The role of Saudi universities in facilitating the understanding of national dialects A critical statistical study⁽*⁾

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Abstract

This study explores the role of Saudi universities in helping non-Arabic speakers understand national dialects. A descriptive analytical approach was used, focusing on a random sample of students learning Arabic as a second language. The key findings reveal that universities play a positive and statistically significant role in facilitating dialect comprehension in Saudi Arabia. There is a clear connection from educational goals to implementation mechanisms, and from these mechanisms to various difficulties and challenges encountered by learners. However, there is no statistically significant relationship between the difficulties and challenges and improvements in dialect understanding. The study also found a high level of agreement among respondents on the questionnaire statements. It concludes with a recommendation to link improvement plans and mechanisms to the identified difficulties and challenges. Additionally, it suggests creating programs that promote cross-cultural exchange and teach languages in their various dialects, utilizing computer programs and digital media. This approach aims to support and encourage innovation through smart applications, thereby facilitating the understanding of both classical Arabic and its dialects.

Keywords: Saudi universities, Saudi dialects, mechanisms, challenges, non-native Arabic speakers.

Introduction

Language serves as the face of a nation, a vital component of its identity, and a reflection of its achievements. Many countries have recognized the significance of promoting their languages and dialects, taking various steps to do so. They have developed educational plans and programs aimed at facilitating communication with others and achieving mutual interests in an increasingly globalized world, especially in the context of the technological revolution. Statistics indicate a continuous rise in the interest in learning foreign languages among individuals (Al-Aqili, 2018).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one such country that has prioritized the teaching of Arabic, making significant efforts to support its instruction for non-native speakers (Al-Suhaibani et al., 2018, Alotaibi, 2023).

The Arabic language is the dominant language throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where there are more than sixty distinct Saudi Arabic dialects across different regions. These colloquial dialects reflect the evolving nature of the language and play a significant role in everyday communication (Fawzia, 2017, Alharbi, 2022). They serve as the primary means of discourse among individuals in various settings, such as markets, companies, institutions, and government ministries.

Learning and understanding these dialects through new technologies, direct communication, and social media can have significant economic benefits. Improved communication fosters better transactions, services, and mutual interests. Furthermore, these advancements promote coexistence and acceptance of diverse perspectives, contributing to the cohesion and stability of a multifaceted society (Alshaya, 2020, Alsubhi, 2024).

Language plays a crucial role in understanding the culture of the community that speaks it (Ahmed, 2011, Al-Rayes, 2024). The demand for learning Arabic has been growing worldwide due to various factors, including political, economic, touristic, social, and security reasons. This functional approach to learning second and foreign languages is one of the most important educational strategies. However, having a job or practical application of the language has become essential for the effectiveness of linguistic structures. This approach aims to enhance the cognitive and linguistic abilities of learners, enabling them to navigate their daily lives and engage in personal and social activities (Sukkar, DT).

The issue arises when learners study Classical Arabic in the classroom but encounter dialects or colloquial Arabic in everyday situations outside of it. This includes informal interactions such as conversations with friends, business dealings, and shopping (Al-Qaffaan & Al-Faouri, 2012). Sukkar defined non-Arabic-speaking students as those coming from various countries to learn both Classical and colloquial Arabic (Al-Rabaya, 2019; Sukkar, 2016).

The influences and linguistic overlaps between languages have garnered interest in applied linguistics across various theoretical perspectives. Some theories suggest that a learner's first language impacts their acquisition of a second language at phonetic, grammatical, lexical, and etymological levels. Conversely, other theories argue that the first language can negatively affect second language learning, as the mother tongue may hinder the mastery of the target language (Al-Hain, 2017).

This study aims to contribute to the goals of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 by enhancing communication between Saudi society and the world while promoting the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence among its diverse components. To this end, the King Salman Center has launched the channel "Al-Arabiya for the World." This initiative seeks to serve and disseminate Arabic through the King Salman International Academy for the Arabic Language (ksaa.gov.sa), which is crucial in developing plans to enable non-Arabic speakers to communicate and understand Saudi society across various regions and dialects.

It is essential for those wishing to learn Arabic in its multiple dialects to have access to programs, events, and applications that meet their needs and help them overcome the linguistic challenges they face. This can be achieved by innovating solutions and providing ideas that align with their expectations, utilizing e-learning methods that incorporate the latest artificial intelligence advancements.

