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Expatriates' Use of AI Translation Tools in KSA: An Exploratory Study with Non-Arabic Speakers

Mohammad Shariq
Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Humanities, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia
m.aslam@qu.edu.sa

Fahd Hamad Alqasham
Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Humanities, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia
f.alqasham@qu.edu.sa

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Abstract

With increasing globalization, societies are becoming more and more multicultural as the workforce, whether skilled or unskilled, is moving across the globe for better work opportunities. With a robust developmental plan in place known as Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia is also welcoming businesses and professionals like never before. In this scenario, investors, tourists and other non-Arabic-speaking visitors, including expatriates, are entering the country. However, with an equal emphasis on preserving the country's pristine culture and a local population less than proficient in the international language of communication, both language groups are resorting to the aid of AI tools to tackle their communication deficits in personal and professional spaces. This study explores the perceptions of expatriate and local populations in Saudi Arabia towards the use of AI tools in their daily lives to communicate socially in shared workspaces, to bridge language barriers, and how these tools contribute to easing the language barrier. Findings indicate a positive perception of the efficacy of AI as a language assistant, the existence of differences between the more and less digitally enabled populations, and Saudi nationals' greater ease with the use of AI in professional settings but preference for Arabic-speaking locals where problem-solving involves individual intervention. The outcomes of the study are expected to yield insights into optimizing the quality of visitor and tourist experience as well as AI-based translation utilization in KSA.

1. INTRODUCTION

Multicultural environments such as modern Saudi Arabia mandate the use of either an international language for communication (Tryzna, 2023) or in a situation where the linguistic repertoire of one of the participants in the exchange is limited to the mother tongue, the translation tools offered by AI which enable communication to occur directly or indirectly (Derivry & Potolia, 2023). Whereas AI intervention in intercultural communication was rather slow in its nascent stages, the current growth in both the technologies and people's acceptance of them (Sayers et al., 2021; Alowedi & Al Ahdal, 2023) have deeply impacted the nature of communication, graduating the role of AI from that of mediators in communication to veritable communicator itself (Hohenstein, 2020). This is bound to

have a certain social impact on the nature of communication, especially in multicultural or intercultural environments where AI has come to figure in interaction, information sharing, connecting and so on (Khasawneh, 2023). It is, therefore, natural for certain sectors, such as tourism to also be affected by this change. As per Al-Malki (2023), the English communication skills of Saudi tourism undergraduates score poorly on all four parameters but are the poorest in speaking and listening, followed by reading and writing in that order. Given the fact that a great deal of Saudi education is directed towards teaching and learning English, studies over the past years have shown consistently that the Saudi youth are nowhere near achieving a semblance of proficiency in English that may be classified as communicatively adequate (Alhamazany, 2021; Aljabr & Al-Ahdal, 2024). In this scenario, AI tools are gaining popularity with the expatriate populations in their communication with the locals as the international workforce struggles to adjust to the new work and social cultures and transition to a hassle-free lifestyle (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011). These expats sometimes enter Saudi Arabia with some degree of cross-cultural training (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005), yet when it comes to real-time communication, given the diverse local linguistic and cultural groups that they encounter, their training soon proves to be inadequate (Tahir & Ismail, 2007).

Globalization has brought in its wake integrated operations across longitudes, necessitating the movement of the workforce to alien cultures (Magnani, 2024). According to the Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia is constantly working to attract millions of visitors, tourists, and investors in order to grow its economy and reduce the Kingdom's reliance on oil revenues (Shariq, 2023). Job dissatisfaction and difficulties in adjusting to the local culture are the two major factors behind (Alsadaan et al., 2021), as many as 20% of American managers abandoning their assignments before term in Saudi Arabia (Black & Gregersen, 1999). Not only this, but the study also found that the performance of those who chose to stay the full period was not up to the employers' satisfaction, and about a quarter of those who did complete their assignments actually changed their employers on repatriation. Expatriates' expectations of the new culture and their perceptions of their actual experiences in the country of expatriation affect their ability to adjust to the new culture (Setti,Sommovigo & Argentero., 2022). In cross-cultural situations, cultural shock, defined as "the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences" (Adler, 1975), causes adjustments issues to the expatriates. Failure to communicate effectively with the local populations can cause stressful reactions.

Adjusting to the new cultural and linguistic milieu can be challenging where common grounds such as a lingua franca do not exist. Thus, expatriates' domestic and occupational lives are transitioned (Dowling et al., 2017), which poses day-to-day struggles for fulfilling one's basic needs. In this scenario, AI tools that interpret spontaneously are highly popular as they bridge the linguistic gap between the sender and receiver of the message.

