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Exploring ethnic identity and heritage language proficiency among second-generation Hausa Saudis

MORAD ALSAHAFI

King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This article reports a part of a larger study which examines the sociolinguistic dynamics within the Hausa community in Saudi Arabia. It focuses on how second-generation members of the Hausa Saudi community perceive their ethnic identity and investigates the relationship between their proficiency in the Hausa heritage language and their sense of ethnic identity. Data were collected through an online questionnaire completed by 103 participants. The findings reveal that participants reported moderately high levels of ethnic identity (M = 3.14, SD = 0.63). Responses regarding ethnic self-identification indicated a strong preference among participants for identity labels that emphasize their Hausa family roots and their "Arabness" (e.g., Hausa Arab, Arab Hausa). These labels illustrate how individuals negotiate the relationship between their Hausa origin and the predominantly Arabic-speaking environment in which they were born and currently reside and identify. Correlation analysis showed a weak yet significant positive relationship between Hausa language proficiency and ethnic identity ($r = .24$, $p < .05$). The conclusion suggests that while heritage language contributes to shaping ethnic identity, other factors, including ancestry, race, and religion, may also play pivotal roles.

Keywords: ethnic identity; heritage language; Hausa; language proficiency

Introduction

Ethnic identity has been a subject of significant interest in the literature due to its complex and multifaceted nature. This complexity stems from the diverse theoretical perspectives on ethnicity (Fishman, 1989; Helms, 2007; Isajiw, 1990; Nagel, 1994; Norton, 1997; Phinney, 2003). At its core, ethnic identity is not a static concept but a dynamic and evolving one that continually shapes individuals' identity and reflects how well they are affiliated with their ethnic group.

Phinney (2003) defines it as one's "sense of self as a member of an ethnic group" (p. 63). Joseph (2004) further distinguishes between ethnic and national identities, with ethnic identity being more focused on common descent and shared cultural heritage. National identity, on the other hand, is centered on political borders and autonomy.

The connection between language and ethnic identity is well-established in existing literature, though various interpretations have emerged to clarify the nature of this relationship (Cavallaro, 2005; Isajiw, 1990; Jee, 2024; Liebkind, 1999; Ozers, 2024; Phinney et al., 2001). The heritage language of an ethnic group is often considered a key indicator of the identity of its speakers (Park, 2024; Phinney et al., 2001). According to Woodward, "[ethnic] identities are given meaning through the language and symbolic systems through which they are represented" (1997, cited in Fishman 1999, p. 451). The importance of ethnic language as a marker of ethnic identity is evident in various areas, such as shared cultural experiences, rituals, literature, and historical narratives. Consequently, the heritage language of an ethnic group can serve as "the most 'visible' symbol of an ethnic group" (Myers-Scotton, 2006, p. 102).

Despite the notable visibility of the Afro-Saudi community in the Western region of Saudi Arabia, there exists a significant gap in scholarly research concerning their sociolinguistic circumstances (Alsahafi, 2019; Tawalbeh, 2013). For generations, people of Hausa origin have lived in the country since its founding in 1932, alongside other Saudi citizens. Many of them share a national identity as Saudis, aligning with the majority group, and a religious affiliation as Muslims, co-religious with the majority population. This article presents findings from a larger study that delves into the sociolinguistic dynamics of the Hausa community in Saudi Arabia, focusing on issues surrounding ethnic identity, language attitudes, and heritage language maintenance. In particular, this paper examines how second-generation Hausa adults in Saudi Arabia (N = 103) perceive their ethnic identity. It focuses on their commitment to and exploration of their ethnic identity and the relationship between their perceived identity and their proficiency in the Hausa language. This study employs a quantitative approach to address the following research questions:

RQ#1. How do participants perceive their ethnic identity in relation to identity exploration, commitment, and self-identification?
RQ#2. What is the relationship between participants' ethnic identity and their Hausa heritage language proficiency?