According to Al-Shafei (2022), it is important to teach speakers Arabic at different levels and styles, including classical heritage, modern classical Arabic, colloquial language (or middle language), and various colloquial dialects. Linguist Kyung Yoon Un (2012) stated that to fully master the Arabic language, one must be proficient in at least three forms: classical Arabic, colloquial intellectual language, and colloquial dialects.

Search problem:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has played a leading role in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers since 1967. It has established centers and institutes for Arabic language instruction in most of its universities, as well as in various locations around the world. The private sector has also contributed to promoting the spread of the Arabic language (Al-Aqili, 2018). However, there is a research gap in evaluating the efforts of Saudi universities to help non-Arabic speakers overcome the difficulties of understanding dialects within the Kingdom.

This gap underscores the need for research to clarify what universities are currently doing in this area, what more they can do in the future, and to identify potential obstacles. Additionally, it aims to explore the necessary solutions, methods, and resources needed to address these challenges. Thus, the primary question of this research is established.

What is the role of Saudi universities in overcoming the understanding of Saudi dialects for non-Arabic speakers?

And the following sub-questions:

1- To what extent have the university's goals been achieved in promoting the understanding of Saudi dialects for non-Arabic speakers?
2- What are the mechanisms for introducing Saudi dialects among non-Arabic speakers, and solving their problem in dealing and communicating?
3- What are the most important obstacles that hinder Saudi universities in overcoming the understanding of Saudi dialects among non-Arabic speakers?
4- What challenges do non-Arabic speakers face in understanding Saudi dialects from the student's point of view?

Research Objectives:

1- Explore how Saudi universities can promote the understanding of Saudi dialects among non-Arabic speakers.
2- Monitor the strategies used to introduce Saudi dialects to non-Arabic speakers and evaluate solutions to challenges faced in community communication.
3- Identify the key obstacles that Saudi universities encounter in helping non-Arabic speakers understand Saudi dialects.
4- Examine the challenges that non-Arabic speakers face in understanding Saudi dialects from the perspective of students.

Research hypotheses:

They are the probabilistic answers to research questions that might be accepted or rejected.

Saudi universities play a significant role in helping non-Arabic speakers understand Saudi dialects.

And the following sub-hypotheses:

1- Saudi universities are successfully achieving many of their goals in enhancing the understanding of Saudi dialects among non-Arabic speakers. They have developed mechanisms to introduce these dialects to non-Arabic speakers and help address the challenges they face in communication.

2- However, several obstacles prevent universities from effectively facilitating the understanding of Saudi dialects for non-Arabic speakers.

Research Methodology and Tools:

The research methodology employs a descriptive analytical approach, utilizing a questionnaire for field data collection.

Theoretical Framework:

The dialect is the form of human language in which a person grows up. It is often referred to as "the tongue" or "its tip," as it serves as the instrument for speaking. A dialect can be defined as "a specific method of linguistic use that exists within a particular environment of the same language." Some scholars describe it as the speech habits of a smaller group within a larger population that speaks the same language (Hilal, 1993).

Because a dialect encompasses a set of characteristics and qualities unique to a specific environment, it features linguistic phenomena that facilitate communication among members of that environment. Consequently, variations can arise even within a single language-such as the differences in language used by a lawyer compared to that of a doctor, (Darroush & Bousid, 2019).

The various dialects from the peninsula entered regions where non-Arabic languages were spoken, such as Coptic, Roman, Persian, Aramaic, Berber, and other local languages during the Islamic conquests. This led to a conflict between the invading dialects and the established local dialects. In many cases, the result was the isolation of the local dialects or their complete eradication. However, these local dialects did not disappear entirely; instead,

they left some phonetic traces within the invasive dialects (Anis, 2003). Al-Hazmi, (1975) noted that part of the Saudi war tribe migrated from their homeland to a different environment, causing them to be influenced by linguistic influences from their neighbors (Al-hazmy, 1975).

The study conducted by Meqdam (2023) revealed significant differences between the Al-Jawf dialect spoken in the Kingdom and other dialects, particularly the Jazan dialect and the Al-Jawf dialect in Yemen (Mugaddam, 2023). The authors suggest that teaching students in their native dialects may enhance their understanding of the material (Wondimu, 2015).