Moreover, embedded in Saudi Vision 2030 is the highest-level support for tourism in Saudi Arabia; the country is opening its doors to tourists at an unparalleled level hitherto, welcoming not only pilgrims but tourists of all sorts (Saudi Ministry of Tourism Portal). Non-Arabic tourists often turn to AI translation tools to help them explore and provide them with access to communication with the locals for various reasons.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. AI as the non-native speaker's assistant

An important development in educational technology is the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) into Arabic language instruction for non-Arabic speakers. Garba and Hassan (2024) examine the benefits and difficulties of utilizing AI tools to improve non-native Arabic speakers' Arabic language proficiency. These apps include ArabicPod101 for improving listening skills, Lingbe for improving

speaking abilities, Duolingo for improving reading skills, and Scribe for improving writing skills. For non-Arabic speakers, using these tools will make learning Arabic easier. Using a questionnaire, data was gathered from ten students at the 100-level Department of Arabic Language at Umaru Musa Yar'adua Katsina, Nigeria, using an adaptation of the description approach. The outcome of the research shows that the participants acknowledge the impact of these applications in improvising the learning of 4 linguistic skills. As per them, incorporating these applications into teaching Arabic to non-Arabic speakers is a boon.

Thabet and Qadha (2024) look at how well English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners can translate a poem by well-known Saudi poet Dr. Ghazi Al-Qusaibi from Arabic to English using artificial intelligence-based translation techniques. The study involved fifty Saudi undergraduate EFL students who were split evenly between an experimental group that employed AI technologies and a control group that did not. One of Dr. Al-Qusaibi's poems was given to each group to translate, and the results were assessed according to standards such as precision, fluidity, poetic device usage, and conformity to genre norms. According to statistical analysis, students in the experimental group generated translations that considerably outperformed the control group on the majority of metrics. Although both groups were able to express the main idea accurately, the AI-assisted group outperformed the other group in areas such as creating translations that were more fluid, coherent, and free of grammatical mistakes. Within the constraints of concentrating on a single poet, the study offers insights into how learners may be able to overcome the difficulties associated with translating poetry, which mainly depends on cultural contextualization and imaginative interpretation of symbolic language, by strategically integrating AI during the translation process. A deeper understanding could be obtained by additional study that increases the sample size and diversity of source texts.

The influence of applying artificial intelligence (AI)-based automated translation technologies, including Chat GPT and DeepL, on third language competency among students at Malaysian public institutions (IPTA) is the subject matter of the study done by Saja and Azmi (2024). The focus is on how students' dependence on AI technologies may impair their ability to speak, write, and understand language in other domains. This study aims to determine the reasons that motivate students to utilize AI in their third language acquisition, assess the impact of AI usage on grammar and writing competency, and examine the connection between students' reliance on AI and their speaking abilities. 306 students were given a questionnaire, which serves as the main tool in this quantitative study. The association between AI use and language competency was investigated using regression and correlation analysis. With a correlation value of $r = -0.52$, the results show a substantial negative relationship between the use of AI and writing and grammatical skills. Furthermore, a beta score of -0.45 indicates that speaking abilities are adversely impacted by reliance on AI. The primary determinants of AI utilization were found to be factors including technical knowledge, accuracy of AI, and accessibility to AI. In conclusion, excessive reliance on AI may hinder competency in third languages, even when it helps with language acquisition. To guarantee more thorough language mastering, the application of AI must be combined with creative teaching strategies.

Learner engagement may increase when non-native Arabic speakers instruct native Arabic speakers using computer-based technology. A machine translation (MT) system is created as a learning tool in Kolhar and Alameen(2021). To cut down on multitasking, the suggested system can be connected to a projector and digital podium. The researcher surveyed 25 students from Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia on the usage of the suggested technology-enhanced MT system. Exploiting the high service bandwidth (up to multiple bandwidths) made accessible for interactive translation services is a key justification for employing this architecture. For the translation operation, the framework is set up by connecting it to a projector, digital podium, and video camera in every classroom. Consequently, following the implementation of the system, the impact on the

understanding of the subject that was taught using English was evaluated. Consequently, the impact of the system on students' comprehension of the technical elements of the English-taught topic was assessed after it was put into use. The findings showed that it was advantageous to employ the created technology for translation in class.