Literature Review

Defining Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity represents a crucial social marker in multiethnic societies (Lal & Majumdar, 2023; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Phinney, 2000; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Ting & Kho, 2021; Voicu, 2013). It can be seen from objective and subjective perspectives (Edwards, 1985; Guilherme et al., 2000; Ross, 1979). Objective definitions of ethnic identity consider objective characteristics to identify various social groups, including country of origin, physical appearance, ethnic mother tongue (i.e., a heritage language), religion, and ancestry. From such a perspective, ethnic identity is viewed as inherited and immutable. This objective view emphasizes ethnic identity's involuntary nature instead of the voluntaristic nature of the subjective perspective, which considers self-ascriptions made by a specific ethnic group concerning themselves and others. This meaning of ethnic identity is usually socially constructed, involving the renegotiation and redefinition of ethnic boundaries and the adaptation of cultural practices via a constant process through which ethnic identity changes in response to different

living circumstances, such as migration and intermarriage. Ethnic identity, in this sense, is both situational and mutable. For a better understanding of ethnic identity, it is essential to combine objective and subjective perspectives toward ethnic identity (Edwards, 1985; Fishman, 1989; Guilherme et al., 2000).

Rotheram and Phinney's (1987) view of ethnic identity encompasses not only the ancestry of an ethnic collectivity but also patterns of its thinking, feelings, and behaviors. According to them, ethnic identity concerns the ethnic group member's acquisition of such ethnic group patterns. They identify several components of ethnic identity, including ethnic awareness (the identification of one's own and other groups), ethnic self-identification (the label used for one's group), ethnic attitudes (characteristic ways of responding either positively or negatively to one's own and other ethnicities), and ethnic behaviors (behaviors patterns explicitly related to an ethnic collectivity). Nagel (1994) describes ethnic identity as being the result of a continuous construction process through which "individuals and groups create and recreate their personal and collective histories, the membership boundaries of their groups, and the content and meaning of their ethnicity" (p. 154). In her article, Nagel identifies two main components of ethnicity, which she called "two of the basic building blocks of ethnicity" (p. 152). These are identity (who are we?) and culture (what are we?).

Guilherme et al. (2000) perceive ethnicity as a multidimensional construct resulting from the interaction of three interrelated dimensions, namely ethnic origin, ethnic identity, and ethnic intensity. Ethnic origin is "an individual's or group's natural identification with the original ethnic group, into which the individual is born" (Guilherme et al., 2000, p.49). In this sense, ethnic origin is an immutable fact. Ethnic identity refers to an individual's membership or identification with a specific ethnic group. Unlike ethnic origin, ethnic identity can be dynamic based on the individual's preferences through time and place. The third dimension, ethnic intensity, refers to the degree of association with an ethnic group and reflects the strength of connection to shared cultural values.

The literature reviewed above can provide some insights regarding ethnic identity. First, ethnic identity is a multidimensional and dynamic construct. To illustrate its multidimensional nature, various researchers have employed differing terms and classifications. Second, some scholars distinguish between individual and collective (group) levels of ethnic identity. However, it is important to note that no strict boundaries separate the two identified levels of ethnic identity. What happens to an ethnic group is related to the ethnic identity of its members (and vice versa). Third, the discussion above highlights the important boundary function of ethnicity. Phinney (1990) pointed out that ethnic identity is meaningful only in contact situations as it is based on boundaries. Being a member of an ethnic group means participating in particular social networks and, therefore, having access to the resources and specific social roles controlled by members of the ethnic group. Fourth, ethnic identity development involves the exploration of its meaning for ethnic group members and their sense of belongingness and commitment to a particular ethnic entity (Ong et al., 2010; Phinney, 1992; Tang & Calafato, 2022). Finally, researchers endorse the fact that ethnic identity, in part, is genetically determined and inherited (involuntary). Researchers have also acknowledged that ethnic identity enjoys another mutable and more voluntary dimension (subjectivist view) that is changeable through time and place based on living circumstances. Issues surrounding the measurement of ethnic identity are briefly discussed in the following section.