In most legislation, there is a noticeable lack of policy regarding languages, often prioritizing the main national language while overlooking the richness of multilingualism (Led, 2018). As we thrive in the twenty-first century, a time when technology holds immense potential, it is crucial to cultivate innovative policies for language investment. This is our moment to harness the power of technology to drive innovation and create new opportunities (Graham, 2013).

The rapid evolution of new technologies and digital transformations presents both challenges and opportunities for society and educational systems alike (Torben & Thomas, 2022). Communication and information technologies are not just transforming the daily lives of adolescents; they are reshaping the very fabric of the society they will inherit (Muhammet & Berna, 2011). Recent efforts highlight the importance of enhancing the digital skills of teachers and educational institutions, paving the way for a brighter future (Tuomi & Ilkka, 2015).

Our proposed approach highlights the inspiring power of media and resources in shaping the way learners design communicative assignments (Dorothy, 2016). For the past forty years, the dynamic relationship between technology and language teaching has captured the attention of researchers, driven by groundbreaking computer innovations that have enriched the experience of language learners (Robert and Edo, 2019).

Recognizing dialect traits is crucial for developers of dialect education programs, as it allows them to test and address any undesirable biases that may arise when applying models to speakers of specific dialects (Dorottya, 2021). This guide facilitates the creation of original material by utilizing

natural language processing techniques based on the language used by native speakers within a specific dialect. It also aids in the development of educational packages that are distributed online by the Saudi Authority for Data and Artificial Intelligence (SDAIA) (2023).

Field Study Procedures:

This section outlines the methods and procedures used in conducting this research. It includes a description of the data collection sources, the statistical processing tools employed to ensure validity, the methods used for application, the statistical analysis conducted on the data, and concludes with findings and recommendations.

First: Data Collection Sources:

This study used primary sources obtained through a questionnaire, which was reviewed by specialists in the field. The evaluation considered the clarity of the objective, the components, accuracy, and consistency of the questionnaire. It included an introduction to identify the target sample of the study, divided into two parts. The first part collected general data such as specialization, gender, and university. The second part consisted of statements designed to test the validity of the hypotheses.

Second: Statistical Processing Tool:

The data collection tool utilized was a questionnaire. The research employed statistical analysis software, specifically SPSS and Smart PLS4. The basic data was categorized into five key axes, as follows:

Table (1) shows the paragraphs corresponding to each axis and the number of phrases.

Number	Paragraphs	Themes of the study
16	1-16	The first axis is the objectives of the university
16	1-16	Second Theme: Mechanisms Used
16	1-16	Third Theme: Difficulties
16	1-16	Fourth Theme: Challenges
17	1-17	Fifth Theme: Improvement Proposals
81		Total

Third: Analysis of public data:

The study's general data was organized according to three axes: specialization, gender, and university. The table below presents the analysis of this data.

Table (2) shows the analysis of general data

Total	Rate %	Iteration	Category	Variable	figure
800	75.0	600	Faculty of Languages	Specialization	1
	25.0	200	Other		
800	35.0	225	male	Sex	2
	65.0	520	female		
800	37.5	300	Princess Nourah University	University	3
	30.0	240	Imam Muhammad University		
	22.5	180	King Saud University		
	10.0	80	Other		

Fourth: Statistical analysis of the degree of approval:

The degree of possible responses to the paragraphs was measured using a five-point Likert scale. This scale ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree, as shown in Table 3.

Table (3) Approval Score Scale

Degree of approval	Relative weight	Weighted average	Statistical significance
I strongly agree	5	5-4.21	"Very high approval score
I agree	4	4.20 – 3.41	High approval score
neutral	3	3.40 – 2.61	Medium approval score
Disagree.	2	2.60 – 1.81	Low approval score
Strongly disagree	1	1.80 -1	Zero approval score

The scale was calculated by dividing the total score by the number of consent statements.

$$(5+4+3+2+1)$$
$$/5= (15/5) =3$$

The calculated average value of 3 represents the hypothetical mean of the study. If the average response to a statement exceeds this hypothetical mean, it indicates that the sample members agree with that statement. The following table presents the calculated average values for each question in the questionnaire, along with the corresponding standard deviations, the significance of these calculated values, and the ranking of the statements

based on the degree of agreement from the sample members. Additionally, the table illustrates the level of agreement among respondents regarding the themes of the questionnaire.

