

Bridging or Dividing? Chinese Language Integration and the Resilience of ELT in Saudi Higher Education under Vision 2030: Policy Symbolism vs. Pedagogical Realities

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Abstract

Saudi Arabia has pledged to attract international investments as part of its Vision 2030 policy, one that seeks to diversify the education and economic environment of the country, especially by enhancing alliances with China. In support of this objective, some higher education institutions have established or initiated the teaching of the Chinese language within English-dominant educational environments, in addition to the currently taught English Language courses. This paper examines the implementation of Chinese in ELT practices in Saudi Arabia, focusing on the deployment of institutional methodologies, stakeholder viewpoints, and the ideological consequences of the policy-based multilingual curriculum revolution. The study employs a multiple-case design that is based on language policy and planning (Ricento, 2006) and translingual pedagogies (Garcia & Wei, 2014). It relies on semi-structured interviews and responses to these interviews by key stakeholders of the case, as well as analysis of institutional documents and a faculty, administrative, and student survey. Insights indicate an ongoing antagonism between English as a linguistic capital of dominance (Bourdieu, 1991) and the novel valorisation of Chinese as a diplomatic language of the state. The research offers critical perspectives on how Saudi higher education navigates the linguistic pluralism of Vision 2030's framework and suggests implications for multilingual curriculum design, trainer preparation, and language policy implementation.

Keywords: Vision 2030, Chinese language learning, translanguaging, English Language Teaching (ELT), language ideology, language policy implementation, multilingual education

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Problem

Vision 2030 is the Saudi Arabia development plan, which focuses on transforming the economy to be less dependent on oil production and diversifying connections with other countries. Moreover, it works on remodelling the education process according to 21st-century skills. It is one of its strategic priorities to strengthen human capital by innovating curriculum and multilingualism (Vision 2030, 2016). In this regard, a bilateral agreement between Saudi Arabia and China, signed in 2019, resulted in the official implementation of the Chinese language programs in educational institutions (Saudi Press Agency, 2019). The involvement of China can be attributed to overall geopolitical changes whereby China has become the leading Saudi Arabian trading partner in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (Kinninmont, 2017; Haghirian & Zaccara, 2023). Whereas English is the established foreign language in academics and in the workplace (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014), the appearance of Chinese implies novel ideological and pedagogical issues. The insertion of Chinese in the Saudi Arabian English-dominated ELT scene creates a set of questions addressing linguistic hierarchies, educational equity, and symbolic capital. It examines the case of whether the inclusion of Chinese language instruction constitutes a genuine multilingual transformation or merely a formal affirmation of state-directed policy. Although the policy has committed to language diversity, the practice, curriculum development, institutional preparation, and attitude among the stakeholders may still be English-dominant paradigms. This conflict between the policy's intentions and classroom action is similar to the idea presented in Spolsky (2004) that politics create language policy, but then are inducted into the classroom. The proposed study will follow a qualitative-dominant mixed research design in examining the implementation of the Chinese language teaching within ELT settings at the Saudi tertiary institutions. This will allow us to perform a profoundly context-sensitive analysis of what the faculty, administrators, and students connote and bring about through multilingual reform. Through a well-developed methodology, this study examines the ideological tensions, institutional preparedness, and pedagogical challenges surrounding the introduction of Chinese language instruction, offering insights into multilingual policy implementation in the Gulf and contributing to global debates on language planning in post-monolingual, non-Western contexts, to inform curriculum development, teacher training, and institutional interpretations of state-led reforms.

1.2 Importance of the Problem

The integration of the Chinese language into Saudi Arabia's higher education curriculum under Vision 2030 represents a pivotal shift in the country's linguistic and educational landscape. This reform initiative reflects broader geopolitical and economic realignments, particularly the strategic partnership between Saudi Arabia and China. While English has long held hegemonic status as the language of science, commerce, and higher education in Saudi Arabia, the introduction of Chinese signals a state-led effort to diversify linguistic capital and align with new global power configurations (Bourdieu, 1991; Vision 2030, 2016).

However, this policy shift exposes critical tensions between symbolic policy declarations and institutional capacity for genuine pedagogical transformation. Unlike demand-driven multilingual contexts in Southeast Asia, where language learning is embedded within community practice (Paradise, 2009), Saudi Arabia's multilingualism is top-down and policy-mandated. This raises important questions about the viability, legitimacy, and sustainability of such reforms in the absence of bottom-up institutional readiness and cultural validation. Thus, the problem deserves renewed scholarly attention not only because it embodies a transformative policy direction but also because it highlights unresolved contradictions between language ideology, curriculum design, and stakeholder readiness within non-Western, monolingual-dominant educational systems.

1.3 Relevant Scholarship

Prior scholarship has extensively explored the dominance of English in the Gulf region, particularly in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Al-Seghayer, 2014). These studies reveal how English functions not only as the primary medium of instruction but also as a symbolic and functional marker of modernity, scientific progress, and global competitiveness. English proficiency is frequently linked to academic mobility, professional success, and institutional prestige, creating what Bourdieu (1991) terms a "linguistic market" where English holds the highest capital value. Consequently, other foreign languages, including Chinese, are often relegated to elective or extracurricular status, if included at all.

Theoretical contributions from Spolsky (2004), Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), and Ricento (2006) have been instrumental in framing language policy as a multifaceted construct shaped by ideology, management, and practice. Their models provide a valuable foundation for understanding how language policies are formulated, negotiated, and enacted within national education systems. However, empirical applications of these models to multilingual policy formation in the Gulf, particularly in Saudi Arabia, remain sparse. Much of the scholarship tends to examine English hegemony without thoroughly interrogating the processes and tensions that arise when new languages are introduced into entrenched linguistic systems.

In the specific context of Saudi Vision 2030, a small but growing body of literature has addressed the geopolitical motivations behind the promotion of Chinese language education (Alhazmi, 2020; Saudi Press Agency, 2019). These works point to the strategic alignment between Saudi Arabia and China under the Belt and Road Initiative and highlight the policy rhetoric surrounding cultural exchange and diplomatic ties. However, these studies often focus on high-level policy announcements and lack attention to the ground-level realities of implementation—particularly how institutional actors perceive, resist, or accommodate such reforms.