Measuring Ethnic Identity

A glance through the literature revealed that although various measures have been developed to examine ethnic identity among various ethnic groups in different contexts, Phinney's multilingual

ethnic identity measure (MEIM) emerged as one of the most widely used measures of ethnic identity development (Jee, 2024; Maehler & Hanke, 2019; Phinney, 1992; Tang & Calafato, 2022; Yu, 2015). The original version of the MEIM comprised 14 items assessing three core components of ethnic identity: attachment/belonging, achievement, and involvement. Following an extensive study conducted in the United States, Phinney (1992) refined the MEIM to encompass two primary components of ethnic identity development (exploration and commitment), assessed by 12 items: Five items assessing ethnic identity exploration and seven items for the commitment subscale. While the exploration component refers to "the extent to which the individual has spent time thinking about and/or engaging in activities designed to help define what their ethnic identity means," the commitment subscale indicates "the extent to which the individual has committed to a particular meaning for their ethnic identity" (Scottham et al., 2019, p. 21). Responses to the MEIM are evaluated on a four-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4).

Phinney and Ong (2007) developed a revised, relatively shorter (six-item) two-factor model of the MEIM. This revised version contains three items to assess ethnic identity exploration and three for the commitment subscale. The scale assesses ethnic identity, where higher scores reflect a more developed or established sense of identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007). An analysis of the reliability of the 6-item version produced Cronbach's alphas of .76 for exploration, .78 for commitment, and .81 for the overall scale, demonstrating good internal consistency. Phinney and Ong (2007) concluded that their instrument "provides a concise measure of the core aspects of group identity that determine the strength and security of ethnic identity or the degree to which ethnic identity has been achieved" (p. 278).

Numerous studies have used different versions of the MEIM to measure ethnic identity development among various ethnic groups, and they have proved to be valid and reliable measures of ethnic identity (Chakawa et al., 2015; Habibi et al., 2021; Lal & Majumdar, 2023; Maehler & Hanke, 2019; Musso et al., 2018; Neumann et al., 2024). The current study uses an Arabic version of the MEIM-R to examine ethnic identity among a sample of Hausa Saudis and assess its psychometric properties as indicated by internal consistency. To the best of available knowledge, no previously published study has examined the psychometric properties of this instrument among different ethnic groups in Saudi Arabia.

Ethnic Identity and Heritage Language Proficiency

In language contact settings, members of ethnolinguistic minorities use the languages in their repertoire to express their multiple identities. As Joseph (2004, p. 226) puts it,

> If people's use of language is reduced analytically to how meaning is formed and represented in sound, or communicated from one person to another, or even the conjunction of the two, something vital has been abstracted away: the people themselves, who prior to such abstraction, are always present in what they say, through the identity recoverable in (or at least interpretable from) their voice, spoken, written or signed.

However, some researchers prioritize other identity markers, such as race, nationality, and social class, over language in defining group boundaries and shaping ethnic identity (e.g., Anderson, 1979). From this perspective, the loss of an ethnic language does not necessarily equate to a loss of ethnic identity. As Anderson (1979, p. 68) notes, "ethnic consciousness is not necessarily dependent on the maintenance of a unique traditional language," though language shifts within a group may signal varying levels of assimilation.

Isajiw (1990) proposed a useful theoretical model that depicts ethnic identity as a complex construct with internal and external dimensions. Within this framework, the use of a heritage language is identified as one of the external aspects of ethnic identity, serving as a visible behavior exhibited by members of the ethnic group within various social contexts. On the other hand, the sense of attachment and obligation that ethnic group members feel towards teaching their heritage language and ensuring its intergenerational transmission provides an example of internal moral components of ethnic identity. This is particularly evident in multilingual contexts where the maintenance and transmission of the heritage language enhance ethnic consciousness and help preserve cultural distinctiveness despite assimilation pressures.