Table (4) shows respondents' levels of agreement on the questionnaire axes

Pvalue	df	t	Order	Consent	Mean	Axis	
.000	15	19.44	4	high	4.09	The first axis is the objectives of the university	1
.000	15	36.99	2	high	4.17	Second Theme: Mechanisms Used	2
.000	15	18.39	3	high	4.16	Third Theme: Difficulties	3
.000	15	19.06	5	high	4.01	Fourth Theme: Challenges	4
.000	16	12.89	1	Very high	4.26	Fifth Theme: Improvement Proposals	5
.000			high		4.14	General arithmetic mean (weighting)	

Based on the path coefficients derived from the sample data, we reject the null hypothesis. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between each of the goals and the mechanisms, as well as between the mechanisms and both difficulties and challenges, with a statistical significance level of less than (5%). However, no significant relationship was found between difficulties and challenges leading to improvements, as the level of statistical significance is greater than 5%.

Many sample members agree with several significant phrases in the research axes:

- It appears that universities are keen to stay updated on the challenges facing the Arabic language. The Saudi Kingdom has placed significant emphasis on this matter as part of its Vision 2030, aiming to ensure the quality of services provided and contribute to a sustainable renaissance.
- The most frequently mentioned strategies approved by the sample members for enhancing the role of Saudi universities in promoting understanding of national dialects are as follows: motivating students through graduation projects and field training to attend and engage in Arabic language events and discussions is crucial. This approach supports the Arabic language by utilizing advertising and media discourse, while also fostering innovations and solutions that guide students toward leadership roles.

- One of the main challenges in improving the understanding of national dialects is the inadequate qualifications of those responsible for programs related to discourse, persuasion, and communication in the Arabic language. Additionally, there is a lack of interest among these individuals in attending university seminars that promote the Arabic language and teach it to non-native speakers. Furthermore, there is insufficient material and moral support for activities aimed at enhancing the Arabic language and its innovative applications, which are crucial for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers. There is also a need to establish camps and opportunities for students to volunteer or participate in initiatives that support the Arabic language and its education for non-native speakers.

- One of the significant challenges facing non-Arabic speakers, as identified by students in language institutes, is the prevalence of colloquial Arabic and dialects in Arabic content on social networks. This trend weakens their understanding, participation, and overall benefit from the language. Additionally, there is a lack of effective communication between Arab students and non-native speakers.

- Furthermore, there is insufficient attention given to extracurricular activities that could help bridge the gap between Modern Standard Arabic and dialects. There is also a notable absence of applications and technical resources developed by universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia aimed at serving the Arabic language and its various dialects. Lastly, there is a shortage of both material and moral support for Arabic language activities and innovative applications that could help connect classical Arabic with its dialects.

- There are several proposals aimed at improving the mechanisms for disseminating classical Arabic and its dialects among non-native speakers. These proposals include:

1- Coordinating efforts among the relevant authorities to encourage the participation of non-Arabic-speaking students in universities and institutes in social, national, regional, and global activities.

2- Providing both material and moral incentives to enhance participation in events, such as the International Day of the Arabic Language.

3- Allocating specific study hours for practical applications, which could involve organizing tourist visits and fostering cross-cultural exchanges.

4- Encouraging the development of various digital media using smart applications to facilitate the understanding of classical Arabic and its dialects.

These initiatives aim to create a more engaging and effective learning environment for non-native speakers.

Fifth: Measuring the quality and conformity of the measurement model (SEM-PLM-PLS)

Social science researchers utilize various tools for statistical analysis, and the optimal choice depends on selecting analysis methods capable of developing, exploring, and confirming research results. Among the latest methods appropriate for the research topic are Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, which includes both omega A and omega C.

The evaluation process consists of two stages. The first stage involves assessing the standard models to verify stability and reliability, meaning that the scale provides consistent results when reapplied to the same sample. This is tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient or the split-half reliability coefficient. The stability coefficient ranges from zero to one; as the value approaches zero, the degree of stability decreases, whereas it increases as the value approaches one.

