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REVIEW ARTICLE

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Language skills for the creative economy: Cultural heritage narratives and employability in Saudi humanities programmes

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ABSTRACT

Saudi Arabia's expanding cultural sector creates an opportunity for humanities education. Museums, heritage destinations, publishing, tourism, festivals, archives, media production, and cultural entrepreneurship all require graduates who can research cultural materials, judge sources, shape narratives, translate across languages and registers, and communicate through digital and embodied forms. Yet the connection between these capacities and employability is often described too loosely. "Communication skills" can become an empty graduate attribute, while heritage can be treated as marketable content detached from communities, provenance, and linguistic complexity. This conceptual article develops a Language–Heritage–Employability framework for Saudi humanities programmes through a critical integrative review of scholarship on the creative economy, graduate employability, cultural heritage interpretation, translation competence, multiliteracies, and digital storytelling. The framework identifies seven interdependent capability domains: heritage inquiry and source criticism; Arabic narrative and register competence; bilingual cultural mediation and localisation; digital and multimodal storytelling; audience, platform, and data literacy; ethical stewardship; and professional identity, networks, and cultural enterprise. It argues that employability should not be equated with immediate job placement or the instrumentalisation of the humanities. Rather, it should denote graduates' capacity to produce culturally credible, ethically governed, audience-aware, and economically viable work while sustaining the critical and public purposes of humanities education. The article proposes a spiral curriculum, heritage studios, community-based projects, work-integrated learning, and bilingual portfolios, alongside safeguards against commodification, linguistic hierarchy, precarious unpaid labour, and uncritical automation. It concludes that Saudi humanities programmes can become central to the creative economy when language is taught not merely as proficiency, but as a form of cultural inquiry, narrative design, mediation, and responsible public action.

KEYWORDS: language skills, creative economy, cultural heritage, employability, Saudi Arabia, humanities education, translation, digital storytelling

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1. Introduction

The creative economy depends on language more deeply than the phrase “communication skills” suggests. Cultural products and experiences do not reach publics simply because a society possesses valuable traditions, memorable places, or abundant archives. They become intelligible and shareable through acts of selection, interpretation, narration, translation, naming, description, performance, and circulation. A museum label, heritage-tour script, documentary subtitle, exhibition catalogue, podcast, literary festival programme, location-based application, or social-media campaign is therefore not a decorative layer placed over culture. It is an intervention that frames what the past means, who may speak for it, which audience is imagined, and how cultural value enters public and economic life.

This observation is important in Saudi Arabia. The cultural and tourism sectors have acquired institutional prominence under Vision 2030, while Saudi cultural heritage is increasingly presented through museums, festivals, restored urban environments, archaeological destinations, publishing initiatives, digital platforms, and international cultural exchange. UNESCO currently lists eight Saudi World Heritage properties and eighteen elements of intangible cultural heritage, but these designations represent only part of a field that includes oral histories, regional dialects, poetry, crafts, culinary knowledge, performance practices, family archives, and everyday memories (UNESCO, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Each domain creates work that is simultaneously linguistic, interpretive, social, and technological.

Humanities programmes appear well placed to contribute. Their students study Arabic and English, literature, rhetoric, history, translation, cultural analysis, religious and philosophical traditions, and the interpretation of complex texts. Nevertheless, possessing disciplinary knowledge does not enable a graduate to transform a manuscript, oral account, poem, architectural site, or customary practice into a responsible cultural product. Nor does the addition of a generic employability workshop solve the problem. The task is curricular: universities must make visible how humanities knowledge travels into professional practice without reducing the humanities to short-term labour-market training.

This article addresses that task through the title’s three linked terms: language skills, cultural heritage narratives, and employability. Language skills are understood broadly as capacities for inquiry, interpretation, rhetorical choice, translation, multimodal composition, interaction, and ethical representation. Heritage narratives are not neutral containers of facts; they organise temporal relations, causal explanations, identities, emotions, and claims to belonging (Bruner, 1991; Chronis, 2005). Employability is not treated as a guarantee of employment, which depends on economic structure, recruitment practices, location, networks, and opportunity. It refers instead to a graduate’s developing capacity to create value, demonstrate capability, navigate occupational transitions, and exercise judgment in specific contexts (Clarke, 2018; Tomlinson, 2017).