Correlational research on the relationship between ethnic identity and proficiency in the heritage language generally reported a significant weak to moderate positive correlation (Jee, 2024; Yu, 2015). Jee (2024), for instance, reported a weak yet significant positive correlation ($r = .203$, $p < .05$) between second-generation Korean Australians' cultural identity and their self-rated Korean proficiency. In Yu's study (2015), a statistically significant positive relationship was identified between proficiency in Chinese heritage language and ethnic identity among 63 American-born Chinese children ($r = .316$, $p = .006$). Positive correlations were also found between ethnic identity and oracy skills ($r = .261$, $p = .019$) and literacy skills ($r = .282$, $p = .012$). One of the main objectives of this study is to explore the relationship between ethnic identity and self-rated Hausa proficiency among second-generation Saudi Hausas.

The Hausa Saudi Community

"Hausa" refers to the Hausa people and their ethnic mother tongue. The Hausa constitute the largest ethnic group in West Africa (Fellow, 1997). According to Yusuf (2020), Hausa ethnicity is "a melting pot of cultures and traditions that contains large populations of people who originated from other minority or majority tribes of northern Nigeria, sometimes even of southern Nigerian origin" (p. 1375). Yusuf (2020) identified three distinguishing features of the Hausa identity: Language (the ability to speak the Hausa language, attire (wearing peculiar Hausa attire), and religion (predominantly Muslim). The Hausa language is the most widely spoken language in West Africa, with over 50 million native speakers and approximately 15 million second-language speakers (National African Language Resource Center, n.d.). Hausa serves as a trade language and a lingua franca in West Africa, similar to the role of Swahili in East Africa. In addition, Hausa is spoken by diasporic communities in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and the United States (NALRC, n.d.).

In Saudi Arabia, Hausa-origin Saudis belong to a larger Afro-Saudi community, representing around 10% of the country's 32 million population. No official estimates exist for the Hausa Saudi population due to a lack of census data on the country's various ethnic groups. Early waves of Hausa immigration toward Mecca (officially known as Makkah al-Mukarramah), Islam's holiest city, occurred as early as the 1880s (Miran, 2015). Although performing Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca, the fifth pillar of Islam) was one of the main motives for their movement, it is often intertwined with such material pursuits as searching for "labor, farming, or trade opportunities" (Miran, 2015, p. 393). Other push factors in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa were linked to the beginning of the British colonialism era in the mid-nineteenth century, against which many Muslim Hausas resorted to migration "as a form of resistance, a tactic known as the *hejira*, in which those perceived as infidels are avoided" (Kirk-Greene et al., 2024, n.d.).

Since Hajj is an annual season, Hausa pilgrims have continued to arrive in Mecca and Medina (the first and second holiest cities of Islam) before and after the establishment of modern Saudi Arabia in 1932. Hausa Saudis are mostly educated and employed in both public and private

Table 1 *Demographic profile of participants: Age group, education, and occupation (N = 103)*

Demographic information	Number of participants
Age groups in years	
18–35	21
36–55	65
56–65+	17
Educational level	
High school and below	59
Undergraduate	30
Postgraduate	14
Occupation	
Student	5
Employed	54
Unemployed	13
Retired	19
Other	12

sectors. They use the Arabic term "Hausawi" or "Hawsawi" as a surname to indicate their Hausa-ethnic origin.

Methods

Participants

The results reported below are pertinent to data gathered from 103 second-generation Hausa Saudi adults. These respondents met the following criteria: (1) being 18 years of age or older, (2) being born in Saudi Arabia, and (3) having one or two parents born outside of Saudi Arabia. They included 29 females and 74 males, organized into three age groups: young adults (ages 18–35 years; n = 21), middle-aged adults (ages 36–55 years, n = 65), and older adults (aged older than 55 years, n = 17). Demographic information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data reported below are derived from a larger study conducted among members of the Hausa Saudi community. Participants were invited to complete an online questionnaire of 30 questions divided into four main sections. The four sections gathered data on participants' demographics, ethnic identity, language proficiency, and attitudes. The questionnaire begins with an introduction informing respondents about the research topic and purpose, the researcher's name and affiliation, and their participation's voluntary and anonymous nature. The questionnaire was made available to the participants in Arabic for user convenience and shared via Google Forms URL. Two members of the Hausa community known to the researcher

