across the reviewed studies, these platforms are described as shaping English learning beyond classrooms and as informing how Arab learners in Qatar negotiate language use and cultural self-perception. Studies by Mubarak et al. (2023), Alós et al. (2017), Olimat et al. (2023), and Yahiaoui et al. (2020) highlight how Qatar's increasing global engagement amplifies this trend, reinforcing the evolving and often ambivalent relationship between English language acquisition and cultural self-perception.

Cultural Shifts and Evolving Communication Models

Drawing on Hofstede, Alós et al. (2017) analyzed how English plays a fundamental role in intercultural communication by challenging customary cultural classifications of high-context norms where cultures communicate in ways that heavily rely on semiotically structured implied context cues. These patterns indicate not only a movement from high-context to low-context communication styles but also a broader discursive reorientation where digital English introduces communicative norms that diverge from Arabic rhetorical traditions. In Qatar, the consumption of digital media culture and its interfaces has introduced more explicit interaction methods, transforming how English is used and comprehended. Mubarak et al. (2023) examined emojis as cues for detecting hate speech in Arabic tweets, revealing how cultural references are essential to comprehend offensive discourse. Cultural context and linguistic interpretations are instrumental elements of Arabic interaction. The junction of contextual cues and cultural expectations underlines the need for English learners in Qatar to understand how culture negotiates, co-constructs, and alters meaning across languages.

Translating Culturally Sensitive Content from Social Media, Ads, and Apps

The translation of culturally sensitive material from English to Arabic reveals that language use outside classrooms impacts the learning of English. Online platforms, advertisements, and streaming services create linguistic and cultural spaces where different cultural idiosyncrasies play out. In these settings, language choice inflects not only comprehension but also how cultural values are preserved or adapted. Studies on advertising, entertainment, and digital branding reveal how English proficiency in Qatar is shaped by such informal exposure. Alós et al. (2017) explored the role of branding and advertising by international luxury cosmetic companies in cultural mappings and transformation. The extracurricular exposure to English through these means influences linguistic competence and consumer identity.

Yahiaoui et al. (2020) examined strategies for translating American humor and satire in the animated TV show *The Simpsons* into Arabic, emphasizing that effective translation must align with the sociocultural norms of the target audience. Their study explored the differences between dubbing and subtitling in rendering satire. Subtitling often relies on literal strategies, which tend to miss cultural nuances. In contrast, dubbing typically employs the equivalent effect strategy, which is better at capturing sociocultural elements. The study found that language variety and translation modality significantly affect how well satire is conveyed. Dubbing in Egyptian Arabic allows for greater creative adaptation, while subtitling in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) often results in more literal and less culturally resonant translations. This suggests that regional dialects may feel more immediate for many Arabic-speaking viewers, whereas MSA can be perceived as more

formal and less conversational. Correspondingly, subtitling strategies in the two Jordanian series “Jinn” and “Al-Rawabi” on Netflix bring to light the intricacies of translating culturally sensitive language (Olimat et al., 2023). Even though direct translations are sometimes used, subtitlers regularly utilize cultural substitution or omission to avoid touching on cultural sensitivities. The overreliance on generalization or omission can lead to the loss of meaning and the reduction of conversational accuracy for English-speaking audiences (Olimat et al., 2023).

Implications for English Language Education

The process of English language learning in Qatar has become increasingly pragmatic as the traditional academic channels have been reshaped by new social and digital platforms. The extracurricular exposure to verbal exchanges in new social media conduits has contributed to the emergence of a parallel informal outlet of education. This informal exposure reshapes not only linguistic competencies but also the cultural schemas through which students interpret meaning, engage with peers, and situate themselves within a globalized media landscape. Computer-mediated culture and digital platforms are associated with shifts in language use and identity, including exposure to topics treated as sensitive in mainstream culture (Olimat et al., 2023; Yahiaoui et al., 2020). Yahiaoui et al.'s (2020) work on dubbing and subtitling strategies in translating humor across Arabic and English intersects with Alós et al.'s (2017) study on brand marketing translation operations that alter cultural specificities, influencing how English and Arabic interact in commercial and public discourse. Taken together, these studies suggest that learners’ perceptions of appropriate language use are shaped not only by formal instruction but also by exposure to cross-cultural norms in digital and professional communication. Moreover, the use of emojis in the transmission of hate speech highlights the importance of context in interpreting meaning in both Arabic and English (Mubarak et al., 2023).