Additionally, students' performance and learning outcomes were enhanced by their active participation in the sessions. Additionally, the students mentioned that the suggested framework is beneficial from two angles: topic comprehension and vocabulary growth. Many students said that utilizing the framework to complete assignments and homework was helpful since it translated words that were hard to grasp.

Despite this non-typical usage, healthcare professionals have voiced some serious reservations about the usage of AI in this field. Budayr (2024) tries to identify the issues surrounding the use of AI by Saudi medical experts. Materials and techniques: Stratified convenience sampling was used in this cross-sectional survey, which was conducted across healthcare institutions between September and November 2024. All licensed healthcare professionals who had been in practice for at least a year were included in this study; interns and administrative personnel were not. A validated 33-item questionnaire that was available online and on paper was used to collect data. Eight measures assessed AI awareness, five items assessed prior experience, and twenty items assessed worries across four categories. Concerns regarding data dependability and the effects of AI adoption were the primary issues raised by health experts.

AbdAlgane and Jabir Othman (2023) focus on the use of AI technology in routine, everyday tasks, such as encouraging the usage of Google Translate or Bing Translator in conjunction with other programs and applications. Additionally, it assesses and empirically illustrates the topics of writing using AI technologies, (MT), computer-assisted language learning (CALL), and automated evaluation systems (AESs) to provide solutions for improved communication training in Saudi Arabia's EFL system. An AI-powered writing aid called Word Tune can comprehend the writer's thoughts and provide several rewrites (such as condensing or expanding) based on their ideas. This tool helps writers who are learning English as a second language keep up a consistent flow and pick up practical English phrases. It has been demonstrated that implementing artificial intelligence (AI) technology in EFL classrooms helps students and teachers stay current with new technological advancements and streamlines the English language learning (ELT) process. All digital and AI-powered gadgets have the potential to support teaching and learning, as this exploratory study showed. Thus, an AI framework may be used to build the pedagogical component of future education.

The application of AI in the education sector has perhaps been the most phenomenal of all in the last few years. English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' ability to write independently is significantly impacted by their degree of dependence on AI-Powered Writing Tools (AI-PWT). Milton (2024) determines how well-versed ESL health science graduates are in using two distinct kinds of AI-powered writing tools—independent writing with AI editing support and generative writing with AI support—and how these tools have influenced their ability to write independently. The results indicated that in 213 (68.9%) samples, the participants' overall frequency distribution of knowledge had a higher score range of 14–20. About 17–19% of respondents were unsure about getting real-time writing input to maximize the content, despite the fact that 215 (70%) were experienced with utilizing AI-PWT to improve vocabulary and grammar. 199 people (64%) said they had a favourable opinion of utilizing AI-PWT. Approximately 214 (69.3%) used AI-PWT to help with generative writing instead of editing their own work. In actuality, only 60 (19.4%) and 64 (20.7%) received input to improve their grammar and vocabulary, respectively, suggesting a preference for more generative writing using AI tools rather than independent writing with editing

support. In conclusion, AI-powered writing tools are widely acknowledged as effective writing aids that may support students with their scholarly writing. However, autonomous writing may be greatly impacted if these technologies are exclusively used for generating goals. The study emphasizes the necessity of teacher-led support.

Nakomoki et al. (2025) examine how foreign students see and utilize AI-powered language translation tools, highlighting how they might improve communication, academic achievement, and social integration. Higher academic levels and perceived translation accuracy are associated with increasing use for both academic and personal objectives, according to the survey, which had 851 foreign students, and the regression analysis that followed. Furthermore, pupils are more inclined to stick to using AI translation tools if they have previously used them. Higher language competence students, on the other hand, are less inclined to endorse these tools and utilize them more for academic objectives than for everyday communication. The report also emphasizes how crucial useful capabilities like offline translation, quick camera translation, speech translation, and text translation are in AI translation solutions. These results highlight the need to help foreign students by offering them training and resources on AI translation technologies, which will improve their educational experience and communication.

2.2. Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Saudis and non-Arabic expatriates in Saudi Arabia towards the use of AI in their daily lives to communicate with the locals?
2. What are the views of Saudis and non-Arabic expatriates in shared workspaces about AI applications in connecting them culturally?
3. How effective are AI tools in bridging the social, cultural, and language gaps between Saudis and multicultural expatriates in Saudi Arabia?
4. What, if any are the reservations of the participants in using AI tools as communication tools in Saudi Arabia?