Furthermore, critical perspectives from translanguaging theory (García & Wei, 2014) and neoliberal ideology critiques (Piller & Cho, 2013) have illuminated how multilingualism is operationalised in educational settings globally. Translanguaging promotes a fluid, integrative model of language use that challenges monolingual norms and reimagines language classrooms as spaces of heteroglossic meaning-making. However, these pedagogical innovations are rarely explored in the Gulf context, where language instruction, particularly ELT, remains rigidly compartmentalised. Similarly, while Piller and Cho (2013) critique the instrumentalist framing of language learning as primarily economic or political capital, such critiques have not yet been extended to Saudi Arabia's Chinese language initiative.

1.4 Research Gap

Although Gulf-based scholarship has increasingly addressed multilingual language policy, Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL), and English Language Teaching (ELT), the intersection of these domains within Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 remains critically underexplored. Most existing studies isolate either CFL adoption or English dominance but overlook how multilingual policies are operationalised at the institutional level or how they affect pedagogy and stakeholder perceptions. This study addresses these gaps by offering a multi-method, multi-stakeholder analysis of Chinese integration into English-dominated ELT curricula across Saudi public universities. It captures not only institutional readiness and attitudes but also the ideological and pedagogical frictions embedded in policy implementation.

While earlier research (e.g., Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017) has examined English hegemony and early policy narratives surrounding Chinese, few have investigated the lived experiences of those tasked with implementing such reforms. This study brings forward bottom-up perspectives from faculty, administrators, and students, highlighting how geopolitical language policy is interpreted, accepted, or resisted in context.

Taken together, these gaps point to a need for research that bridges macro-level policy discourse with meso- and micro-level institutional responses. This study contributes to that effort by providing a qualitative, multi-stakeholder account of how Saudi universities operationalise the inclusion of Chinese within ELT frameworks. It sheds light on how global language ideologies intersect with local institutional structures, revealing both the affordances and constraints of state-driven multilingualism in a non-Western, English-dominant educational system. By combining qualitative insights with survey-based breadth, the research exposes the tensions between symbolic

multilingualism and practical reform. It identifies two significant gaps: (1) the lack of focused research on Chinese-English integration within Arabic-English ELT systems, and (2) the absence of stakeholder-driven accounts of multilingual reform. Ultimately, the study contributes a more grounded, ideologically informed understanding of how top-down language policy initiatives like Vision 2030 are mediated and reshaped at the institutional level within non-Western higher education contexts.

1.5 Hypotheses and Their Correspondence to Research Design

This study is structured around three interrelated research questions that address the ideological, institutional, and pedagogical dimensions of multilingual policy reform in Saudi higher education under Vision 2030:

- 1) How is Chinese language teaching being integrated into existing ELT frameworks in Saudi higher education institutions under Vision 2030?
- 2) What are the perceptions, attitudes, and readiness of institutional stakeholders (faculty, administrators, students) toward the multilingual curriculum change?
- 3) How do national language policy objectives interact with institutional ideologies and practices in shaping multilingual education?

These questions are grounded in a multi-theoretical framework:

- **Spolsky's (2004)** tripartite model of language policy, which distinguishes among language beliefs, practices, and management, is used to explore the coherence, or lack thereof, between institutional intentions, everyday classroom practices, and policy directives.
- **Bourdieu's (1991)** concept of linguistic capital informs the investigation into how English and Chinese are differentially valued across academic, symbolic, and professional domains.
- **García and Wei's (2014)** translanguaging theory provides a lens to examine the pedagogical practices and student agency within multilingual classrooms, particularly in identifying whether integrative practices are encouraged or resisted.

From this foundation, the following working hypotheses and investigative foci are derived:

- **H1 (Primary):** Chinese language instruction, as implemented within Saudi ELT frameworks, remains symbolic mainly and lacks substantive curricular and institutional integration.
- **H2 (Primary):** Stakeholder perceptions reflect an ideological hierarchy in which English retains dominant symbolic and functional value, while Chinese is perceived as diplomatically motivated and structurally unsupported.
- **H3 (Secondary):** Translanguaging practices are minimally adopted or institutionally unsupported, revealing a disconnect between policy discourse on multilingualism and pedagogical reality.

To address these hypotheses, the study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design that enables both contextual depth and empirical triangulation. The methodology includes:

- **Semi-structured interviews** with 40 participants, including faculty members, administrative leaders, and national policymakers, to elicit interpretive, experience-based insights into institutional responses.
- **Focus groups** with ELT and Chinese language students to explore how learners navigate multilingual environments and construct language value hierarchies.
- **Document analysis** of Vision 2030 implementation strategies, institutional curriculum plans, and national language policy guidelines to assess ideological framing and structural readiness.
- **A supplementary survey** was distributed to a broader sample of 58 stakeholders to quantitatively validate emerging themes regarding attitudes, preparedness, and institutional constraints.

This design enables an iterative analytic process, where qualitative data guide the interpretation of survey results, and vice versa. The triangulation of multiple data sources strengthens the validity of inferences about how geopolitical language policies are received, reinterpreted, or resisted within specific educational settings. Notably, the design supports both thematic exploration of bottom-up institutional responses and hypothesis-testing regarding language ideology, policy enactment, and curricular transformation.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

1.6.1 Language Policy, Ideology, and Multilingual Practice in Saudi Higher Education

This study draws on a multi-theoretical framework to analyse how Chinese is being integrated into Saudi Arabia's English-dominant higher education curricula. It focuses on the intersections of language policy, ideology, and multilingual practice through four main lenses: (1) Language Policy Theory (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Ricento, 2006), (2) Translanguaging and Multilingualism (García & Wei, 2014), (3) Spolsky's Ideological Model of Language Planning (2004), and (4) Bourdieu's Linguistic Capital (1991). Together, these theories provide complementary insights into the complex, multi-scalar processes that govern how language policies are created, interpreted, and contested. In order to avoid confusion, the theoretical basis of the given study should be further elaborated by referring to the differences between the conceptually related, yet distinct constructs of multilingualism, translanguaging, and language ideology. Multilingualism is most often associated with the coexistence and functional use of two or more named languages in individuals or societies (Wei, 2013). Such a view commonly assumes that languages are closed, discrete systems.