Three questions organise the discussion. First, which language capabilities mediate between humanities knowledge and work in the cultural and creative economy? Second, how can Saudi humanities programmes embed those capabilities across curricula, assessment, and partnerships rather than confining them to isolated electives? Third, what ethical and educational safeguards are required so that employability discourse does not instrumentalise the humanities or turn living heritage into extractable content?

The article’s central argument is that Saudi humanities programmes need a Language–Heritage–Employability framework in which bilingual and multimodal language practices connect disciplinary understanding with culturally accountable production. Such a framework must develop not only human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological capital, as graduate-capital theory proposes, but also stewardship capital: the relational legitimacy to work with heritage through consent, provenance, attribution, reciprocity, and responsibility. Stewardship capital is not private possession or a licence to speak for communities. It is an accountable capacity that can be earned, questioned, and withdrawn.

The article is conceptual rather than empirical. It synthesises relevant scholarship, interprets recent Saudi evidence, and proposes a curriculum architecture and research agenda.

2. Method and Conceptual Orientation

The article uses a critical integrative-review approach. Unlike a systematic review designed to answer a narrowly specified effectiveness question, an integrative review can connect conceptual, empirical, and policy literatures that employ different units of analysis. Five bodies of work were brought into dialogue: creative-

economy and cultural-economics research; graduate-employability theory; cultural-heritage interpretation and tourism storytelling; translation, intercultural competence, and multiliteracies; and scholarship on Saudi higher education, cultural mediation, and digital heritage. Priority was given to peer-reviewed sources with verifiable digital object identifiers, supplemented by official Saudi and UNESCO documents where current policy or designation data were required.

The synthesis proceeded through three analytical moves. The first identified recurring capabilities demanded by creative and cultural work, including narrative construction, bilingual mediation, digital production, collaboration, audience understanding, and career management. The second examined what becomes obscured when these are translated into generic graduate attributes. For example, “writing” may refer to source-based historical interpretation, concise museum copy, a grant proposal, a bilingual script, or search-oriented platform content; competence in one form does not automatically transfer to another. The third move considered normative limits. Heritage work concerns memory, identity, authority, ownership, and representation, so employability cannot be evaluated only through productivity or market reach.

The proposed framework therefore adopts a dual criterion. A capability is professionally relevant when it helps graduates enter, sustain, or create culturally related work. It is educationally and ethically defensible when it preserves inquiry, interpretive complexity, linguistic plurality, and public responsibility. The framework is not a list of employer preferences. It is a model for aligning disciplinary learning, authentic production, community accountability, and career formation.

3. Creative Economy, Heritage Narrative, and Graduate Employability

3.1 Creative work as cultural and relational production

The creative economy is frequently described through sectors such as design, media, publishing, advertising, performance, heritage, and digital content. Sector lists are useful administratively, but they can conceal the social processes through which creative value is recognised. Potts et al. (2008) characterise creative industries as social-network markets in which judgments of novelty and value are uncertain and strongly influenced by other people. This helps explain why creative careers depend not only on technical skill but also on reputation, collaboration, cultural knowledge, audience formation, and the capacity to present one’s work convincingly.

For humanities graduates, this uncertainty has two implications. First, occupational pathways may be distributed across institutions rather than attached to one stable profession. A graduate may move among cultural organisations, tourism providers, media agencies, publishing, education, freelance translation, research, and project-based work. Second, disciplinary capacity must be accompanied by career-management and enterprise skills. Bridgstock (2009, 2011) argues that graduates need the ability to identify opportunities, build networks, communicate professional value, and adapt their expertise. Arts entrepreneurship, properly understood, is not an instruction to commercialise every cultural practice; it enables graduates to organise resources, sustain projects, negotiate partnerships, and create forms of work where conventional vacancies are limited (Bridgstock, 2013). The economic dimension should nonetheless remain connected to cultural value. Throsby (1999) distinguishes cultural capital from purely financial assets, while Cerisola (2019) shows that creativity can mediate the relationship between heritage and development. Heritage can contribute to place-making, learning, identity, tourism, and enterprise, but its value is damaged when it is reduced to a stock of images or stories awaiting monetisation. Creative production is therefore relational: it connects inherited materials, professional expertise, community authority, institutional resources, and audience interpretation.