2.3. Research objectives

This study aims to

1- explore the perceptions of Saudis and non-Arabic expatriates in Saudi Arabia regarding the use of AI in their daily lives for communication with locals.
2- examine the perspectives of Saudis and non-Arabic expatriates in shared workspaces on the role of AI applications in fostering cultural connections.
3- evaluate the effectiveness of AI tools in bridging social, cultural, and language gaps between Saudis and multicultural expatriates in Saudi Arabia.
4- identify any reservations or concerns among participants regarding the use of AI tools as communication tools in Saudi Arabia.

3. METHODS

3.1. Instrument design and validity

The study uses a mixed methods approach design with quantitative and qualitative datasets being used to triangulate the outcomes: The role of AI in facilitating communication in multicultural environments such as found in modern Saudi Arabia. A Likert Scale-based questionnaire was developed by the researcher in consultation with previous literature to gather the perceptions data. At the same time, semi-structured interviews with a mixed-culture participant group added depth to the findings.

3.2.Participants

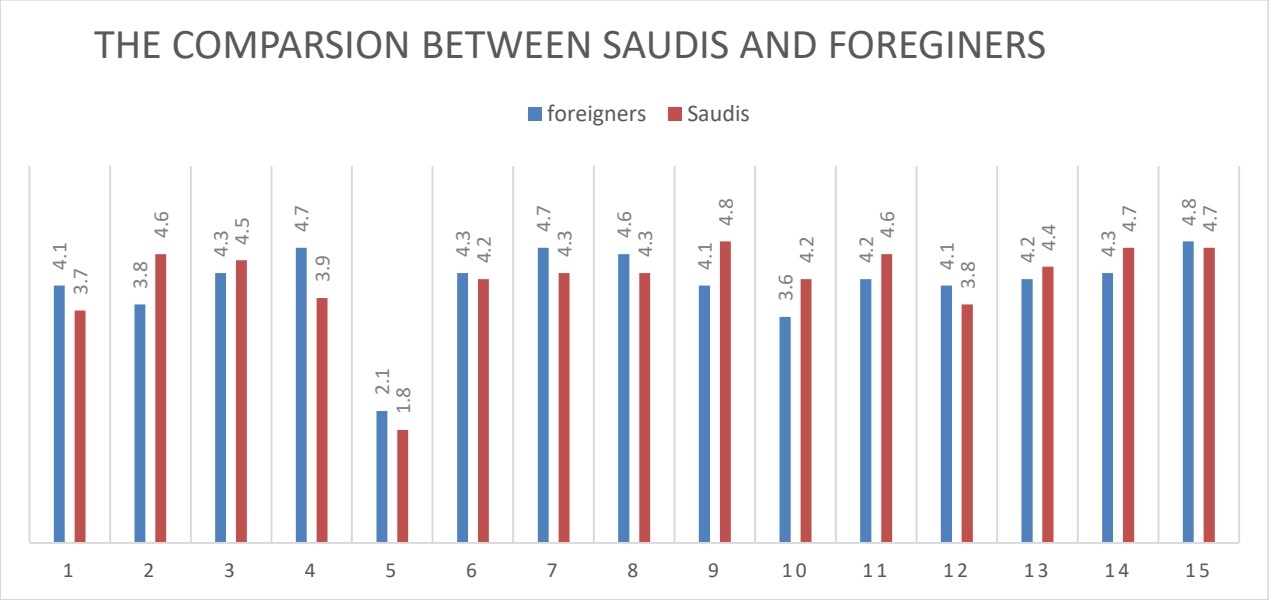
To assess the success of AI as a communication tool between local and expatriate subjects, the study also included native Arabic-speaking Saudi individuals. The non-Saudis were people from other cultures and nations touring KSA or working in common spaces, and the thrust of the investigation was on their mutual use of AI to bridge the cultural and linguistic gaps. In all there were 115 participants, of which 64 foreigners and 61 Saudi nationals each.All participants were in the age group of 35-42 years and were comfortable answering the survey in English language. Thus, the sample was purposive. As stated above, the five-point Likert Scale was used to collect the experiential data with 1= totally disagree, 5= totally agree, and thereafter, for every item, the mean was computed. Table 1 below summarizes the quantitative data. All data is in terms of mean values on a maximum scale of 5.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis is based on the following table and chart. The means of each statement was calculated using an Exel sheet.