Cultural Shifts in Arabic–English Translation

Intercultural sensitivity has attracted the renewed attention of scholars. It is particularly important in Arabic-to-English translation, as the lack thereof can pose difficulties, namely with figurative language, semantic repetition, and metaphorical conceptualization. These convolutions arise from polarities in rhetorical styles and cultural beliefs. Adapting translated texts to the target audience impels the ability to navigate between meaning retention and readability (Alsadi, 2016; Al-Adwan & Abuorabialedwan, 2019; Almann, 2020; Khatin-Zadeh et al., 2023).

Translational Challenges from Arabic to English

A cardinal challenge with Arabic–English translation is the treatment of semantic repetition: a stylistic and rhetorical device that is common to Arabic but less conventional in English. Repetition in Arabic is used rhetorically and emphatically to create an inner cadence and confer a sense of cohesiveness on the text. English, however, is generally more concise as a language, and hence translating repetitions in Arabic can produce awkwardness and redundancy. Repetition in Arabic not only functions as a means of rhetoric and cohesiveness but also creates extratextual meanings by mirroring oral traditions (Al-Adwan & Abuorabialedwan, 2019).

Beyond repetition, Arabic’s syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures pose additional challenges for translators. Almann (2020) explained that diction choices in translation modify the reader’s mental imagery as they belong to a larger linguistic system. This justifies why translators

alter phrasings in Arabic at the risk of unintentionally diluting the rhetorical impact of the text of origin. This discrepancy underlines the delicate balance between textual accuracy and cultural acceptability in translation. In cross-linguistic translation from Arabic, the meaning often shifts.

Metaphorical Conceptualization and Culture

The polarities in the concepts of time and space are culturally bound. Apart from the discursive challenges, Arabic-to-English translation needs to heed the conceptually distinctive metaphorical language and probe how the notion of time is conceptualized differently in Arabic and English (Al-Adwan & Abuorabaledwan, 2019). The use of metaphors diverges between different cultures and is contingent on the interlocutor's dynamic syntactic, cognitive, and lexical choices. For instance, in English, time is conceptualized as a commodity, using expressions such as "spending time" or "wasting time," whereas in Arabic, time is conceptualized in moral, cyclical, or destiny-related terms. This variance mirrors wider cultural attitudes toward fate and time that impact the way metaphorical discourse should be adapted in translation (Khatin-Zadeh et al., 2023). Moreover, metaphors are profoundly predicated on discourse and sustain expressive and cultural implications that can hinder a smooth transfer across semantic boundaries. In Arabic, the language of time generally carries undertones pertaining to morality, religion, and philosophy.

Translating metaphors is even more complicated due to cultural narratives and the divergences in cognitive framing (Alsadi, 2016; Khatin-Zadeh et al., 2023). Culturally grounded metaphorical conceptualizations in Arabic interfere with meaning-making in English, revealing translation-like cognitive challenges within EFL learning contexts in Qatar (Alsadi, 2016). Taken together, this body of work suggests that translation is simultaneously a linguistic and cultural act that negotiates the integrity of the source text and its reception in the target language (Al-Adwan & Abuorabaledwan, 2019; Almanna, 2020; Khatin-Zadeh et al., 2023).

Implications for English Language Education and Translation Practice

With the ongoing institutionalization of English, the reviewed studies draw attention to the challenges learners face in navigating linguistic and cultural diversity across contexts. Such awareness highlights the cognitive demands involved in negotiating meaning across texts and contexts. Being knowledgeable about the rhetorical constructs of the Arabic language, such as repetition, metaphors, and cohesion strategies, Almanna (2020) proposed that during their training, translators need to systematically examine the syntagmatic and paradigmatic connections to see how the subtle moves, conceptual gaps, contextualization, and variations in discourse can modify meaning. Khatin-Zadeh et al. (2023) stressed the significance of contextualizing metaphorical language to comprehend the way abstract concepts are framed differently in both English and Arabic.

English Hegemony and National Identity

In Qatar, English functions as a primary medium of instruction in higher education and as a central linguistic resource in economic, political, and international domains, as well as in the formulation and implementation of educational policy. As a medium of cognition and social organization, English has been associated in some reviewed studies with shifts in educational

frameworks, social hierarchies, and processes of identity formation across Gulf societies. Within this literature, the teaching and dissemination of English are discussed in relation to sociopolitical and ideological authority, and English is often analyzed as a privileged language of knowledge, mobility, and power (Alkateeb, 2023; Reynolds, 2021).