The evaluation of honesty (Validity) refers to the scale's ability to accurately measure what it was designed to assess. This involves ensuring that the paragraphs are clear and that all relevant elements are included in the scale. The coefficient known as Cronbach's Alpha helps the researcher determine the degree of correlation among a set of elements within the statistical test, indicating whether they function as a consistent and unified group. A fundamental guideline for interpreting the scale's Cronbach's Alpha applies to both dichotomous questions (those with two possible answers) and Likert scale questions.

In general, a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.7 is considered acceptable; however, some researchers recommend aiming for values higher than 0.90 to 0.95 for better reliability. The analysis shows that the overall stability of the questionnaire statements is 0.968, which is statistically significant and indicates the validity and consistency of the instrument.

The calculation of Cronbach's Alpha for each dimension of the questionnaire is done as follows:

**Table (5) Measuring the degree of reliability and honesty**

Results	Goals	Mechanisms	Diffculties	Challenges	Improvement
Cronbach's alpha	0.948	0.965	0.952	0.940	0.922
Composite reliability (rho_a)	0.952	0.966	0.962	0.957	0.781
Composite reliability (rho_c)	0.954	0.968	0.958	0.950	0.904
Average variance extracted (AVE)	0.568	0.671	0.596	0.566	0.369

The analysis of the reliability criteria, specifically rho_a and rho_c, yielded good results for all dimensions. The calculated values for both indicators were greater than 0.9, which exceeds the standard value of 0.6. Additionally, the extracted average variance (AVE) for all dimensions was deemed acceptable, as these values surpassed the reference threshold of 0.5. This assessment comes with the expectation of improvements in future proposals.

Sixth: Path Models analysis

Path models are graphs that visually represent hypotheses and relationships analyzed through SEM.

Figure 1 illustrates the track analysis that studies the role of universities in enhancing the understanding of national dialects in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
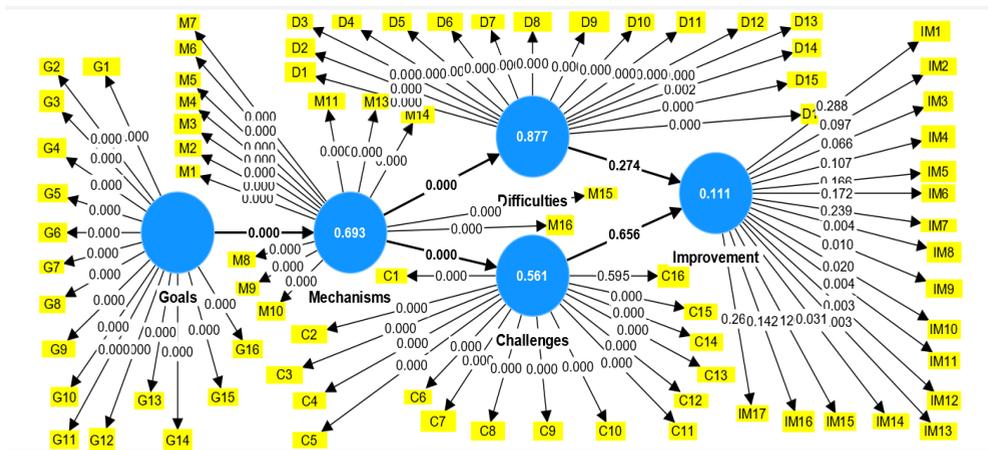
Figure 1 illustrates the path analysis of the different dimensions of the search variables.

After running the PLS-SEM algorithm, we obtained estimates for the relationships outlined in the structural model, specifically the path coefficients. These coefficients represent the assumed relationships between the variables. The results indicate that the majority of these path coefficients are statistically significant, as the probability values are below (5%). This reflects the impact on the underlying variables that were developed for measurement.

The findings revealed several key correlations: the correlation coefficient between the university's objectives and the mechanisms used stands at 69.3%, while the correlation between the mechanisms and the challenges faced is significantly higher at (87.7%). Additionally, the relationship between the mechanisms followed and improvement is measured at (56. 1%). Lastly, the influence of challenges and difficulties on improvement is noted to be (11.1%).

The results of the analysis have been obtained from the path extracted after doubling the sample size to 5000 (subsample).

The coefficients for the paths derived from the sample data are presented in Table (6).

