



Investigating Sustainable Values in Al-Ahsa Proverbs in Relation to Saudi Vision 2030 and SDGs

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Abstract

This study explores how Al-Ahsa proverbs encode sustainable values that align with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Using qualitative thematic and critical discourse analysis of 29 traditional proverbs, the research identifies three core themes: resource stewardship and moderation, patience and delayed gratification, and social prudence and trust. These categories reflect the values underpinning Vision 2030's pillars of a vibrant society, thriving economy, and ambitious nation. Proverbs such as "Sit on the clay until it softens" and "Don't overburden strong animals" metaphorically express patience, conservation, and moral responsibility—principles that correspond with SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions). By linking local linguistic heritage with global sustainability frameworks, the study demonstrates how indigenous wisdom can inform and enrich contemporary environmental and social policy. The findings suggest that Al-Ahsa's proverbs function as living repositories of ecological awareness and ethical guidance, embodying a lasting harmony between humans and nature. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing field of eco-linguistics and supports Vision 2030's objectives of cultural preservation and sustainable development, reinforcing the idea that sustainability is deeply rooted in Saudi Arabia's linguistic and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Al-Ahsa Traditional Proverbs, Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Cultural Heritage.

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دراسة القيم المستدامة في أمثال الأحساء وعلاقتها برؤية المملكة 2030 وأهداف التنمية المستدامة

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ملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة القيم المستدامة المتجذرة في أمثال الأحساء، وعلاقتها برؤية المملكة العربية السعودية 2030 وأهداف التنمية المستدامة للأمم المتحدة (SDGs). ومن خلال تحليل نوعي وخطابي نقدي لعينة مكونة من 29 مثلاً شعبياً، تمّ تحديد ثلاثة محاور رئيسة هي: ترشيد الموارد والاعتدال، والصبر والتأني، والحكمة الاجتماعية والثقة. وتعكس هذه المحاور منظومة القيم التي تدعم ركائز رؤية 2030 والمتمثلة في: مجتمع حيوي، واقتصاد مزدهر، ووطن طموح. وتبرز في الأمثال المدروسة معاني عميقة تعبر مجازياً عن مبادئ الصبر والمسؤولية الأخلاقية تجاه البيئة والموارد، كما في الأمثال: "اقعد على الطين لين يلين" و"لا تشد على الدبش"، وهي مبادئ تتوافق مع الأهداف 12 (الاستهلاك والإنتاج المسؤولان)، و15 (الحياة في الأرض)، و16 (السلام والعدل والمؤسسات القوية). ومن خلال ربط التراث اللغوي المحلي بالأطر العالمية للاستدامة، توضّح الدراسة كيف تمثّل الأمثال الشعبية أداة فاعلة في نقل القيم البيئية والاجتماعية وتعزيز السلوك المستدام. وتشير النتائج إلى أنّ أمثال الأحساء تعدّ مستودعاً حياً للحكمة الشعبية والوعي البيئي والأخلاقي، وتعكس علاقة متوازنة بين الإنسان والطبيعة. وتسهم الدراسة في إثراء حقل اللغويات البيئية وتؤكد أن التراث اللغوي المحلي يمكن أن يكون ركيزة أساسية لتحقيق التنمية المستدامة والحفاظ على الهوية الثقافية للأجيال القادمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأمثال الشعبية في الأحساء، اللسانيات الاجتماعية، تحليل الخطاب، أهداف التنمية المستدامة (SDGs)، التراث الثقافي.

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© نُشر هذا البحث وفقاً لشروط الرخصة Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)، التي تسمح بنسخ البحث وتوزيعه ونقله بأي شكل من الأشكال، كما تسمح بتكييف البحث أو تحويله أو إضافته إليه لأي غرض كان، بما في ذلك الأغراض التجارية، شريطة نسبة العمل إلى صاحبه مع بيان أي تعديلات أجريت عليه.



Introduction

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 emphasizes a "thriving economy" and "vibrant society" built on sustainable development and cultural heritage, aligning closely with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to responsible consumption (SDG 12), life on land (SDG 15), and quality education (SDG 4). The official plan explicitly ties environmental preservation to moral duty and quality of life, calling for efficient resource use and protection of natural reserves. At the same time, Vision 2030 promotes the revival of national identity and heritage through the restoration and global recognition of cultural sites. In this context, everyday language and folk wisdom can provide valuable discourse resources, with proverbs serving as concise traditional sayings that encapsulate collective values and worldviews (Ganmote, 2024). Investigating how Al-Ahsa proverbs address resource use, patience, and stewardship can thus reveal local value frameworks that resonate with the sustainability ideals embedded in both Vision 2030 and the SDGs.