3.2 Heritage narratives as interpretive action

Narrative is central because heritage is rarely encountered as an unstructured inventory. Narratives configure events and practices into meaningful sequences, assign agency, select beginnings and endings, and establish relations between past and present. Bruner (1991) argues that narrative is a mode through which reality is constructed rather than merely reported. In heritage settings, visitors and interpreters may co-construct meaning, drawing on public stories and personal identity (Chronis, 2005). Interpretation can also encourage mindful attention when it presents complexity, variation, and questions rather than a single closed message (Moscardo, 1996). Heritage tourism is especially powerful when people perceive a site as related to their own heritage, which means that narrative reception is shaped by identity and belonging as well as information (Poria et al.,

2003).

A heritage narrative is thus an ethical and rhetorical design. Its author must decide how to balance evidence with accessibility, chronology with thematic structure, emotional engagement with restraint, and local terminology with explanation. The same site may require a scholarly catalogue entry, an Arabic family-oriented story, an English audio guide, a child-friendly activity, an accessible description, and a short digital post. Adaptation across these forms is not dilution when it is evidence-based and transparent; it is audience-responsive mediation.

3.3 Employability as situated capability and capital

Employability discourse becomes problematic when it treats students as bundles of transferable skills independent of social context. Clarke (2018) proposes a more contextual model that combines individual attributes, forms of capital, and labour-market conditions. Tomlinson (2017) similarly identifies human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological forms of graduate capital. Human capital includes knowledge and skills; social capital concerns networks and relationships; cultural capital includes knowledge of codes and expectations; identity capital supports a credible professional narrative; and psychological capital includes adaptability, confidence, and resilience.

This perspective is particularly relevant to creative work. A graduate may possess excellent literary or linguistic knowledge yet struggle to demonstrate its relevance to a museum, publisher, cultural foundation, or destination-management company. Conversely, polished self-presentation cannot compensate for weak research, superficial cultural understanding, or careless translation. Employability emerges from the interaction of knowledge, demonstrable practice, networks, professional identity, and opportunity.

Work-integrated learning can help students connect these dimensions, but only when projects are genuinely educational, supervised, and assessed. Jackson (2015) notes that weak preparation, inconsistent workplace support, and inadequate reflection can limit employability learning. Student perspectives also matter because curricula fail when learners cannot recognise the purpose of employability activities or relate them to their own aspirations (Tymon, 2013). Humanities programmes therefore need a visible developmental sequence rather than a late internship added to an otherwise unchanged curriculum.

The present article extends graduate-capital theory by proposing stewardship capital for heritage-related work. Stewardship capital consists of demonstrated habits and relationships that make cultural mediation legitimate: source transparency, respect for restrictions, informed consent, attribution, fair representation, reciprocal benefit, and willingness to revise a narrative when knowledge holders contest it. Unlike a credential, stewardship capital cannot be claimed solely by the graduate. It depends on continuing accountability to people, places, and institutions whose heritage is being represented.

4. The Saudi Opportunity and the Humanities Curriculum Gap

Saudi Arabia offers an unusually fertile setting for connecting language, heritage, and creative work. The national transformation agenda links cultural participation, tourism, quality of life, economic diversification, and the international presentation of the Kingdom (Saudi Vision 2030, n.d.). Its heritage field includes archaeological landscapes, historic cities, religious and trade routes, vernacular architecture, crafts, foodways, oral traditions, music, dance, poetry, and regional memory. UNESCO designations such as Hegra, Historic Jeddah, Al-Ahsa Oasis, and the Ḥimā Cultural Area coexist with intangible practices including Al-Qatt Al-Asiri, Alardah, Arabic coffee, date-palm traditions, Al Sadu weaving, and other shared or regional forms (UNESCO, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). This breadth requires more than promotional language. It requires researchers and communicators who can distinguish evidence from legend, explain regional variation, work across registers and languages, and recognise when knowledge should not be simplified or disclosed.