The British Council and the Institutionalization of English Hegemony

In the Gulf region, English has been institutionally embedded through organizations such as the British Council, whose physical presence has contributed to the popularity and expansion of English-language education across the region. In visual semiotic analyses of videos published on the British Council's promotional websites for English courses and programs in the GCC, Alkateeb (2023) described the organization's institutional efforts to promote interest in learning English. The organization has contributed meaningfully to determining language strategies and plans in the GCC region, ensuring that English remains central to academic and professional qualifications. The organization has been implementing and prioritizing extensive educational initiatives and reaching out to all institutions through its IELTS examination centers, which serve as key access points to many Western and non-Western universities. Through strategic marketing campaigns and their impact, the British Council perpetuates and underpins a neoliberal ideology (Alkateeb, 2023). Its engagement advances it as an "unstoppable juggernaut" that exemplifies linguistic hegemony and goes hand in hand with economic power (Demont-Heinrich, 2007, cited in Alkateeb, 2023, p. 306). The council's alignment with British and Western academic models positions the United Kingdom as the central authority on English-language education (Alkateeb, 2023). This process not only strengthens the visibility of English in higher education and corporate settings but may also contribute to cultural assimilation, as Arabic becomes less visible in key domains of knowledge production. By emphasizing global communication and professional development, the British Council popularizes the ELT industry and circulates narratives of linguistic and cultural power.

English-medium Instruction and Cultural Displacement in Higher Education

The strong presence of English-medium instruction (EMI) in international higher education institutions in Qatar has been associated in the literature with significant cultural and institutional effects. Reynolds (2021) characterizes EMI institutions, such as Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q) and other international branch campuses in Education City, as extensions of Western academic models that shape how knowledge is structured, disseminated, and valued. EMI can be a tool for cultural displacement, redefining students' engagement with their native language and cultural legacy. Reynolds (2021) further argues that English proficiency functions as a gatekeeping requirement for access to elite institutions, potentially marginalizing students whose academic repertoires are more strongly grounded in Arabic and privileging Western academic norms over locally rooted knowledge traditions.

The implications of EMI may extend beyond institutional structures to students' perceptions of linguistic identity and belonging. Some reviewed studies suggest that this dynamic may contribute to the relative neglect of indigenous knowledge systems and local narratives, as well as to the marginalization of Arabic in some fields of academic study (Reynolds, 2021). Arabic-speaking students may feel alienated from their intellectual and cultural heritage, which in turn affects their identity formation (Alkateeb, 2023). Students educated primarily in EMI environments often develop hybrid identities, experiencing linguistic and cultural dislocation as they attempt to reconcile their Arabic linguistic background with the dominant presence of English (Reynolds,

2021). The ongoing need to code-switch between languages and cultural frameworks can lead to cultural uncertainty and a sense of detachment from one's native identity, raising critical questions about the long-term cultural implications of EMI in Qatar (Mustafawi et al., 2021).

Linguistic Hierarchies and the Globalization of English in Qatar

The hierarchical positioning of English as an elite corporate language is one factor discussed in relation to its dominance as a medium of instruction in international schools. Alkateeb (2023) notes a distinct power imbalance in Qatar in the preferential treatment accorded to Western degrees, Western degree holders, and Western nationalities. She further argues that English fluency is discursively constructed and widely circulated as a prerequisite for access to prestigious institutions and high-status professional fields. Within this framework, native-speakerism functions as a reference model across several Gulf contexts, shaping institutional language hierarchies and structuring differential access for speakers of languages other than English. In Alkateeb's analysis, such ideological positioning may devalue the professional standing of some educators by privileging Western-associated linguistic norms within Qatar's academic landscape. It may also contribute to structural and professional barriers for Arabic-speaking English teachers, particularly within English-medium instruction institutions.

Conclusion

The present state-of-the-art review has mapped a decade (2014–2024) of empirical research authored by scholars affiliated with Qatari institutions, underscoring the increasingly complex interplay between English language use and cultural transformation in Qatar. While earlier scholarship often treated English as a neutral tool of globalization (e.g., Al-Issa, 2005; Syed, 2003), more recent research suggests a discursive landscape wherein English operates as symbolic capital, knowledge gatekeeper, and driver of sociocultural change. Across educational, professional, and digital domains, some studies indicate that English is linked to shifts in institutional hierarchies, the status of Arabic, and processes of identity formation (Raza et al., 2021; Mustafawi et al., 2021; Reynolds, 2021).

The reviewed studies track how English, once contained within the classroom or workplace, permeates digital ecologies and algorithmic platforms, facilitating cultural authority and inscribing aspirational modernities, especially among young people. Such findings indicate that the hegemony of English is not a byproduct of globalization but an integral mechanism in reconfiguring belonging, legitimacy, and access to knowledge. Some studies have interpreted the spread of English, which is frequently framed in terms of pragmatism and economic mobility, as contributing to a realignment of linguistic hierarchies, possibly displacing Arabic from some elite discursive spaces and creating forms of epistemic ambivalence among bilingual speakers (Hillman & Eibenschutz, 2018; Toriida et al., 2020; Alkateeb, 2023).