Table 2 *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure—Revised (adopted from Phinney & Ong, 2007)*

Item no.	Item	Subscale	Short code
1.	I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.	Exploration	Exp1
2.	I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.	Commitment	Com1
3.	I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.	Commitment	Com2
4.	I have often done things that will help me understand my ethnic background better.	Exploration	Exp2
5.	I have often talked to other people in order to learn more about my ethnic group.	Exploration	Exp3
6.	I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.	Commitment	Com3

Table 3 *Internal consistency coefficients and mean inter-item correlations (N = 103)*

Scale	N of items	Cronbach's alpha	Mean inter-item correlations
Exploration	3	.81	.59
Commitment	3	.89	.73
MEIM-R total	6	.88	.57

voluntarily helped distribute the questionnaire link among their fellow Hausas' WhatsApp groups. Data collection was conducted over three months, after which access to the online questionnaire was disabled. The questionnaire data were exported from Google Forms into Excel and subsequently imported into SPSS 21 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for analysis to address the research questions. The present study focuses on self-reported proficiency in the Hausa language and levels of ethnic identity using the six-item MEIM-R (see Table 2).

The MEIM-R scale was designed to assess two key ethnic identity subscales: exploration and commitment. Items are assessed on a four-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. In addition to obtaining scores for these two subscales, a composite total score was also calculated to indicate the overall level of ethnic identity. Measurements of consistency confirmed the strong psychometric properties of this measure of ethnic identity, as demonstrated by high Cronbach's alpha values: total score (α = .88), exploration (α = .81), and commitment (α = .89). Likewise, the mean inter-item correlation for the measure was strong (r = .57), with the two subscales showing strong correlations (r = .59 for exploration and r = .73 for commitment) (see Table 3). These findings are consistent with Phinney and Ong's (2007) theoretical framework on ethnic identity and also with previous

Table 4 *Descriptive analysis of ethnic identity measures in the study sample (N = 103)*

Measures	Mean	Std deviation
Exploration subscale		
Exp1	2.95	0.89
Exp2	3.04	0.79
Exp3	3.06	0.83
Exploration total (3 items)	3.02	0.71
Commitment subscale		
Com1	3.31	0.70
Com2	3.28	0.75
Com3	3.19	0.79
Commitment total (3 items)	3.26	0.68
Total MEIM-R (6 items)	3.14	0.63

studies indicating high internal reliability of the measure in diverse cultural settings (see, for example, Habibi et al., 2021; Lal & Majumdar, 2023; Neumann et al., 2024).

In addition, participants were asked to self-rate their Hausa language proficiency on a scale of 1–7. The average score across oracy (understanding and speaking) and literacy (reading and writing) skills were combined and used to measure their overall heritage language proficiency. The final question in the questionnaire was open-ended, inviting participants to specify their ethnic identity.

Results

The results will be presented following the two research questions. The findings for the first question will be divided into two sections. The first relates to participants' responses concerning their commitment to and exploration of their ethnic identity, while the second analyzes the labels they use for self-identification.

Ethnic Identity Exploration and Commitment

The participants reported a moderately high level of ethnic identity exploration, with a mean score of 3.02 (SD = .71). Commitment scores were marginally higher than exploration scores, with a mean of 3.26 (SD = .68). The overall mean for the total ethnic identity scores was also moderately high (3.14). Descriptive statistics for ethnic identity measures are presented in Table 4.