Recent Saudi scholarship supports the educational relevance of this task. Alangari (2022) shows that tourism translation is an act of cultural mediation in which translators make consequential choices about explanation, familiarity, and difference. Yehia and Alkhashil (2026) position digital storytelling as a means of connecting Saudi heritage, memory, and national identity. Studies of higher education and employability likewise argue that university transformation must be aligned with changing social and occupational needs rather than confined to formal expansion (Abdullateef et al., 2023; Yusuf & Jamjoom, 2022). Alanazi and Benlaria (2023)

report the continuing importance of aligning higher-education outcomes with labour-market requirements in the Saudi context.

Particularly relevant is recent research on Saudi literature and linguistics graduates. Alkahtani et al. (2026) identify tensions between graduate preparation and a changing labour market, including differences between graduates' and employers' judgments of applied bilingual and digital capabilities, as well as the significance of internships and mobility. The implication is not that literature or linguistics should be displaced by vocational modules. It is that programmes must create more opportunities for students to use literary, rhetorical, linguistic, and cultural knowledge in externally intelligible forms.

The curriculum gap is therefore one of connection. A student may analyse metaphor but never write an interpretive script for a heritage walk. Another may translate literary passages but never localise a museum interface, justify the treatment of an untranslatable term, or test a translation with users. A history student may evaluate archives but never create a source trail for a podcast. An Arabic student may command classical rhetoric but never apply register choice to a public exhibition. These are not deficits in the humanities disciplines themselves. They are missed opportunities to make disciplinary judgment visible through authentic cultural production.

A Saudi model must also avoid a damaging linguistic division of labour in which Arabic supplies "heritage content" while English alone is imagined as the language of professionalism and international reach. Arabic is a language of analysis, curation, argument, creativity, and public expertise. English provides additional access to global audiences, scholarship, partnerships, and markets. Employability lies in the ability to choose, combine, translate, and sometimes refuse translation between them with purpose and accountability.

5. The Language–Heritage–Employability Framework

The Language–Heritage–Employability framework comprises seven capability domains. They are analytically distinct but professionally interdependent. A digital story without source criticism may be attractive but unreliable; an accurate translation without audience design may remain inaccessible; a commercially successful campaign without stewardship may damage the community it represents. Programmes should therefore develop the domains cumulatively and assess their integration.

5.1 Heritage inquiry and source criticism

The first domain is the capacity to investigate before narrating. Students need to locate, compare, contextualise, and document archival, material, oral, and digital sources. They should recognise differences among historical evidence, community memory, institutional interpretation, promotional claim, and later folklore. This includes interviewing practice, transcription, metadata, citation, provenance, and an understanding of how archives include some voices while excluding others.

Source criticism becomes employability when it is translated into dependable professional outputs. A graduate working on a podcast, exhibition, documentary, or destination page must be able to produce a source dossier, flag uncertainty, distinguish consensus from dispute, and explain why a detail was included. The relevant language skill is not simply comprehension. It is evidential writing: matching the certainty, scale, and tone of a statement to the quality of its support. Authentic assessment could require students to create a short public narrative accompanied by an annotated evidence file that records every substantive claim.

5.2 Arabic narrative craft and register competence

Arabic competence should occupy a foundational rather than ceremonial place. Heritage communication may require Modern Standard Arabic, regionally marked vocabulary, formal institutional prose, accessible family-oriented language, oral performance, or carefully contextualised classical expression. Graduates must understand how register shapes authority, intimacy, identity, and inclusion. They should be able to write concise interpretive copy without flattening lexical richness, and to use rhetorical resources without turning every heritage text into elevated ceremonial language.

Narrative craft includes scene, sequence, focalisation, voice, character, suspense, description, quotation, and the ethical management of emotion. Literature and *balāgha* offer rich resources for teaching how linguistic form directs attention and judgment. The professional objective is not to replace literary study with copywriting,

but to let students transfer close-reading insight into purposeful composition. A useful task would ask students to produce three Arabic versions of one researched story: a museum label, an audio narrative, and a script for younger visitors, followed by a commentary explaining changes in syntax, vocabulary, figurative density, and implied audience.