In contrast, Translanguaging is a concept designed to disrupt such an idea, as it perceives language use as fluid and dynamic, illustrating that multilingual speakers have an integrated linguistic repertoire, rather than different and separate language use (García & Wei, 2014). It focuses on the aspect of meaning-making as a linguistic boundary, especially in teaching. Woolard (1998) defines the language ideology as the beliefs, assumptions, and value constructions of the issues related to language, such as the ideas of linguistic superiority, legitimacy and identity. These ideologies affect the perception of languages, teaching and institutionalisation. Multilingualism is used in this paper as the structural underpinning of language diversity in Saudi education, translanguaging as a framework through which to view classroom practice and agentic decision-making by learners, and language ideology as a lens through which to understand how power, prestige, and policy impact stakeholder attitudes toward English and Chinese.

1.6.2 Language Policy Theory (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997)

The paper will use the tripartite language planning model by Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) to determine how Chinese is being integrated into Saudi Arabia in terms of higher education. Their model presents a distinction between status planning (raising the social status of a language), acquisition planning (building teaching and learning systems), and corpus planning (building teaching and learning content and linguistic norms). This typology will offer a systematic analytical perspective to understanding the discourse, action and facilitation of Chinese language education as represented by Saudi Vision 2030. Although successful in terms of categorising policy functions, the model has been criticised as technocratic and ignoring ideological processes and actor influence (Johnson, 2013). In order to fill these gaps, this paper critically deploys the framework to explore how institutional actors (faculty, administrators, and students) make sense and negotiate top-down policies within English-dominant spaces. Specifically, the model is used to assess:

- How Chinese is positioned within national policy discourse (**status**),
- How universities operationalise their instruction (**acquisition**), and
- Whether appropriate curricular materials and teacher training systems are emerging (**corpus**).

In doing so, the study interrogates whether Chinese language policy in Saudi Arabia represents a genuine multilingual shift or functions primarily as a symbolic tool of geopolitical strategy.

1.6.3 Ricento's Ideological Approach to Language Policy (2006)

This study draws on Ricento's (2006) ideological approach to language policy to explore how macro-level reforms, such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, are negotiated across institutional and individual levels. Unlike structuralist models that emphasise status, corpus, and acquisition planning, this framework foregrounds the role of ideology and agency in shaping how language policies are interpreted, contested, or implemented in context. In doing so, it provides a multi-scalar lens for understanding the interaction between national aspirations and institutional constraints in the integration of Chinese into Saudi ELT settings. At the **macro level**, the Saudi state positions Chinese language instruction as a strategic instrument of economic diversification and geopolitical alignment with China. Vision 2030 introduces this policy as a strategy of boosting competitiveness at the global level. There is, however, a rationale behind it which makes Chinese a symbolic asset in which promoting visibility and diplomacy is alluded to, as opposed to teaching parity with English. At the meso level, universities are responsible for translating national policy into curricular practice. Social constructs currently exist, which are English-centric in nature and can at best represent formidable obstacles to integration. For instance, structures measuring conduct and discipline language preferences will be more than enough to impede the aims of integration. Institutional actors claim to be supportive of multilingualism but do not typically have the resources or ideological orientation to integrate Chinese into the well-established ELT systems. The micro level includes faculty, students and language centre staff who, further, interact with multilingual policy depending on their work-related experience, linguistic beliefs and the perceived usefulness of languages. According to many respondents in this study, English was considered to have better symbolic and academic capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

In contrast, Chinese was regarded as pedagogically peripheral but politically quite significant. These perceptions help to explain the fact that language policy is experienced and performed by individuals based on their ideologies, as opposed to being applied externally. This multi-layered interpretation of ideologically oriented discourse and actual practice demonstrates the contradictions that can exist between what the government wishes to say and what it actually says. Though Vision 2030 pursues a multilingual future, its execution testifies to a symbolic change as opposed to a radical change. It is through institutions that this policy is mediated selectively and in a frequently performative manner, and the involvement of the stakeholders in the directive of studying the Chinese language has continued to be influenced by deeply rooted notions of the supremacy of English. Incorporating this ideological lens allows the study to interrogate:

- Whether Saudi multilingualism is a substantive educational reform or a symbolic response to globalisation;
- How institutional actors navigate the dissonance between state discourse and classroom realities;
- The degree to which pedagogical agency is supported or sidelined in policy implementation.

Thus, by embedding ideological critique within a multi-level analysis, this study offers a deeper understanding of how language policy becomes a site of negotiation, where national objectives meet institutional pragmatism and individual beliefs.

1.6.4 Translanguaging and Multilingualism (García & Wei, 2014)

This study uses the concept of translanguaging, proposed by García and Wei (2014), to analyse the responses of stakeholders to the integration of Chinese along with English in Saudi higher education because it conceptualises language as fluid, not separate systems.

Whereas this model informs an inclusive and dynamic practice in classroom settings, the existing implementation of Chinese in Vision 2030 is on inflexible English-dominated platforms that do not encourage integrative language use. The learning of Chinese and English is generally not interdependent but parallel, thus indicating a very top-down geopolitical approach to multilingualism that does not correspond to a pedagogical reality. In order to fill this gap, the paper presents the idea of geopolitically motivated translanguaging, whereby the inclusion of languages depends more on foreign policy rather than the needs of the learners. The lens enables a critical examination of how institutional ideologies, teacher preparedness, and curriculum design either support or hinder meaningful translanguaging. The study also differentiates between multilingualism and translanguaging regarding their respective policy orientation (macro (state) and micro (classroom)), whereby the former is often symbolic, whilst the latter is focused on making pedagogy inclusive and learner-centred. This framework finally explains the discord between policy discourse and practice at the ground level, which is a central issue in the title and objectives of the study.

1.6.5 Spolsky's Ideological Model of Language Planning (2004)

In an attempt to further interrogate the meaning and role of language beliefs and ideologies to policy implementation, the current study will use the Ideological Model of Language Planning (Spolsky, 2004). According to the model, language policy is formed as the relationship between three aspects, namely practices, beliefs or ideologies and management. The latter is most potent in that it strikes a balance between the formal and informal, actual and expected behaviours and assumptions. This framework can be used to understand the context of Vision 2030, where Chinese is a strategic language, to determine whether stakeholders internalise the ideological goal embedded in the state-led reforms or resist or reinterpret the same. It has, however, been criticised as being hard to apply in the contested policy arena and having no tools to describe the role of particular actors in the construction of language ideologies (Johnson, 2013). To counter these weaknesses, this paper supplements the model by introducing the concept of linguistic capital proposed by Bourdieu that opens the door to a more in-depth analysis of how symbolic hierarchies are created and challenged at the institutional level.