Table 1: Perceptions of Non-Arabic (Expatriates) and Arabic (Saudi) Speakers

No	Statements	Expatriates	Saudis
1	AI tools help me overcome communication gaps while interacting with speakers of other languages in daily life	4.1	3.7
2	Some AI tools are of use to me in understanding the other culture(s)	3.8	4.6
3	When I am in a diverse group, AI tools help ease the language barriers	4.3	4.5
4	Sometimes, I have to be wary of the stereotypical output of AI tools	4.7	3.9
5	At my workplace, AI tools are a hindrance to communication with individuals from other cultures	2.1	1.8
6	My employer is supportive of the use of AI for communication with speakers of other languages	4.3	4.2
7	The easily available information on AI tools helped me to appreciate other cultures	4.7	4.3
8	Despite many pros, there were times when I found it risky to use AI tools for communication purposes in my host country	4.6	4.3
9	I believe that AI, especially interactive tools, can contribute a great deal to the cross-cultural experiences of people like me	4.1	4.8
10	There stands the chance of AI dependence causing miscommunication in multicultural settings	3.6	4.2
11	Educational settings leverage AI tools for enhancing the learning environments. This can turn out truly global citizens	4.2	4.6
12	Communication and coordination in the workplace can draw heavily from AI assistance in foreign lands	4.1	3.8
13	Chatbots are not 100% equipped to deal with cross-cultural challenges, especially where one or more cultures have an ancient ethos	4.2	4.4
14	AI tools ensure inclusiveness in personal and professional groups	4.3	4.7
15	AI tools contributed positively to my cross-cultural experiences	4.8	4.7



The data gathered in the survey offers some interesting insights, on some counts, the foreigners and locals share some common perceptions but differ on some others. Both groups generally agree on the positive effects of AI in enhancing communication, breaking down language barriers, and fostering inclusiveness in both personal and professional settings. However, there are some differences in their perceptions of the risks and limitations of AI, especially concerning stereotypes, miscommunication, and reliance on AI tools. Foreigners rate AI tools slightly higher (4.1) than Saudis (3.7) in terms of helping to bridge communication gaps in daily life, indicating that expatriates find AI more advantageous for overcoming language obstacles. Conversely, Saudis (4.6) give a higher rating to AI than expatriates (3.8) when it comes to using AI to understand other cultures. This may suggest that Saudi nationals find AI tools more effective for gaining cultural insights, possibly due to their regular interactions with a diverse range of foreign workers and tourists. Both groups rate AI highly for easing language barriers within diverse groups, with Saudis at 4.5 and expatriates at 4.3, showing close alignment. Foreigners (4.7) express more caution regarding the stereotypical outputs of AI tools compared to Saudis (3.9), indicating that expatriates may be more conscious of cultural biases in AI-generated content. Regarding the potential hindrance of AI tools in workplace communication, both expatriates (2.1) and Saudis (1.8) perceive minimal disruption, suggesting that AI is generally seen as a facilitator rather than an obstacle. Additionally, both groups feel supported by their employers in utilizing AI tools for communication with speakers of other languages, with expatriates rating it at 4.3 and Saudis at 4.2.

When it comes to AI tools that help appreciate other cultures, expatriates (4.7) slightly outperform Saudis (4.3), likely because expatriates need to adapt more to Saudi culture. Both groups recognize the risks of using AI tools for communication in a host country, with expatriates rating it 4.6 and Saudis 4.3, indicating an awareness of potential misunderstandings or cultural misinterpretations. Saudis (4.8) show a stronger belief than expatriates (4.1) in AI's role in enhancing cross-cultural experiences, reflecting their confidence in AI as a means of cultural exchange. Saudis (4.2) express more concern than expatriates (3.6) about the risk of AI dependence leading to miscommunication in multicultural environments, possibly due to a better understanding of AI's limitations in sensitive cultural contexts. Both groups agree that AI in education is crucial for developing global citizens, with Saudis (4.6) rating it slightly higher than expatriates (4.2). This aligns with Saudi Arabia's emphasis on AI in educational reforms. Expatriates (4.1) rate AI assistance in workplace communication a bit higher than Saudis (3.8), perhaps reflecting their regular use of AI to navigate language and cultural

barriers. Both groups concur that chatbots are not fully capable of addressing cross-cultural challenges, particularly when it comes to ancient cultural values, with expatriates rating this 4.2 and Saudis 4.4. The role of AI in promoting inclusiveness in personal and professional settings is widely acknowledged by both expatriates (4.3) and Saudis (4.7), with Saudis giving it a higher rating, likely due to the country's diverse and multicultural workforce. Ultimately, both groups strongly agree that AI tools have positively impacted their cross-cultural experiences, with expatriates rating this 4.8 and Saudis 4.7, demonstrating a shared appreciation for AI's contribution to enhancing cultural interactions.