5.3 Bilingual cultural mediation and localisation

Translation for the creative economy is not word replacement. PACTE Group (2005) conceptualises translation competence as a coordinated set of bilingual, strategic, instrumental, and knowledge-based abilities. Intercultural competence similarly involves the capacity to interpret perspectives and communicate appropriately across difference (Deardorff, 2006). In Saudi heritage contexts, translators must decide when to retain an Arabic term, when to gloss it, how to translate titles and kinship relations, how to handle religious or tribal references, and how much background an audience requires.

Localisation expands the task to interfaces, spatial constraints, platform conventions, images, audio, and user journeys. Students should learn to produce Arabic-first and English-first communication rather than assuming that one language is always the original and the other its derivative. They should also recognise non-equivalence. Some concepts require layered translation, transliteration, audio pronunciation, or visual explanation. Assessment should include a bilingual artefact and a translator's commentary that identifies audience, losses, gains, disputed choices, and the evidence used to resolve them.

5.4 Digital and multimodal storytelling

Contemporary heritage narratives combine writing with image, sound, movement, spatial design, and interaction. The New London Group (1996) and Cope and Kalantzis (2009) demonstrate why literacy must be understood across modes and social contexts. Digital storytelling can integrate personal voice, archival material, music, photography, mapping, and concise narration, and Robin (2008) shows its pedagogical value as a form of meaning-making rather than a merely technical exercise.

Students do not need to become professional software engineers, but they should understand scripting, storyboarding, audio recording, visual sequencing, captioning, accessibility, basic editing, and asset management. They should learn that each mode carries claims: a photograph can imply authenticity, music can romanticise, and a reconstructed image can blur evidence and imagination. A heritage-storytelling studio could require teams to create an accessible bilingual micro-documentary or location-based narrative, with captions, transcripts, alt text, rights records, and a reflective account of how mode changed meaning.

5.5 Audience, platform, and data literacy

Creative work addresses publics rather than an abstract "general audience." Students need methods for identifying audience knowledge, motivations, linguistic preferences, accessibility requirements, and possible objections. Heritage interpretation should encourage mindful engagement rather than overwhelm visitors with facts or reduce a site to spectacle (Moscardo, 1996). Audience awareness also includes testing whether a narrative is comprehensible, respectful, memorable, and capable of prompting further inquiry.

Platform literacy concerns how search engines, social networks, streaming services, and institutional websites shape visibility and length. Data literacy should remain proportionate: students can learn to interpret engagement patterns, user feedback, completion rates, and search terms without treating popularity as equivalent to cultural value. They should be able to formulate a communication objective, select meaningful indicators, and explain the limits of the evidence. A strong project would compare how the same narrative performs in a gallery, on a mobile screen, and in an audio format, then revise it using user feedback while defending elements that should not be altered merely to maximise clicks.

5.6 Ethical stewardship and cultural accountability

Heritage narratives distribute voice and authority. Students must ask who owns an object or story, who is entitled to narrate it, what permissions apply, which knowledge is restricted, and who benefits from circulation. Consent is not exhausted by obtaining a signature; contributors should understand intended uses, platforms, audiences, and possibilities of reuse. Attribution must name knowledge holders where desired, while privacy

and anonymity must be protected where necessary.

Stewardship also requires resistance to easy claims of authenticity. Communities are internally diverse, traditions change, and official narratives may not capture all memories. Students should distinguish between documenting a practice and declaring one version definitive. They should learn to present uncertainty, disagreement, and change without manufacturing controversy. Every capstone project should therefore include an ethics and provenance dossier recording permissions, ownership, image rights, translation decisions, community review, and intended benefit. A project that cannot satisfy these requirements should be redesigned, limited, or not published.

5.7 Professional identity, networks, and cultural enterprise

Creative-economy participation requires graduates to explain what they can do and to show evidence. A transcript stating that a student completed courses in literature, language, or history rarely communicates the quality of the student's research, writing, mediation, and production. Students need bilingual portfolios containing finished artefacts, process documentation, feedback, ethical records, and reflective analyses. The portfolio should demonstrate progression and judgment, not simply accumulate attractive products.