1.6.6 Linguistic Capital and Symbolic Power (Bourdieu, 1991)

With the help of the concept of linguistic capital developed by Bourdieu, who sees English and Chinese as unequal values, this paper draws upon it to critique the importance of English and Chinese in Saudi higher education. English possesses embedded highly symbolic capital, which concentrates on teaching, publishing, and the status of institutions, as the primary means of academic attainments and employability (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017). Chinese, in its turn, despite its policy-driven promotion within implementing Vision 2030, lacks such institutional legitimacy and career desirability. Such asymmetry indexes a more fundamental ideological hierarchy. Whereas Chinese is used in the process of strategic diversification, it is marginalised both in curricula and symbolic positioning. Chinese is also usually given as an option; English, on the other hand, is at the core of the graduation and employment systems, which indicates the disproportion between the functional and symbolic value. This was made possible by Bourdieu's concept of a linguistic market, where universities and individuals invest in a language based on perceived returns. Policies can set out to lift Chinese standards, but perceived gains to the stakeholders determine their implementation. Such a disconnect characterises the ideological conflict between symbolic multilingualism and practical institutional investments. Using Bourdieu, analysis has tried to demonstrate that language policies are not merely pedagogical acts but are rather acts of ideology that either strengthen or oppose pre-existing systems of power, access and credibility. It lays out how the perception of the various stakeholders and the institutional applications of these perceptions together influence how language hierarchies can form, and whether a new language program flourishes or is just a cosmetic gesture.

1.6.7 Integrative Synthesis

All four theoretical lenses are presented in this research, Kaplan and Baldauf language planning taxonomy (1997) of language planning, Spolsky ideological model of language planning (2004), theory of linguistic capital by Bourdieu (1991), and translanguaging by Garc (2014) and Wei (2014), have unique but complementary insights into the manner of implementing language policy and its contestation. Collectively, they create a multi-dimensional vision of Saudi higher education, where Saudi policy, ideology, pedagogy, and power converge in the strategic realignments of Vision 2030. The structure of the planning, which is differentiated in terms of its status, acquisition, and corpus, can be explained within the model proposed by Kaplan and Baldauf. In contrast, Spolsky describes the control of ideologies in the form of language ideologies in his framework. Bourdieu elucidates the continuous presence of English as the dominant language despite the policy implications for Chinese, given its intellectual capital in higher and professional circles. In the meantime, the translanguaging perspective, as introduced by Garc á and Wei, allows revealing the micro-level tensions of the pedagogy with multilingualism as a symbolic one without flexible and integrated language practices. Together, these frameworks reveal that stakeholder responses, whether resistance or ambivalence, are often rooted in institutional structures and ideological attachments, not ignorance. Ultimately, the study shows that meaningful multilingual reform requires more than policy design; it must address the symbolic hierarchies and lived realities of those tasked with enacting change.

Table 1. Theoretical Framework Contribution Across Analytical Levels

Theoretical Model	Policy Level		Curriculum Level	Classroom Level	Attitude Level
<i>Kaplan & Baldauf's Language Policy Model (1997)</i>	Identifies macro-level goals (status, corpus, acquisition planning)		Explains planning processes for language inclusion (e.g., syllabus, materials)	Less direct—assumes implementation flows from policy	Not central; focuses on structural top-down mechanisms
<i>Ricento's Ideological Approach (2006)</i>	Illuminates how ideology and power shape language policy		Highlights institutional agency in interpreting policy	Emphasizes institutional negotiation and resistance	Shows how actors interpret, endorse, or resist policy ideologies
<i>García & Wei's Translanguaging Theory (2014)</i>	Limited policy role; critiques monolingual assumptions		Promotes fluid curriculum design that legitimizes multiple language use	Central: explains learners' and teachers' language use practices in real-time	Encourages learner empowerment and resistance to linguistic hierarchies
<i>Spolsky's Language Policy Model (2004)</i>	Policy emerges from interaction of beliefs, practices, and management		Accounts for informal and formal policy at curriculum level	Highlights how policy is enacted (or resisted) through practices	Integrates beliefs and ideologies as part of policy formation
<i>Bourdieu's Linguistic Capital (1991)</i>	Explains symbolic power of languages in state-driven agendas	Interprets curriculum as site of cultural and linguistic capital reproduction	Analyzes power relations in classroom language choices		Central: explains perceived value and legitimacy of English vs. Chinese languages

2. Method

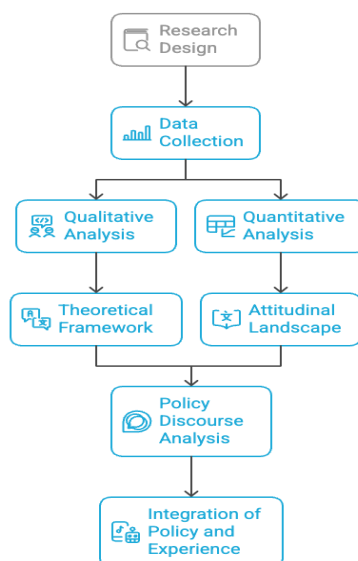


Figure 1. Research Method

2.1 Participants

Table 7. Demographic Information

Category	Details
Participant Types	• 16 Faculty Members (mostly ELT) • 10 Administrators • 14 Policymakers • 58 Survey Respondents (faculty & admin)
Total Interviewed Participants	40 (16 Faculty + 10 Admin + 14 Policymakers)
Gender	24 Males, 16 Females
Age Range	28–62 years
Experience in Higher Education	5–35 years
Academic Roles	Assistant Prof, Associate Prof, Full Prof, Dept Chair, Dean
Policy Roles	Strategic Planners, Curriculum Developers, Vision 2030 Task Force Members
Involvement in Chinese Policy	All participants engaged in at least one of the following: – Policy formulation

	– Curriculum development – Program coordination – Faculty training
Survey Institutions	6 institutions

2.1.1 Stakeholder Description

2.1.1.1 University Faculty (English and Chinese Instructors)

This cluster includes teachers currently teaching English or Chinese in the language departments, in other preparatory programs, or with the relevant language centres. English instructors must comment on ways in which the growth of Chinese impacts ELT course design, instruction, and attitudes toward language relevance. Chinese language instructors offer pertinent suggestions about the curriculum, materials, and learners' perceptions when available. Faculty perspectives help comprehend the educational practices and ideological positioning of reform in teaching multiple languages within the classroom context.