The data gathered from 21 participants through semi-structured interviews adds another dimension to these findings. The expatriate workforce in the country is also a mixed lot with people coming from diverse cultures across the globe (Saudi Arabia offers some of the highest paid jobs in the world). Their individual perceptions of the efficacy of AI also differ. Countries which have a high reach of AI (e.g., India and Philippines) have populations familiar and even adept at the use of AI and digital tools and are, therefore, quite comfortable in the use of AI tools in day-to-day transactions, both personal and professional. However, some workers from less digitally advanced countries, such as Malaysia, report limited use of the same. The former use AI to navigate local culture, norms, and social needs by resorting to the use of virtual assistants and translation apps. They reported that doing so placed them in a position of advantage both socially and professionally when dealing with the locals. In addition to these usages, they also use AI tools for travel-related purposes, understanding and accessing the local laws and religious norms. At the workplace, these digitally empowered expat workers use AI to find crucial balance when operating as a team with other people from other cultures, for effective and accurate communication, and even to pick some common words and phrases of the Arabic language, which places them in apposition of favour with the locals. The Saudi interviewees reported general ease with the use of AI in professional settings, easy access to tech tools, and an overall positive attitude to the use of AI in cross-cultural dealings. However, they report that they still prefer Arabic-speaking locals where problem-solving involves individual intervention, such as on customer care desks. This may indicate a biased attitude amongst Saudi nationals in favour of the local human workforce in the traditional services sector.

5. FINDINGS

The data collected from the survey and semi-structured interviews reveal both positive and negative perceptions of AI's role in cross-cultural communication among foreign students and Saudis. Both groups agree on the positive impact of AI in breaking down language barriers, fostering inclusiveness, and enhancing workplace communication, this finding is in alignment with that highlights AI's transformative potential in multicultural settings (Klimova & Chen, 2024). However, differences emerge in their perceptions can be glanced that foreigners express greater concern about AI-generated stereotypes compared to Saudis, a finding consistent with research by Labajová (2023) and Ayvazyan and Pym (2024), which note that AI struggles with complex syntactic structures and cultural nuances in low-resource languages.

On the opposite direction, Saudis show more concern than foreigners about AI dependence, leading to miscommunication, possibly due to Saudis' deeper understanding of cultural sensitivities. This disparity aligns with global trends in AI adoption, where familiarity and access to digital tools significantly influence usage patterns. Saudis, on the other hand, demonstrate a strong belief in AI's role in cultural understanding (Barnes, Zhang & Valenzuela, 2024; Han, Kaas & Wang, (2025). amazingly, Saudi Participants reported that AI plays a crucial role in education, with a score mean of (4.6), reflecting Saudi Arabia's emphasis on AI-driven educational reforms. Despite that, Saudis' preference for Arabic-speaking locals in customer-facing roles suggests an enduring bias toward

human intervention in traditional service sectors, a finding that contrasts with studies advocating for AI's role in reducing human bias in service delivery.

6. CONCLUSION

Despite modernization efforts, KSA has a rich heritage that scaffolds the country to its roots: both globalization and heritage preservation efforts go hand in hand, as such, non-Arab expatriates, more often than not, find themselves in situations where Arabic is the only possible medium of communication. This paper aims to investigate how non-Arab expatriates find AI translation tools helpful in such situations. Accordingly, the results expected from this study can be the beacon light for AI-based LLMs as they will add to the language corpus, identify user needs, and isolate the tools' shortcomings. Findings indicate that expatriates often prioritize the practical advantages of AI, like breaking down language barriers and improving communication in the workplace. In contrast, Saudis highlight the long-term benefits of AI in fostering cultural understanding, inclusivity, and education. Both groups are aware of the risks tied to AI, including stereotypes, reliance, and miscommunication. Yet, they still see the overall positive influence of AI in enhancing cross-cultural understanding and interactions.

6.1. Recommendations

Despite the positive outcomes of the efficacy of AI for communication in a cross-cultural setting, the study has some recommendations to make. AI as a communication tool is a relatively new area across all settings. Therefore, its various aspects need to be examined from all possible vantages before opening the floodgates. AI usage norms in the country need to be updated and aligned with global needs.

6.2. Limitations

The study discovered a difference in the perceptions of AI users, even amongst the expat populations. However, given the scope of the study, this angle could not be adequately explored.

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