Professional identity also involves collaboration, project scoping, budgeting, scheduling, pitching, negotiation, and intellectual-property awareness. Networks matter because creative opportunities are frequently project-based and relational, yet universities must not romanticise networking or leave students without family or metropolitan connections at a disadvantage. Structured mentorship, paid placements where possible, alumni studios, regional partnerships, and transparent project calls can widen access. Enterprise education should focus on sustainable cultural service: identifying a genuine public or organisational need, designing a responsible response, estimating resources, and evaluating cultural as well as financial value.

Together, the seven domains redefine language skills as a chain of accountable action: investigating cultural material, composing and translating narratives, selecting modes and platforms, engaging audiences, protecting heritage relationships, and presenting professional value. Their integration is what converts humanities learning into creative-economy capability without surrendering the humanities' critical purpose.

6. Curriculum Architecture: From Courses to a Capability Spine

The framework will remain rhetorical unless it is built into programme structure. A practical model is a spiral capability spine extending across the degree. In the first stage, students learn source evaluation, academic and public writing, oral-history foundations, digital hygiene, and basic bilingual mediation. They complete small tasks using locally accessible materials: an object biography, a family photograph with consent, a place-name investigation, or a comparison of institutional descriptions of one site. The emphasis is accuracy, documentation, and awareness of audience.

In the second stage, disciplinary courses incorporate genre transformation. A literature course might connect close reading to audio interpretation; a rhetoric course might examine how museum language directs attention; a linguistics course might analyse dialect representation and naming; a history course might require an exhibition panel supported by a source trail; and a translation course might localise an interpretive text for specified users. Such tasks should supplement, not replace, sustained reading, theoretical analysis, and disciplinary writing. Their value lies in making students translate knowledge across contexts.

The third stage should introduce collaborative heritage studios. Universities can partner with museums, municipal bodies, schools, libraries, cultural associations, publishers, festivals, destination organisations, and local knowledge holders. Teams might develop a bilingual walking narrative, oral-history collection, digital exhibition, educational resource, or interpretive prototype. Partners should offer a real brief and feedback, but academic staff must retain responsibility for learning quality, workload, and ethical approval. Students are learners, not a source of unpaid replacement labour.

A final capstone can integrate independent research with public production. Each student or team would submit a scholarly rationale, a professional artefact, a bilingual or localisation component where appropriate, an evidence and rights dossier, audience-testing results, and a reflective employability narrative. The public artefact may be concise, but the intellectual apparatus behind it should be substantial. This design prevents "practical" work from becoming academically thin and prevents scholarship from remaining professionally

invisible.

Assessment requires common but flexible criteria. Six dimensions are especially useful: evidential integrity; linguistic and rhetorical effectiveness; bilingual or intercultural judgment; multimodal and accessibility design; ethical stewardship; and professional execution. Rubrics should reward justified decisions rather than superficial polish. A technically modest podcast with excellent research, consent, and narrative control may deserve a higher result than a visually impressive production containing unsupported claims.

The portfolio is the framework's principal connective device. Students should preserve drafts, source notes, translations, audience feedback, revisions, and reflections, then curate selected work for external presentation. Career learning can be embedded through role mapping, alumni conversations, proposal writing, project budgets, interviews, and explanations of disciplinary value. Bridgstock's (2009) emphasis on career-management competence is important here: graduates need to recognise opportunities and narrate their capabilities, especially when job titles do not correspond neatly to degree names.

Faculty development and institutional coordination are equally necessary. Language, literature, history, media, design, computing, tourism, and business staff should not be collapsed into one interdisciplinary unit, but they can co-teach bounded projects. Cultural-sector practitioners can contribute briefs and critique without replacing academic expertise. Universities also need small production facilities, accessible equipment, copyright guidance, community-partnership protocols, and mechanisms for compensating external contributors.

Programme evaluation should extend beyond first-destination employment. Relevant indicators include portfolio quality, paid placement access, employer and community feedback, graduate movement across cultural roles, sustained freelance or entrepreneurial activity, further study, and the public use of student work. Data should be disaggregated by gender, region, disability, socioeconomic background, and access to mobility opportunities. A programme cannot claim success if impressive projects depend on unpaid travel, private equipment, or personal networks available only to some students.

A possible four-level sequence is therefore: foundations of language and evidence; narrative and translation laboratories; collaborative heritage studios; and an integrated capstone with portfolio transition. The sequence gives employability a curricular home while preserving the intellectual depth that makes humanities graduates valuable in the first place.