2.1.1.2 Language Centre Directors and Curriculum Developers

These mid-level academic managers are responsible for curriculum design, program evaluation, and teacher development. Their inclusion provides an institutional perspective on how Chinese language instruction is operationalised, funded, and aligned (or not) with existing ELT objectives. This group also plays a gatekeeping role in navigating policy translation, making them crucial informants on policy coherence and institutional agency issues.

2.1.1.3 University Students (ELT and Chinese Learners)

Students in English and/or Chinese language courses are engaged through surveys and focus groups. Their input is vital for understanding how Chinese is perceived as a linguistic capital, how motivation varies between languages, and whether Vision 2030 language goals align with student aspirations. Students also offer insight into linguistic identity, language anxiety, and experiential barriers to multilingual learning in Saudi university contexts.

2.1.1.4 Administrative Policymakers (Where Accessible)

Where access is permitted, the study includes interviews with administrative staff involved in strategic language planning, such as deans of academic affairs, directors of international partnerships, or Vision 2030 task force members within the universities. Their contributions help contextualise the ideological and policy-level drivers of Chinese language integration and clarify how external mandates (e.g., from the Ministry of Education) are interpreted at the institutional level.

2.2 Saturation Strategy

To ensure methodological rigour, this study adhered to the principle of data saturation, a widely accepted criterion for determining adequate sample size in qualitative research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Saturation was considered achieved when successive interviews and focus group discussions failed to yield new codes or thematic categories relevant to the research objectives. Following the completion of 32 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups, comprising faculty members, administrators, and policymakers, analysis revealed a high degree of thematic redundancy, particularly regarding language policy perceptions, institutional readiness, and the symbolic value of Chinese in Saudi higher education. To validate saturation, additional interviews were conducted, culminating in a total of 40 participants.

In parallel, a supplementary survey was administered to 58 faculty and administrators across six institutions to triangulate findings and enhance analytical depth. While the survey data were not used to determine qualitative saturation per se, the integration of quantitative responses provided an additional layer of confirmation for thematic stability. This iterative and reflexive process ensured that both qualitative and quantitative components of data collection were sufficient and theoretically robust.

2.3 Data Collection Instrument

Semi-Structured Interviews: Interviews were conducted with faculty, language centre administrators, and policymakers, focusing on their experiences with curriculum integration, ideological orientations, and institutional goals, using protocols aligned with the study's theoretical framework (language ideology, linguistic capital, and translanguaging).

Survey Instrument and Integration with Qualitative Data: A short survey containing 12 Likert-scale and three open-ended questions was administered to 58 faculty and administrators across six Saudi universities engaged in Chinese language implementation, aiming to capture general attitudes and triangulate with interview and focus group findings. The instrument, content-validated by experts and piloted with five faculty members, was analysed using SPSS for quantitative responses and NVivo for qualitative themes, with purposive sampling ensuring direct policy relevance.

Focus Groups: Conducted with students from ELT and Chinese language programs, the focus groups were designed to explore collective perceptions of language status, motivation, and the perceived relevance of Chinese in comparison to English.

Document Analysis: Institutional documents, including Vision 2030 implementation plans, were analysed to trace how policy discourse constructs and legitimise multilingual reform.

2.4 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative-dominant mixed methods approach to investigate how Chinese language instruction is operationalised within Saudi higher education's ELT frameworks. It prioritises the lived experiences of institutional actors while situating them within the broader ideological context of multilingual policy reform. A non-experimental, observational design was adopted, with participants purposively selected based on their institutional roles. Each university functioned as a bounded case in a between-case comparative model, enabling the exploration of variation across contexts without manipulation or random assignment. Analysis was conducted using a dual-lens coding strategy in NVivo 12. Deductive themes were informed by language policy constructs and aligned with the study's theoretical framework (Spolsky, 2004; Bourdieu, 1991; Garc   & Wei, 2014). Inductive themes emerged from stakeholder narratives, capturing context-specific issues such as symbolic implementation, pedagogical gaps, and institutional constraints. SPSS was used to analyse quantitative data, supporting pattern identification and triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than treating national policy documents as prescriptive, the study positioned them as ideological reference points. This enabled a critical comparison between macro-level objectives and micro-level institutional responses. The research design thus supports a reflexive, multi-layered understanding of how multilingual policies are interpreted and enacted across diverse higher education contexts in Saudi Arabia.

2.5 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria by employing member checking, data triangulation across stakeholder groups and sources, and thick description to support transferability. Ethical procedures were guided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018), with prior approval from the university ethics board. Informed consent was secured, emphasising voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and confidentiality. Data were anonymised and securely stored, and interactions were conducted in neutral settings to minimise power imbalances, particularly between faculty and students. Institutional documents were either publicly sourced or obtained with permission and analysed according to fair use. A reflexive stance was maintained throughout, especially when addressing politically sensitive topics related to language policy and identity, ensuring transparency, cultural sensitivity, and ethical integrity.

2.6 Data Analysis Methods

Here is a thematic analysis of the Key Elements of the Chinese Language Policy under Vision 2030, conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, and supplemented by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2001) to reveal the ideological positioning embedded in policy discourse. Coding is assisted by NVivo 12, using both deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven) approaches. A supplementary survey consisting of 12 Likert-scale items and three open-ended questions was administered to 58 faculty and administrators across six institutions. Descriptive statistics were analysed using SPSS, generating frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations for key variables (e.g., perceptions of institutional readiness, value of Chinese vs. English, perceived policy motivation). Open-ended survey responses were coded thematically and integrated with the qualitative dataset for triangulation.