Responses to the Open-ended Question on Ethnic Self-identification

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to identify their ethnicity. Among the respondents, 45 participants (43.7%) identified as Hausa Arab, 25 (24.3%) as Hausa, and 24 (23.3%) as Arab Hausa. The remaining nine respondents (8.7%) chose other

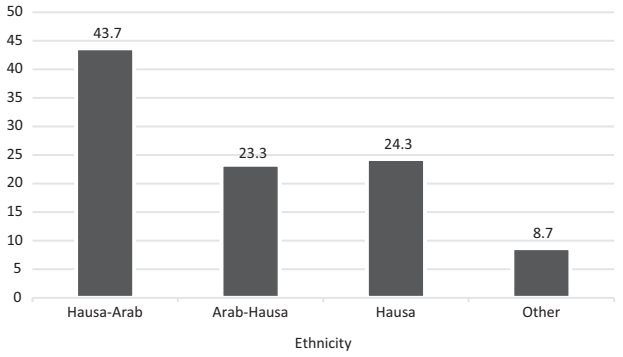

Figure 1 *Participants' ethnic self-identification.*

self-identification terms, including African, Arabized Hausa, *Arabsawi* (as an Arabic blend of Arab and Hausa), and Arab (see Figure 1). Participants were also invited to provide any relevant additional comments at the end of the questionnaire. Their responses reflected a strong commitment to their ethnic identity and community and a desire to foster greater collaboration among community members to strengthen their Hausa tribal bonds and enhance ethnocultural ties. The following are some of their comments indicated by participant ID (case number):

- P94: *The Hausawi community is an extensive community that lived in and grew up in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Although our community has adopted the customs and lifestyles of Saudi society, it has preserved some of its customs and traditions, and Hausa society is spread worldwide. Merchants spread the Hausawi language, not only in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.*
- P55: *I would like to see cooperation between the Hausa tribes in the Gulf and Nigeria.*
- P2: *We must preserve our culture, no matter how long it takes, even if we are naturalized citizens of Saudi Arabia. However, we must not forget where we come from and our original history and culture.*
- P56: *We need the Hausa community to come together as one.*

Correlation Analysis between Ethnic Identity and Language Proficiency

The participants reported a mean overall proficiency score of 4.25 out of 7 in the Hausa language. The average score for oracy skills (understanding and speaking) was 5.42, while literacy skills (reading and writing) had a lower average score of 3.07. A Spearman correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between ethnic identity and Hausa proficiency (see Table 5). The results revealed a significant positive correlation between proficiency in Hausa and the exploration subscale ($r = .26$, $p < .01$), as well as with the overall ethnic identity scale ($r = .24$, $p < .05$). However, both of these correlations were relatively weak, with values below 0.3. Furthermore, the correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant and moderately positive relationship between ethnic identity and oracy skills ($r = .35$, $p < .01$). The effect size, indicated by $r^2 = 0.058$, suggests that approximately 5.8% of the variance in ethnic identity is explained by overall proficiency level in the heritage language.

Table 5 *Correlation coefficient of ethnic identity and language proficiency*

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Understanding/speaking						
2.	Reading/writing	.50**					
3.	Overall proficiency	.82**	.90**				
4.	Exploration	.37**	.11	.26**			
5.	Commitment	.26**	.08	.18	.65**		
6.	MEIM-R	.35**	.11	.24*	.91**	.90**	

*Note: N = 103. *P < .05; **P <. 01; level (2-tailed)*

Discussion

The first research question examined how participants perceive their ethnic identity by assessing their levels of ethnic identity exploration and commitment, as well as their responses to the open-ended self-identification question. Participants exhibited a moderately high level of ethnic identity exploration, indicating their engagement and awareness of their ethnic backgrounds. Their slightly higher commitment scores suggest a strong sense of ethnic identity, which may stem from their Afro-Hausa heritage. The moderately high scores for both exploration and commitment indicate that participants are actively navigating their ethnic identities, consistent with Phinney's (1992) model of ethnic identity development.

The results of the self-identification question revealed a strong preference among participants for terms such as "Hausa Arab," "Arab Hausa," "Arabized Hausa," or "Arabsawi." These preferences reflect participants' integrated bicultural identity and illustrate the influence of their Hausa heritage and the predominance of Arabic culture in their environment on their dual sense of belonging to both Hausa (African) and Arab identities. By identifying as Hausa Arab Saudis, participants not only acknowledge their Hausa tribal roots but also embrace the shared majority concepts of Arab ethnicity and their nationality as Saudis. This observation is aligned with prior research, which suggests that "developing a dual sense of belonging to one's ethnic group and the national community is almost inevitable for members of ethnic minority groups" (Cárdenas et al., 2021, p. 193).