This paper asks: Which proverbs in the Al-Ahsa corpus lexically or metaphorically promote sustainable practices (conservation, patience with resources, stewardship), and how might these local value frames support Vision 2030 sustainability goals? In answering this, we bridge sociolinguistics (paremiology) with policy discourse, highlighting how indigenous proverbs align with both global Sustainable Development Goals and Saudi 2030 targets. By analyzing directive language and metaphors in proverbs, we aim to uncover implicit ecological wisdom and ethical norms embedded in everyday speech. Such analysis can reveal how traditional discourse shapes attitudes toward nature and resources, offering culturally grounded strategies for environmental education.

The study focuses on Al-Ahsa, an oasis region recognized by UNESCO for its unique cultural landscape. Using qualitative coding and critical discourse techniques, we identify themes of environmental risk, resource management, and communal ethics. We then discuss implications for sustainability messaging and Vision 2030, arguing that these proverbs can be leveraged as a policy-relevant discourse resource. This work contributes to sociolinguistic scholarship on parables and proverbs (Mieder, 2004) as well as emerging studies of language and sustainability (Scarlat & Petrisor, 2021).

Literature Review

Proverbs in Sociolinguistics (Paremiology): Proverbs are ubiquitous in folk culture and discourse. Because they distill experience into memorable phrases, proverbs preserve cultural norms and wisdom across generations. Paremiologists (proverb scholars) note that proverbs are "deeply rooted in culture" and provide insight into a community's values and worldview (Ganmote, 2024). In sociolinguistic terms, proverbs function as short, formulaic sentences that convey advice, warnings, or moral lessons. As Mieder (2004) observes, the

study of proverbs (paremiology) reveals the richness of cultural values and insights embedded in everyday language.

Proverbs have long been recognized as tools of folk pedagogy, social control, and identity (Mieder, 2004). For example, proverbs may be used in conversation to justify actions or admonish listeners (Abrahams, 1972). In Saudi Arabia and the broader Arab world, traditional proverbs reflect social norms, honor codes, and religious ethos (Alghamdi, 2019). Scholars have begun to analyze Arabic proverbs in critical contexts – for example, Alghamdi's (2019) sociolinguistic study of proverbs in Al-Bahah province finds that proverbs often echo Quranic and prophetic wisdom, reinforcing religious and moral values in daily talk. Beyond the literal and moral dimensions, proverbs can also be understood through the lens of *anasemiotic* expression. While Makkai (1989) focuses on multilingual poetry, his concept highlights how language can operate beyond straightforward semantic meaning, conveying symbolic and cultural layers. From this perspective, proverbs function as "anasemiotic" forms that condense complex cultural insights into concise linguistic units, linking linguistic form to cultural knowledge and identity.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Proverbs: CDA provides a framework for examining how language both reflects and shapes power relations and ideology (Fairclough, 1995). In CDA, discourse is seen as a "social practice" through which societal values are communicated and maintained. Critical approaches to proverb analysis explore how proverbs can naturalize certain worldviews or social hierarchies (van Dijk, 1998; Lazar, 2005). For instance, a proverb that advises "keep your own house" may reinforce individual responsibility and distrust of others, reflecting broader social mores.

Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that language use is dialectically linked to social structures. In this vein, Al-Bohnayyah (2025) employs CDA on Al-Ahsa proverbs and finds that directive expressions (imperatives and prohibitives) "encode cultural values" and regulate social behavior. By analyzing speech acts in proverbs, one can uncover how communal ethics and power dynamics are enforced. For example, proverbs that command moderation or obedience can subtly endorse respect for elders or religious doctrine. Conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) also helps interpret proverbs: many Arabic proverbs use nature metaphors (e.g. *river*, *desert*, *animal*) to conceptualize abstract ideas. Al-Bohnayyah (2025) explicitly notes that metaphors drawn from the local environment (e.g. "journeys, clay, and furnaces") "render abstract values tangible", linking material reality to moral lessons. This aligns with broader findings that proverbs often use metaphorical language to transmit cultural knowledge (Charteris-Black, 2004).