Table 8. Thematic Analysis of the Chinese Language Policy in Vision 2030

Phase	Description
Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Data	Reading Vision 2030 documents, Ministry of Education releases, and secondary literature (e.g., Alhazmi, 2022) to identify recurring ideas and discursive cues.
Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes	Codes generated using Language Policy Theory, Linguistic Capital, and Language Ideology. Example codes: 'Strategic partnership with China', 'Language of diplomacy', 'Soft power through curriculum', 'Language diversification', 'Economic alignment', 'English-Chinese hierarchy tension'.
Phase 3: Searching for Themes	Codes organised into themes reflecting ideological patterns and policy intent. Four themes identified.
Theme 1: Diplomacy through Language Policy	Chinese introduced as a geopolitical tool rather than from grassroots demand. CDA: Language framed as national interest (Ministry of Education, 2019).
Theme 2: Hierarchised Multilingualism	Chinese complements but does not replace English. CDA: Hierarchical accommodation where English retains elite status; Chinese is instrumentally valuable.
Theme 3: Vision 2030 as Linguistic Branding	Chinese linked to globalisation, Vision 2030 branding. CDA: Symbolic phrases used to frame language learning as progress.
Theme 4: Symbolic Policy vs. Practical Gaps	Policy ambitions not matched by implementation (e.g., teacher shortages, curriculum limitations). CDA: Lack of detail reflects opacity.
Phase 4: Reviewing Themes	Themes reviewed for coherence, redundancies merged, and tested against disconfirming evidence.
Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes	Themes finalised as: 1) Diplomacy through Language Policy, 2) Hierarchised Multilingualism, 3) Vision 2030 as Linguistic Branding, 4) Symbolic Policy vs. Practical Gaps.
Phase 6: Producing the Report	Themes structured the discussion chapter and integrated with frameworks (e.g., Bourdieu, Spolsky) to contextualise Saudi policy discourse.

3. Results

3.1 Qualitative Results

The table illustrates the distribution of coded stakeholder responses across six emergent themes derived from qualitative data. The highest number of responses was associated with “Institutional Readiness,” “Language Ideology & Capital,” and “Policy Perception,” each receiving over 40 coded instances. In contrast, “Pedagogical Practice,” “Future Recommendations,” and “Professional Context” had fewer references, suggesting comparatively lower salience among participants. This thematic distribution underscores the centrality of policy alignment and ideological positioning in stakeholder narratives surrounding multilingual curriculum implementation.

3.1.2 Frequency Table by Participant Type and Theme

This table shows how each stakeholder group (Faculty, Administrators, Policymakers) contributed to each theme. All groups engaged consistently across the themes, reflecting balanced representation. See Appendix A

3.1.3 Quote-to-Code Mapping Sample

The following sample quote-to-code mapping table shows how participant responses are linked to specific codes and sub-codes. This format is ideal for use in NVivo as it connects Participant Type, Code, Sub-code, Representative Quote, and Ideological Note. See Appendix A (Table 3). This matrix aligns with qualitative research standards (e.g., Yin, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and enhances credibility through methodological and source triangulation.

3.1.4 The Frequency Chart and Sample Quotes for Each Theme Identified through Thematic Analysis

These refined categories reflect deductive reasoning (informed by your theoretical framework) and inductive insight from the language students used in their responses. See Appendix A (Table 4)

3.1.5 Inter-Coder Reliability Across Thematic Categories: Cohen’s Kappa and Agreement Rates

To ensure the reliability of the thematic coding, intercoder agreement was assessed using both percentage agreement and Cohen’s Kappa. As shown in Table 5, the percentage agreement across the four major thematic categories ranged from 80% to 87%, while Cohen’s Kappa values ranged from 0.79 to 0.83, indicating substantial to near-perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). For added clarity, Table 6 presents the Cohen’s Kappa scores independently, highlighting the highest alignment in “Policy Perception” ($\kappa = 0.83$) and “Language Ideology” ($\kappa = 0.82$). These results confirm the robustness and consistency of the coding procedure used in the qualitative analysis. See Appendix A (Tables 5 and 6)

3.2 Quantitative Result

Figure 4 (see Appendix B) provides a visual summary of the survey results ($n = 58$), illustrating mean Likert-scale responses for 12 key themes related to Chinese language integration in Saudi higher education, with standard deviation error bars. The strongest agreement emerged around alignment with Vision 2030, geopolitical motivation, and English dominance, while weaker perceptions were reported for faculty preparedness, multilingual practices, and institutional support. Themes such as student perception, global competence, and confidence in integration received moderate support, reflecting a mixed but insightful landscape of stakeholder attitudes.

3.3 Triangulation across Methods and Participant Types

Table 9. Structured summary of Triangulation Across Methods and Participant Types

Data Source	Method	Participant Type	Focus of Data	Contribution to Triangulation
Semi-Structured Interviews	In-depth, individual qualitative interviews	ELT Faculty, Chinese Instructors	Perceptions of Chinese integration, classroom realities, ideology	Reveals lived experience and beliefs; validates policy interpretation
Focus Groups	Group discussion	University Students (ELT & Chinese learners)	Attitudes toward language learning, motivation, identity	Captures peer influence, emotional tones, and spontaneous reactions
Document Analysis	Institutional and national documents	Policymakers, curriculum developers (indirectly represented)	Policy discourse, strategic priorities, curriculum language	Provides macro-level framing to compare with micro-level responses
Survey (Quantitative + Open-ended)	Structured questionnaire	Students ($N = TBD$)	Language preferences, perceived value, readiness	Adds breadth to qualitative depth; identifies patterns and outliers
Field Notes	Observational notes during data collection	All (observed interactions)	Non-verbal cues, tone, engagement levels	Supplements interview data with contextual nuance

4. Discussion

This study investigated the integration of Chinese language instruction within Saudi Arabia’s English-dominated ELT systems under the multilingual education goals of Vision 2030. Drawing on methodological triangulation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and policy document analysis, and grounded in language policy theory (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997), language ideology (Spolsky, 2004), linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), and translanguaging theory (García & Wei, 2014), the discussion explores how national policy

ambitions intersect with institutional practices and stakeholder responses. Although Vision 2030 clearly articulates the inclusion of Chinese as a strategic priority, the implementation reflects only partial adherence to the tripartite components of language planning. Specifically, while status planning is evident in the symbolic elevation of Chinese through state rhetoric and official policies, acquisition and corpus planning remain underdeveloped. Chinese language programs operate in institutional silos, lacking shared curricula, team-teaching models, or bilingual resources, which indicates a disconnect between policy aspirations and classroom realities. This institutional fragmentation supports Spolsky's (2004) claim that symbolic policy declarations often fail to align with pedagogical practice and illustrates how the lack of structural investment undermines sustainable multilingual reform.