The recommendations that follow represent our interpretive synthesis of the reviewed literature rather than a consensus among all 18 studies. The cumulative insights of this review call for a shift from descriptive analysis to purposeful intervention. The widespread use of English in Qatar carries pedagogical and policy implications that should be addressed with both conceptual clarity and critical awareness. This linguistic landscape suggests the need for more than reflection; it can benefit from a thoughtful reexamination of language policy, educational practice, and

institutional priorities. The reviewed literature documents Qatar's sociolinguistic configuration and identifies a range of trajectories discussed in connection to policy formation, culture, and educational planning. English functions as a structuring force in institutional organization and knowledge generation, in addition to being a communication medium. Responses to English expansion are conceptualized within these frameworks in light of more general pedagogical, cultural, and epistemological paradigms. The research highlights the value of critical language awareness frameworks and culturally responsive teaching techniques in examining these processes. The implications that follow are offered as possible directions for language policy and educational practice in ways that affirm both cultural identity and epistemic integrity.

The research reviewed suggests the importance of strengthening the role of Arabic as a language of knowledge capable of supporting scientific discourse, research, and innovative curricula. In parallel, the literature indicates the potential benefits of curricula that incorporate rather than extract local knowledge, bilingual policies that support rather than replace local languages, and assessment practices that recognize translanguaging as a cognitive and cultural resource. A comparable concern has been noted elsewhere in the Gulf; in the Saudi context, Shah et al. (2019) found that the limited representation of learners' source culture in English language textbooks raised concerns about cultural relevance, whereas greater inclusion of local culture was seen as pedagogically beneficial. The scholarship further suggests that instructors may benefit from engaging not only with the pedagogical dimensions of teaching English but also with critical perspectives that situate the language within broader historical and ideological formations. Similarly, the literature highlights the importance of developing learners' discursive agency alongside grammatical competence, enabling them to reflect critically on how English may shape authority, privilege certain voices, and influence forms of belonging. The literature also emphasizes the importance of critical digital literacy, understood not merely as technical fluency but as awareness of the cultural and ideological narratives embedded in algorithmically mediated English content. Such capacities may help students engage with and navigate these digital discourses more critically. In sum, the reviewed literature suggests that language functions not merely as a neutral medium but as a site in which questions of cultural legitimacy, epistemic access, and identity are continually negotiated. To conclude, the key contributions of this review can be summarized as follows:

- Conceptual contribution: examines English in Qatar through the lens of symbolic capital, identity, power, and epistemic hierarchy.
- Empirical mapping: synthesizes ten years (2014–2024) of research conducted within Qatari institutions and identifies dominant themes and blind spots.
- Analytical insight: highlights reported tensions between English ascendancy and Arabic decentering, showing how this shapes educational and cultural negotiation.
- Policy implications: underscores the potential benefits of enhancing the role of Arabic, reconsidering evaluation procedures, and integrating critical awareness of language and ideology into instructional strategies.

Towards Future Research

While this review provides a comprehensive synthesis of peer-reviewed research indexed in Scopus and Web of Science and produced by scholars affiliated with Qatari institutions, its methodological scope inevitably limits the range of perspectives it captures. By excluding Arabic-language publications, grey literature, and work by diasporic or unaffiliated researchers, the review

may overlook alternative knowledge frameworks and locally grounded insights that circulate outside Anglophone academic spaces. Moreover, the selected time frame (2014–2024), though aligned with recent policy developments, may miss earlier stages in Qatar’s language planning history, particularly the Arabization–de-Arabization cycles and the foundational spread of English-medium instruction. Future reviews could address these gaps by incorporating practitioner reports, policy documents, and studies from cultural and educational organizations, thereby offering a broader and more contextually sensitive account of sociolinguistic change.

Looking ahead, future research would benefit from adopting intersectional, longitudinal, and decolonial methodologies that examine English not simply as a tool for communication but as a force that shapes educational, cultural, and institutional structures. Greater attention should be given to how English usage in Qatar is influenced by gender, class, and race, especially as these factors interact with broader discourses of modernity, social legitimacy, and access to opportunity. Comparative studies across the GCC could highlight both shared and distinct patterns in the spread and impact of English. In addition, ethnographic research and translanguaging-based approaches may offer valuable insights into how individuals and communities negotiate, resist, or reshape dominant language ideologies. More broadly, Park (2025) suggests that qualitative and methodologically integrated approaches are especially valuable for examining how language maintenance, cultural practice, and identity are negotiated across communities shaped by linguistic and cultural diversity. Ultimately, future scholarship could move beyond mapping current language practices and instead critically examine the cultural futures that these linguistic shifts both open up and constrain.

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