Local Saudi Studies on Proverbs: There is growing interest in Saudi proverb research. Besides Al-Bohnayyah's (2024; 2025) works on Al-Ahsa, Alghamdi (2019) has collected and analyzed proverbs in regional dialects. This study shows that Saudi proverbs reflect both tribal folklore and Islamic values, and



often serve pragmatic discourse functions (e.g. acts of admonition or consolation). For example, an analysis of religious-based proverbs in Al-Bahah revealed how they enact speech acts that align with religious teachings (Alghamdi, 2019). Likewise, Al-Bohnayyah's (2024) eco-linguistic analysis highlights how Al-Ahsa proverbs embody ecological risk awareness, caution, and resilience. These studies suggest that Saudi proverbs are rich with metaphorical and pragmatic meaning. However, to date no study has specifically connected these cultural artifacts to modern sustainability discourse or policy goals. Our research fills this gap by examining how Al-Ahsa proverbs can articulate values relevant to Vision 2030's sustainability agenda.

Context: Al-Ahsa as Cultural Landscape and Oasis

Al-Ahsa is an eastern province of Saudi Arabia famous for its vast oasis and date palm agriculture. Recognized by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Site ("Al-Ahsa Oasis, an Evolving Cultural Landscape"), it includes gardens, canals, springs, wells, and historical urban fabric. This geocultural landscape exemplifies centuries of human-environment interaction: it is "an exceptional example of human interaction with the environment" (UNESCO World Heritage Convention, n.d.). With over 2.5 million date palms, Al-Ahsa is the largest oasis in the world and has supported continuous settlement since Neolithic times. Its water management systems (wells, springs, canals) and communal farming traditions underscore a deep-rooted ethos of working with scarce resources.

The importance of Al-Ahsa's environment is echoed in its language and traditions. For an oasis society, water and land are vital, making patience and prudent use of resources natural themes. For example, proverbs referencing *clay*, *water*, or *vegetation* draw on daily life in the oasis. In the UNESCO's words, Al-Ahsa is both a cultural jewel and a testament to sustainable living practices. Thus, the regional context pre-disposes Al-Ahsa folk wisdom to emphasize balance with nature.

Vision 2030 explicitly recognizes heritage sites like Al-Ahsa. The Saudi government's development plan commits to strengthening and showcasing national heritage: "We will continue to work on the restoration of national, Arab, Islamic and ancient cultural sites and strive to have them registered internationally...". It also highlights sustainability: "By preserving our environment and natural resources, we fulfill our ... duties" (Saudi Vision 2030). Consequently, Al-Ahsa occupies a nexus of Vision 2030's twin pillars of culture and sustainability. This study leverages that nexus by treating Al-Ahsa proverbs as **cultural-heritage discourse** that can be mobilized to support environmental and social goals. In the UNESCO's framing, Al-Ahsa's human-nature heritage provides a living example of values that resonate with both local identity and global sustainability ideals.

Methods

The study employed a qualitative thematic analysis to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the corpus of 29 traditional Al-Ahsa proverbs. This approach was chosen to delve into the environmental and resource-related metaphors, ethical directives, and implicit sustainability messages encoded within the proverbs, focusing on themes that capture sustainability as understood in local cultural contexts (Gyan et al., 2020; Mesthrie, 2011). The analysis proceeded in the following steps:

1. Corpus Familiarization and Initial Coding: The first step involved a thorough review of the 29 proverbs, including their original Arabic text, English translations, and core meanings as presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Al-Ahsa Proverb Corpus (Arabic script, transliteration, translation, core meaning).

#	Arabic (Proverb)	Transliteration	Translation	Core Meaning
1	اقضِبْ مَجْنُونِكَ لَا يَجِيكَ أَجْنَمَنَّهُ.	<i>Piqḏ'ib madʒnu:nik la: ydʒi:k adʒan minnih.</i>	Hold onto your madman, lest one madder than him comes to you.	Keep what you have to avoid something worse.
2	اقْعُدْ عَلَى الطِّينِ لِيْنِ يَلِيْنِ.	<i>Piqḏid ʕala tʕ-tʕi:n le:n jili:n.</i>	Sit on the clay until it softens.	Advocates enduring tedious patience to achieve results, even if it takes time.
3	إِحْقِ الْكَذَّابِ لِيْنِ بَيْتِ أَهْلِهِ.	<i>Pilḥag l-kaḏḏa:b le:n be:t ahalih.</i>	Follow the liar to his family's doorstep.	Pursue verification of someone's claims to the end, ensuring no excuses remain.
4	إِحْقِ وَأَطُو.	<i>Pilḥag wi-tʕw.</i>	Catch up and forget the past.	Urges moving forward swiftly and leaving behind what's resolved or irrelevant.
5	إِمَشِ الدَّهْرَ وَلَا تَقْطَعْ النَّهْرَ.	<i>Pimʃ d-dahar wa la: tigʔaʃ n-nahar.</i>	Walk the long road but don't cut through the river.	Prioritize safe, steady paths over risky shortcuts; warns against