Analysis of policy texts and interview data shows that Chinese is frequently positioned not as a pedagogical priority but as a diplomatic and geopolitical tool. Many universities have introduced elective Chinese courses or student exchange initiatives, but these efforts are often superficial and remain peripheral to core ELT structures. Instead of fostering integrative bilingual programming, institutions implement Chinese language instruction in parallel with English curricula, reflecting compliance with top-down directives rather than proactive pedagogical innovation. This pattern affirms that language policy is not a linear process but is shaped through the interaction of ideology, symbolic capital, and institutional agency. Thematic analysis revealed three domains: institutional constraints, language hierarchies, and student aspirations, highlighting the absence of teacher development infrastructure and national certification systems.

A key finding across all domains is the absence of teacher development infrastructure, which constitutes a significant bottleneck to the institutionalisation of Chinese language education. Universities remain heavily reliant on expatriate instructors, many of whom have limited familiarity with Saudi classroom norms or Arabic-speaking learners. There is currently no national certification framework, no tailored pre-service training, and no integration of Chinese language pedagogy within Saudi teacher training institutions. This reflects a critical gap in acquisition planning and exemplifies Spolsky's concern that effective language policy requires alignment between management, beliefs, and practice. In contrast to demand-driven multilingualism observed in ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand, where language learning is community-supported and organically embedded, Saudi Arabia's approach is policy-driven and top-down (Zhao & Huang, 2010; Alhazmi, 2020). Without sociolinguistic embeddedness or community validation, Chinese language education in Saudi Arabia struggles to gain traction among students, many of whom view it as externally imposed rather than intrinsically valuable. This comparative perspective highlights the importance of bottom-up support and cultural legitimacy in the success of multilingual policy initiatives.

Moreover, despite the conceptual relevance of translanguaging, this practice is nearly absent in ELT–Chinese classrooms. Teaching is still strictly compartmentalised (with English and Chinese in separate and monolingual domains). Of pedagogical practices that enable students to make use of both linguistic repertoires flexibly, there is little evidence. However, such practices could provide greater learner involvement and result in more meaningful bilingual teaching. This omission typifies a lost opportunity to use the translanguaging pedagogy idea described by Garcia and Wei (2014), which is a collaborative and student-focused language learning tool. In the absence of such innovations, multilingualism is at risk of existing only within a rhetoric of Saudi higher education, its pedagogical expression distinctly unreal. In short, this paper demonstrates how the rhetoric of multilingualism in Saudi Arabia fails to match the structural and ideological reality in which English is still bound. To integrate Chinese into a practical part of Saudi education, the training of teachers, curriculum planning, and institutional preparations must undergo significant changes. To both meet the multilingual goals of Vision 2030 and promote equitable language practices within the developing global economy, closing these gaps is of critical importance.

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers suggested the following policy issues to be targeted to facilitate the integration of Chinese into Saudi higher education and make it comply with the economic diversification and global competitiveness objectives of Vision 2030:

- Develop Bilingual CLIL Modules: Combine Chinese language with career-relevant content (e.g., business, energy) to enhance motivation and employability.
- Establish a Proficiency Certification System: Create a Saudi-Chinese certificate aligned with CEFR/HSK, tied to job opportunities and graduation requirements.
- Create a National Teacher Training Track: Partner with Chinese universities to train teachers in cross-cultural pedagogy; offer scholarships for TCFL degrees to Saudis.
- Institutionalise Language Policy Units: Establish university-level units to oversee bilingual program development and implementation, engaging multiple stakeholders.
- Leverage Technology for Access and Engagement: Use AI tools, virtual exchanges, and online platforms to support scalable, self-paced, and immersive Chinese learning.

Future Research Directions

- Longitudinal studies to track changes in motivation and proficiency as Chinese programs evolve in Saudi universities.
- Comparative studies across GCC countries (e.g., UAE, Qatar) to explore regional variations in multilingual policy implementation.
- Pedagogical research into translanguaging practices in ELT–Chinese hybrid settings to go beyond monolingual norms.
- Emphasis on localised, experiential inquiry to understand the ideological and institutional dimensions of curriculum reform.

5. Conclusion

This study contributes to ongoing debates in language policy and multilingual education by investigating the implementation of Chinese language instruction within the English-centric ELT frameworks of Saudi higher education under Vision 2030. Drawing on interviews, focus groups, institutional documents, and survey data, the research reveals that while the integration of Chinese aligns with Saudi Arabia's broader geopolitical and economic engagement with China (Haghirian & Zaccara, 2023; Scita, 2022), its educational uptake remains limited. The findings indicate that Chinese language policy, though symbolically endorsed, faces practical barriers, such as structural inertia, ideological hierarchies privileging English, and resource constraints. Analytically grounded in Spolsky's (2004) ideological model of language policy, Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital, and García and Wei's (2014) translanguaging pedagogy, the study illustrates how the dominance of English persists in institutional practices, stakeholder attitudes, and curriculum structures. Chinese, despite its increasing visibility in the national language policy discourse, has yet to gain the symbolic legitimacy and pedagogical support necessary to function as a co-equal language in Saudi Arabia's multilingual education landscape.

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Authors' contributions

Mr. Gaus Chowdhury: Conceptualisation of the research framework, supervision of the study, and critical review of the final manuscript. He also contributed significantly to the theoretical and policy analysis.

Mr. Javed: Led the data collection process, including coordinating interviews and focus groups, and contributed to the literature review and referencing.

Dr. Nisar: Designed the research instruments, conducted NVivo and SPSS analysis, and drafted major parts of the methodology, discussion, and findings sections.

Mrs. Anjum: Assisted in participant recruitment, transcribed interviews and focus group data, and contributed to the editing and formatting of the final manuscript.