The second research question explored the relationship between ethnic identity and proficiency in the Hausa language. Correlation analyses demonstrated weak yet significant positive relationships between Hausa language proficiency and ethnic identity. The effect size ($r^2 = 0.058$) suggests a small to moderate relationship, indicating that additional contextual factors likely influence ethnic identity. This finding is consistent with similar studies that reported a weak to moderate correlation between ethnic identity and language proficiency (e.g., Jee, 2024; Yu, 2015). The Positive correlation between proficiency in Hausa and the exploration subscale of ethnic identity indicates that community members who actively explore their ethnic identity tend to achieve higher proficiency in the Heritage language. This supports the idea that exploring one's ethnic identity often involves participation in cultural practices, including various language use patterns (see Phinney & Ong, 2007).

In addition, the relatively weak positive correlation between the overall measure of ethnic identity and proficiency in the Hausa language suggests that a stronger sense of ethnic identity is modestly associated with improved proficiency in the heritage language. These results align with earlier studies (e.g., Anderson, 1979; Alsahafi, 2020; Isajiw, 1990). They indicate that while heritage language serves as an important marker of ethnic identity and its development, ethnic identity can also be influenced by various factors, including race, shared origin, family history, and the social environment.

Conclusion

This study explored the perceived ethnic identity of second-generation members of the Hausa community in Saudi Arabia and analyzed its correlation with their proficiency in the Hausa heritage language. The findings suggest that participants actively explored their Hausa ethnic roots, indicating a strong attachment and commitment to their ethnic group. The slightly higher levels of commitment observed may imply that many participants have reached a more stable stage in their ethnic identity development. This could also reflect the sociocultural and demographic realities of their well-established Hausa community and its integration into broader Saudi society. Participants expressed their sense of ethnic identity through their dual identification as Hausa descendants of early migrants to the Hijaz, the western region of Saudi Arabia that includes the two holy cities of Islam, while also recognizing their essential role within the social fabric of Saudi society. In this context, they identify as co-ethnic, co-religious, and co-national with majority group members. These multiple layers of shared identity they perceive help shape their sense of self, belonging, and cohesion within the broader societal framework.

The study's findings on the relationship between ethnic identity and proficiency in Hausa underscore the complex interplay between heritage language and ethnic identity development in multiethnic contexts. It should be noted that heritage language proficiency is not an equally salient feature of ethnic identity for all ethnolinguistic minorities. It is, therefore, essential to recognize the diversity of experiences within ethnolinguistic minorities when exploring the relationship between language and identity. For some groups, like Afro-descendant diasporic communities, race and ancestry may play a more influential role in forming ethnic identity and raising awareness of that identity. The weak positive correlations observed between proficiency in Hausa and ethnic identity highlight the intricate role of heritage language as just one of several factors that shape ethnic identity. Therefore, future research should examine additional contextual factors beyond the heritage language, such as cultural traditions, historical narratives, and social networks, that shape ethnic identity formation.

In conclusion, as is typical with all research, this study has limitations. While the findings offer valuable insights into ethnic identity and heritage language proficiency among second-generation Hausa Saudis, future research should adopt a more in-depth qualitative approach to explore how members of the Hausa Saudi community perceive their ethnic identity and its connection to the development of their heritage language. Additionally, since the respondents were not randomly selected, the results cannot be generalized to all members of the Hausa community, particularly those without Saudi nationality. Furthermore, despite being a common approach, another limitation of this study is the use of self-assessed language proficiency, which may lead to overestimation or underestimation of actual ability. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study aim to enhance understanding of the sociolinguistic dynamics within the understudied Hausa community in Saudi Arabia, providing insights into the intersection of ethnic identity and heritage language in contexts of language contact.

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