#	Arabic (Proverb)	Transliteration	Translation	Core Meaning
				recklessness.
6	تَعَزَّزِي يَا مَطْلَقَةً.	<i>tiṣazzizaj ja: mṭalliqah.</i>	Hold your head high, oh divorced woman!	Maintain dignity and self-respect in adversity.
7	حِطْ عَقْلُكَ فِي رَاسِكَ تَعْرِفْ خَلَاصِكَ.	<i>hitʿ ṣaglik fi: ra:sik taṣrif xala:sʿik.</i>	Put your mind in your head to find your salvation.	Use logic over emotion to solve problems; stresses rational thinking.
8	خَذْ مِنْ كَيْسِهِ وَعَايِدَهُ.	<i>xiḏ min ki:sih w ṣa:jdah.</i>	Take from his pocket and gift it back.	Criticizes illogical actions, like taking and returning the same thing as a "gift."
9	خَلَّهْ عَلَى طَمَامِ الْمَرْحُومِ.	<i>xallah ṣala: tʿma:m l- marḥu:m.</i>	Leave it buried with the deceased.	Let the past rest; avoid dredging up buried secrets or grudges.
10	رَحْ بَعِيدٍ وَتَعَالَ سَالِمٍ.	<i>raḥ bʿi:d w taṣa:l sa:lim.</i>	Go far away and return safely.	Distance yourself from harm to ensure peace and safety.
11	سَوِ الْخَيْرَ وَقِطِّهِ بِحَرِّ.	<i>saw l-xe:r w qitʿah baḥar.</i>	Do good and throw it in the sea.	Perform good deeds selflessly, without expecting rewards or recognition.
12	شَفْ غَيُومِهِ.	<i>ṣif ḡju:mah.</i>	Look at his clouds.	Investigate and verify things before believing or acting.
13	شَفْ وَجْهَ الْعِزْ وَاحْلِبْ لَبَنَ.	<i>ṣif wadḡh l-ṣanz w ḥlib liban.</i>	Look at the goat's face, then milk it.	Judge people's intentions by their demeanor; kindness invites trust.
14	عَطِّ الْخَبَّازَ خُبْزَكَ لَوْ بَاقَى نَصِّهِ.	<i>ṣatʿ l-xabba:z xubzik law ba:g nisʿsʿah.</i>	Give the baker your bread, even if he steals	Trust experts despite costs; their skill ensures



#	Arabic (Proverb)	Transliteration	Translation	Core Meaning
			half!	quality results.
15	قَفِّلْ دَارَكَ وَلَا تَتَّهِمْ جَارَكَ.	<i>gaffil da:rik wa la: tittihim dza:rik.</i>	Lock your house so you won't suspect your neighbor.	Take precautions to avoid unwarranted blame on others.
16	كِدْ وَمِدْ.	<i>kidd w midd.</i>	Use it endlessly without complaint.	Value durable, high-quality items despite their cost.
17	كُلْ مَا يَعْجِبُكَ وَالْبَسْ مَا يَعْجِبُ النَّاسَ.	<i>kil ma: jaʕdzibik wa pilbas ma: jaʕdzib n-na:s.</i>	Eat what you like, but dress to please others.	Balance personal desires with social respectability.
18	لَا تَأْخُذِينَ عَشِيجَ، وَلَا طَلِيقَ، مَا لَشِ الْاَمْرَةِ رِجَشِ.	<i>la: ta:xði:n ʕaʕi:dʒif, wa la tʕili:gif, ma: laʕ Pilla: mara:rat ri:dʒif.</i>	Take neither a lover nor a divorcer; all you'll get is the bitterness of your spit.	Accept harsh reality; avoid futile hopes.
19	لَا تَبُوقْ وَلَا تَخَافْ.	<i>la: tbu:g wa la: txa:f.</i>	Don't steal, and you won't fear.	Avoid wrongdoing to live without fear of consequences.
20	لَا تَبِيعْ بِرَخِيسٍ وَلَا تَوْصِيْ حَرِيصٍ.	<i>la: tbi:ʕ birxi:sʕ wa la: twasʕi: ʕari:sʕ.</i>	Don't sell cheaply, and don't advise the cautious.	Don't undervalue yourself, and trust that prudent people need no extra advice.
21	لَا تَدْجُلْ عَصَكْ فِي شَيْءٍ مَا يَخْصُكَ.	<i>la: tidaxxil ʕisʕik fi: ʕaj ma: jaxsʕik.</i>	Don't stick your tailbone into what doesn't concern you.	Avoid meddling in others' affairs.
22	لَا تَزَاجِمِ الزَّمْلَ وَأَنْتَ حَوِيشِي.	<i>la: tza:ʕim z-zamil w-ant ʕwe:fi:.</i>	Don't jostle with camels when you're a calf.	Don't compete with those above your status or skill.
23	لَا تَشْكِي لِي وَأَبْكِي لَكَ.	<i>la: taʕki: li: wa ʔabki:</i>	Don't complain to me	Don't seek help from