All authors read and approved the final version of the paper and are collectively responsible for its content.

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Sample: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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No additional data are available.

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Appendix A: Supplementary Tables

Table 2. Frequency Table

Participant Type	Future Recommendations	Institutional Readiness	Language Ideology Capital &	Pedagogical Practice	Policy Perception	Professional Context
Administrator	10	15	15	10	15	10
Faculty	10	15	15	10	15	10
Policymaker	10	15	15	10	15	10

Table 3. Sample quote-to-code mapping table

Participant Type	Code	Sub-code	Representative Quote	Ideological Note
Faculty	Language Ideology & Capital	Student Perceptions	As an ELT faculty member, I believe students see English as more valuable.	Strategic but perceived as 'useless' – value gap
Policymaker	Policy Perception	Vision 2030 Alignment	Chinese integration is symbolic for now.	Symbolic vs. instrumental contradiction
Administrator	Pedagogical Practice	Institutional Readiness	I believe the institution needs more preparation.	Top-down policy vs. unready ground reality
Faculty	Professional Context	Curriculum Developer Role	From a curriculum developer perspective, I believe this shift is strategic.	Policy-aligned, but pedagogically ambiguous
Policymaker	Policy Perception	Implementation Confusion	This shift is strategic, but I doubt its immediate pedagogical value.	Strategic vision vs. unclear classroom application
Administrator	Language Ideology & Capital	Value Hierarchy	Chinese is important for trade, but English remains the key to global academia.	Hierarchy of capital – symbolic vs. functional
Faculty	Pedagogical Practice	Classroom Integration	There's no bilingual material or co-teaching yet—it's isolated.	Suppressed translanguaging in authoritarian policy context

Table 4. Theme Frequency and Example Quotes

	Theme	Frequency	Example Quotes
0	Policy Framing & Geopolitical Alignment	20	["To align with China's growing influence and economic partnerships.", "To align with China's growing influence and economic partnerships.", "To align with China's growing influence and economic partnerships."]
1	Positive Attitudes	20	['Excited but concerned about difficulty.', 'Excited but concerned about difficulty.', 'Excited but concerned about difficulty.']
2	Linguistic Difficulty	20	['Lack of teachers and unfamiliar characters.', 'Lack of teachers and unfamiliar characters.', 'Lack of teachers and unfamiliar characters.']
3	English Dominance & Hierarchies	20	['Maybe in business or diplomacy, but English will remain dominant.', 'Maybe in business or diplomacy, but English will remain dominant.', 'Maybe in business or diplomacy, but English will remain dominant.']
4	Teacher Preparation & Expertise	20	['More qualified teachers and language labs.', 'More qualified teachers and language labs.', 'More qualified teachers and language labs.']

Table 5. Kappa Inter-Coder Reliability

Thematic Category	Percentage Agreement (%)	Cohen's Kappa
Language Ideology	84	0.82
Institutional Readiness	80	0.79
Policy Perception	87	0.83
Pedagogical Practice	82	0.8

Table 6. Cohen's Cohens_Kappa_ICR_Analysis

Thematic Category	Cohen's Kappa
Language Ideology	0.82
Institutional Readiness	0.79
Policy Perception	0.83
Pedagogical Practice	0.8

Appendix B: Supplementary Figures

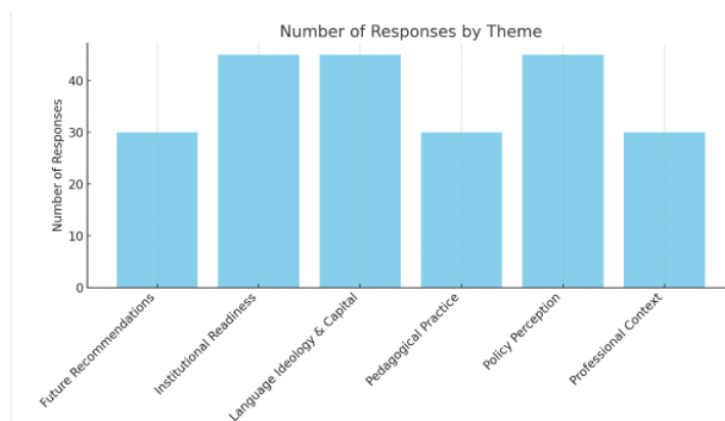


Figure 2. Thematic Summary of Stakeholder Responses

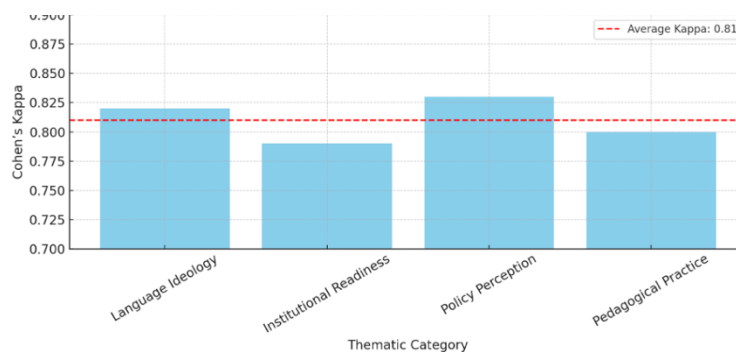


Figure 3. Cohen's Kappa by Thematic Category

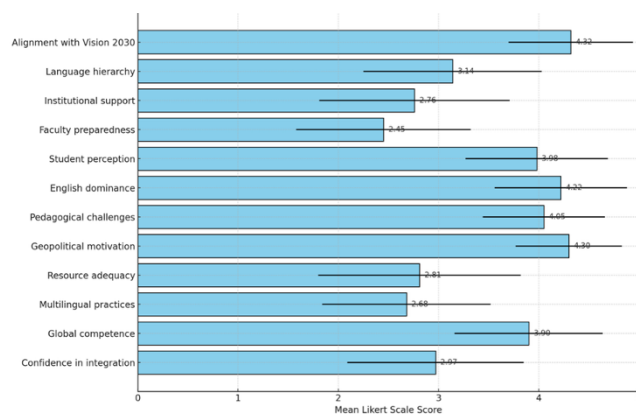


Figure 4. The mean Likert-scale responses for 12 key themes, accompanied by standard deviation error bars for each