7. Risks, Counterarguments, and Safeguards

The proposed model faces several legitimate objections. The first is instrumentalisation. Universities may treat employability as a reason to narrow literature, history, philosophy, or language study to immediately marketable outputs. Ashton et al. (2023) and McCormack and Baron (2023) warn that employability agendas can reshape arts and humanities education in reductive ways. The safeguard is curricular reciprocity: professional production must arise from disciplinary inquiry, while practice should generate new critical questions. No studio project can substitute for deep reading, historical method, theoretical disagreement, or the freedom to study subjects without obvious commercial return.

The second risk is heritage commodification. A compelling story can simplify conflict, standardise regional difference, exoticise communities, or transform private memory into promotional property. Narrative effectiveness is not sufficient evidence of ethical legitimacy. Community review, provenance documentation, benefit sharing, restricted access, and the right to withdraw material should be designed into projects. Programmes must teach that some knowledge should be represented cautiously and some should not be circulated.

The third risk is linguistic hierarchy. English can expand reach, but English-first production may reward what is easily explained to outsiders and marginalise Arabic conceptual precision, dialectal voice, or culturally embedded forms. Bilingual work should be multidirectional, and Arabic outputs should be judged as intellectually complete rather than as preliminary content awaiting English translation.

The fourth risk concerns digital platforms and artificial intelligence. Automated transcription, translation, image generation, and writing support can accelerate production, but they can also fabricate details, erase provenance, reproduce stereotypes, and blur authorship. Students should disclose tools, verify outputs against sources, protect sensitive data, and retain human responsibility for interpretation and translation. Automation should reduce mechanical burden, not replace cultural judgment.

Finally, creative labour can be precarious. Portfolio careers, freelancing, networking, and entrepreneurship

may transfer economic risk from institutions to individuals. Programmes should not present adaptability as a cure for limited vacancies or unequal opportunity. Paid placements, transparent selection, regional partnerships, collective projects, fair contracts, and instruction in rights and negotiation are necessary if employability education is to expand rather than stratify opportunity.

8. Research Agenda

The framework requires empirical testing. Initial studies should map how Saudi humanities programmes currently teach heritage communication, translation, digital production, and career development. Longitudinal research could follow students from coursework through placements and early careers, comparing portfolio evidence with graduate and employer assessments. Community partners should evaluate cultural accuracy, reciprocity, and trust, not merely satisfaction with deliverables. Experimental studies could test how Arabic, English, and bilingual narrative versions affect comprehension, identity, perceived authenticity, and willingness to engage. Researchers should also examine regional differences, access to paid opportunities, the experiences of students with disabilities, and the consequences of artificial-intelligence tools for authorship and provenance. The most valuable outcome would be validated assessment criteria that connect disciplinary rigor, professional performance, and stewardship rather than treating them as competing goals.

9. Conclusion

Saudi humanities programmes do not need to abandon their disciplinary traditions in order to contribute to the creative economy. They need to make the professional force of those traditions visible. Close reading supports interpretive precision; rhetoric supports audience design; history supports evidential accountability; translation supports cultural mediation; and literary study supports narrative imagination. When these capabilities are connected to digital production, ethical partnership, career formation, and public presentation, language becomes an infrastructure for cultural value.

The Language–Heritage–Employability framework proposes that connection through seven integrated domains and a spiral curriculum. Its standard of success is deliberately demanding: graduates should be able to create work that is culturally informed, linguistically accomplished, accessible, ethically legitimate, and professionally sustainable. Employment outcomes matter, but they are not the sole measure. Saudi humanities education can serve economic transformation most responsibly when it also protects complexity, strengthens Arabic intellectual and creative agency, widens participation, and treats heritage not as content to be extracted but as a relationship to be interpreted and sustained.

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Declarations

Data availability: The article analyses public institutional webpages. The source register and representative Romanized excerpts are included. A reusable corpus should be archived only after checking institutional copyright, webpage changes, and journal data-sharing requirements.

Ethics: The corpus contains no private or personal data. Institutional texts are quoted briefly for scholarly analysis.

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