#	Arabic (Proverb)	Transliteration	Translation	Core Meaning
		<i>lak.</i>	while I cry for you.	someone who is as troubled as you.
24	لا تَشِدْ عَلَى الدِّبَشِ.	<i>la: tifidd ʕala: d-dibaf.</i>	Don't overburden strong animals.	Avoid exploiting even the resilient; kindness is obligatory.
25	لا تَطَالْعُونَهَا فِي جِدَّتِهَا لِيَن تَحُولَ سِتْنَهَا وَتَدْنَدَلْ دَبَّتْهَا.	<i>la: titʕa:lʕu:nha: fi: dziddatha le:n thu:l sintha wa tidandil dabbatha.</i>	Don't judge a bride until her first year passes and her belly swells.	Wait for outcomes before judging; patience reveals truth.
26	لا تقول للشّي يا حليله، إلا من تعب أو هيله.	<i>la: tqu:l liʃfaj ja: hle:lah, Pilla: min taʕab wa he:lah.</i>	Don't call something 'lovely' until you've toiled or tricked for it.	Verify value through experience, not superficial judgment.
27	لا تكثر الدوس ترى الأحباب يملونك.	<i>la: tkaθθir d-do:s tara: l-ʔahba:b jimllu:nak.</i>	Don't visit too much, lest loved ones grow weary of you.	Respect boundaries; overstaying welcomes breeds resentment.
28	لا تنفخ في كور طافي.	<i>la: tinʔax fi: ko:r tʕa:fi:.</i>	Don't blow into a cold furnace.	Avoid wasting effort on the unresponsive or hopeless.
29	لا تولّي حلالك إلا اللي عنده حلال، ولا تولي عيالك إلا اللي عنده عيال.	<i>la: twalli: h̄ala:lik ʔilla: Pilli: ʕindah h̄ala:l, wa la: twalli: ʕja:lik ʔilla: Pilli: ʕindah: ʕja:l.</i>	Entrust wealth only to the wealthy, and children only to parents.	Assign responsibilities to those experienced and qualified.

(Translations adapted from local sources.)

This process grounds the analysis in authentic local linguistic material. During this phase, initial codes were generated by identifying explicit and implicit references related to sustainability, with a focus on capturing its essence from a local cultural perspective.

2. Theme Identification and Categorization: Following the initial coding, related codes were grouped together to form broader thematic clusters. The analysis identified three dominant themes that organized the entire corpus:

- **Resource Stewardship / Moderation:** Proverbs that advise on the careful use of resources or warn against waste and overexploitation. Examples include proverbs referencing clay (#2), rivers (#5), animals (#24), and a furnace (#28).

- **Patience / Delayed Gratification:** Sayings that counsel endurance and waiting, underscoring that time and effort are necessary for rewards. Examples include proverbs about clay softening (#2) and waiting a year to judge (#25).

- **Social Prudence / Trust:** Proverbs governing social conduct, integrity, and communal relationships, which support collective sustainability through social cohesion. Examples include doing good selflessly (#11), verifying claims (#12-14), and avoiding meddling (#21).