Table (6) The coefficients for the paths derived from the sample data

Specific indirect effects		Original sample	Sample mean	STDEV	T test	P value	Resolution
H01	**Mechanisms →Objectives**	0.833	0.837	0.042	19.932	0.000	**H0Reject**
H02	**→Difficulties mechanisms**	0.936	0.937	0.016	57.628	0.000	**H0Reject**
H03	**→Challenges mechanisms**	0.749	0.754	0.060	12.466	0.000	**H0Reject**
H04	**→Improvement difficulties**	-0.493	-.0408	0.451	1.093	0.274	**H0Accept**
H05	**→Optimization Challenges**	0.237	0.221	0.532	0.446	0.656	**H0 Accept**

From the results of the path coefficients extracted from the sample data, the null hypothesis is rejected, that is: there is a statistically significant path between each of the goals towards the mechanisms, and the mechanisms towards both difficulties and challenges, as the level of statistical significance is less than (5%). However, it was proven that there is no direction for both

difficulties and challenges towards improvements because the level of statistical significance is greater than (5%).

Results:

1- This study concludes that universities play a positive and statistically significant role in addressing the challenges of learning national dialects in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The results indicate a significant relationship between the goals and mechanisms, with an average value of (0.837) and a statistical significance level of (0.000). Similarly, the relationship from mechanisms to difficulties has an average of 0.937, also with a significance level of 0.000. Additionally, the connection between mechanisms and challenges has an average value of 0.754, again showing a significance level of 0.000. However, there is no significant relationship between difficulties and challenges in terms of improvements, as indicated by a statistical significance level greater than 5%. (See Table 9.)

2- This study concluded that the overall approval rate for all questionnaire statements is high, with a weighted arithmetic mean of 4.14, indicating a strong level of agreement, as shown in Table (4). This high approval is consistent across the various sections of the questionnaire.

3- Saudi universities are making significant efforts to promote the understanding of Saudi dialects among non-Arabic speakers. There is a clear connection between the universities' objectives and the methods they employ, which include hiring experienced individuals, organizing dialect training programs, and integrating female students into society through scientific trips and various activities and events. The respondents' level of agreement on these initiatives averaged 4.09, indicating a high level of approval.

4- Universities are implementing mechanisms to introduce Saudi dialects to non-Arabic speakers and are working to address challenges in communication and community interactions. However, their efforts are currently limited and require further improvement and development. This conclusion is supported by the analysis of the questionnaire, which revealed that the average level of agreement among the participants was (4.17), indicating a high level of approval.

1- One of the main obstacles preventing Saudi universities from helping non-Arabic speakers understand Saudi dialects is the lack of adequate financial

and technical support. This conclusion is supported by the analysis of the questionnaire, which revealed that respondents had a high level of agreement, with an average score of (4.16).

2- One of the challenges that non-Arabic speakers face in understanding Saudi dialects, from the students' perspective, is that the language they study at universities does not adequately prepare them to comprehend these dialects or engage with Saudi and Arab society. This finding is supported by the analysis of the questionnaire, which revealed an average agreement level of (4.01) among the participants, indicating a high level of approval for this viewpoint.

3- The need to connect improvements with existing difficulties and challenges has been acknowledged. The respondents expressed an average level of agreement of 4.26, indicating a high level of approval.

Recommendations:

The paper recommends that universities:

1- Improvement plans and strategies should be linked to the difficulties and challenges faced by non-native Arabic speakers. This can include organizing tourist visits and camps to regions where they can learn about dialects, as well as the local culture, traditions, and values. Additionally, universities should develop programs that help expatriates invest in, engage with, and understand the dialects of the local communities in order to enhance their interaction and integration.

2- Efforts are being made to establish partnerships and develop programs that facilitate the exchange of cultures and teach languages in their various dialects through computer software dedicated to language instruction.

3- Encouraging the innovation and use of diverse digital media through smart applications to enhance the understanding of classical Arabic and its dialects.

4- Coordinating efforts and employing linguistic planning, along with insights from sociolinguistics, to create strategic initiatives for teaching dialects to non-Arabic speakers.

5- Develop initiatives that enhance linguistic investment, as language plays a crucial role in the national economy due to the rising number of non-Arabic speaking residents, expatriates, and tourists in the Kingdom.

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