3. Metaphor and Discourse Analysis: Informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998), this step examined how the proverbs position speakers and listeners in relation to ecological and social issues and explored the underlying ideologies they convey (Cummings et al., 2018). Following Al-Bohnayyah's (2025) methodology, recurring metaphors tied to Al-Ahsa's material reality were noted. The analysis explored how locally grounded metaphors (e.g., "journeys, clay, and furnaces") give concrete form to abstract values, linking everyday material realities with moral guidance. This involved interpreting how imagery like a "cold furnace" (#28) or "overburden[ing] strong animals" (#24) naturalizes ethical principles of conservation and moderation as common sense.

4. Mapping Themes to Sustainability Frameworks: The final step was to systematically map the identified themes against the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Saudi Vision 2030 targets (Qwaider et al., 2023; Huck, 2022). This mapping demonstrated the alignment between the local values in the proverbs and global sustainability frameworks. For instance:

- The Resource Stewardship theme was linked to SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption) and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

- The Patience theme was aligned with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work).

- The Social Prudence theme was connected to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions).

This structured approach allowed the study to bridge local cultural expressions with global policy goals, demonstrating how traditional wisdom can inform contemporary sustainability efforts (Dube, 2020).

Analysis

All twenty-nine proverbs were thematically categorized following an inductive coding process informed by cultural and linguistic cues. Table 1 presents the complete corpus. The qualitative analysis

indicates that a substantial proportion of these proverbs engage directly with natural or material referents—such as clay (#2), rivers (#5), animals (#24), and the furnace (#28)—revealing an embedded ecological consciousness in local discourse. Recurring thematic patterns emphasize prudence, patience, and moderation, as illustrated in proverbs like “Walk the long road... don’t cut the river” (#5) and “Don’t steal... won’t fear” (#19). Furthermore, many of these expressions adopt the imperative form to advocate moral or environmentally attuned behaviors—for example, “Do good and throw it in the sea” (#11)—while others employ prohibitive structures (typically beginning with la- “Don’t...”) to discourage excess, recklessness, or unsustainable conduct (Al-Bohneyah, 2025).

We identified three broad thematic clusters:

- **Resource Stewardship / Moderation:** Proverbs advising careful use of resources or opposing waste. Examples: #2 (patience with clay), #5 (no river cutting), #16 (use durable goods), #19 (no stealing), #24 (don’t overburden animals), #28 (don’t blow cold furnace). These six proverbs often frame consumption in terms of natural imagery and caution.

- **Patience / Delayed Gratification:** Sayings that counsel waiting or endurance. Examples: #2 (clay softening), #25 (wait one year), #26 (work before praise). Here proverbs underscore time and effort as necessary for reward, reflecting a long-term mindset.

- **Social Prudence / Trust:** Proverbs governing social behavior and trust. Examples: #11 (do good selflessly), #12-14 (verify claims/trust experts), #15 (secure home to avoid suspicion), #20-23 (value and competence, don’t meddle, don’t complain). These address communal relations and integrity, which indirectly support collective sustainability by promoting social cohesion and ethical action.

A simple count of the coded themes (Table 2) illustrates this distribution. For instance, six proverbs emphasize **conservation** or moderation in resource use (aligning with SDG targets on consumption and ecosystems), three emphasize **patience/endurance**, and the rest reinforce broader social values.

Table 2.

Distribution of thematic clusters in the Al-Ahsa proverb corpus

Thematic Cluster	No. of Proverbs	Example of Proverb Numbers	SDG Alignment	Vision 2030 Pillars	Key Metaphors
Resource Stewardship Moderation	/ 6	#2, #5, #16, #19, #24, #28	SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption), SDG 15 (Life on Land)	Economy, Vibrant Society	Soil, Water, Animal, Fire

Thematic Cluster	No. of Proverbs	Example of Proverb Numbers	SDG Alignment	Vision 2030 Pillars	Key Metaphors
Patience	/		SDG 4 (Quality Education),	SDG 12	Vibrant Society
Delayed Gratification	3	#2, #25, #26	(Responsible Consumption)		Clay, Time, Labor
Social Prudence	/	#11–14, #15, SDG 16 (Peace, Justice & Ambitious	SDG 8	Nation, Vibrant Exchange,	House, Journey,
Trust	20	#20–23 (plus Institutions), (Decent Work)		Society	Rationality

Thematic and CDA Readings

Under CDA, these proverbs reveal dominant community values and ideologies. A key finding is the naturalization of resource ethics through metaphor. Al-Bohnayyah (2025) highlights that metaphors like “clay” and “furnace” make abstract values tangible. We see this in Proverb 2: sitting on clay until it softens suggests enduring effort with a stubborn material—an image promoting patience with the earth itself. Similarly, Proverb 28 warns against blowing on a cold furnace; this vivid image of futile labor communicates the folly of attempting the impossible. These metaphors root wisdom in everyday Al-Ahsa experience, reinforcing a worldview where “individual agency is inseparable from collective welfare”. In other words, acting prudently (e.g. not wasting labor) is normalized as common sense.

Several proverbs explicitly link ethics to environment. Proverb 24 (“Don’t overburden strong animals”) metaphorically reminds people to be kind to even the resilient—in practical terms, do not exploit resources or beings beyond reason. This aligns with environmental stewardship. Likewise, Proverb 5 (“Walk the long road...don’t cut the river”) frames risk-taking in terms of a river: one should not damage a watercourse for haste. Such imagery conveys respect for natural barriers and due process. These proverbs encode an ideology of moderation: material possessions, effort, and interactions have limits that should not be exceeded.

Other proverbs reinforce social norms consistent with communal sustainability. For example, Proverb 11 (“Do good and throw it in the sea”) urges altruism without expectation of reward, reflecting a disinterest in personal gain. This kind of selflessness supports social capital, which can be mobilized for communal projects like collective irrigation. Proverb 19 (“Don’t steal, and you won’t fear”) ties legal/moral behavior to tranquility,



implying that abiding by rules (including those about property and resources) leads to a peaceful life. By discouraging wrongdoing, the proverb implicitly encourages respect for others' property and resources.

Proverbs also serve as warning systems. According to Al-Bohnayyah (2024), Al-Ahsa proverbs function as "ecological narratives warning against overexploitation and advocating caution". For example, Proverb 8 ("Take from his pocket and gift it back") satirizes wasteful zero-sum transactions, implicitly criticizing illogical consumption. Proverb 15 ("Lock your house so you won't suspect your neighbor") can be read as promoting personal responsibility to prevent conflict. Together, the corpus reflects an ethical landscape: avoid greed, be patient, do no harm, and trust expertise (Proverb 14).

CDA suggests that these proverbs naturalize certain hierarchies and norms. Al-Bohnayyah (2025) notes a "cultural equilibrium" in directives that balance autonomy and social harmony. For example, prohibitives like Proverb 21 ("Don't stick your tailbone into what doesn't concern you") establish boundaries between individuals, reinforcing social order. At the same time, imperatives like Proverb 7 ("Put your mind in your head...") empower personal reason. Thus, proverb discourse mediates between self-regulation and communal ethics. Metaphor analysis also shows how traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is encoded: Scarlat & Petrisor (2021) argue that proverbs often carry principles of inter-generational equity and environmental management, and we find similar patterns here.

Overall, the local narratives emphasize sustainable values: conservation of resources (#16, #24), belief in effort and time (#2, #25, #26), and ethical restraint in actions (#5, #19, #28). These align with global sustainability concepts. Moreover, by couching such lessons in familiar imagery, the proverbs make sustainability a native concern rather than an imported idea. As Al-Bohnayyah (2025) puts it, the metaphors "naturalize" abstract values, effectively integrating environmental caution into everyday wisdom.

Applied Messaging Examples

These findings suggest practical applications. Vision 2030's goals (e.g. water conservation, environmental protection) could be communicated using these proverbs. For instance, a public campaign on energy saving might use Proverb 28 ("Don't blow into a cold furnace") as a tagline for not wasting electricity on unused appliances. Similarly, encouraging patience in public investments could invoke Proverb 2 ("Sit on the clay until it softens") to stress long-term planning. By framing modern sustainability messages with traditional sayings, policymakers could increase cultural resonance. This is consistent with educational research: Mutonyi (2015) notes that stories and proverbs can scaffold learning in indigenous contexts, making science concepts more accessible.

In a conservation education context, teachers might refer to Proverb 24 ("Don't overburden strong animals") when discussing wildlife or overfishing, tying it to SDG 15 on protecting life on land. Likewise,

stewardship of water (SDG 6) could be linked to Proverb 5's metaphor of the river. Even social campaigns on responsible consumption could cite Proverb 16 ("Use it endlessly without complaint") to promote durability over throwaway culture. In each case, the proverb anchors abstract policy aims in familiar folk wisdom. This strategy leverages cultural continuity: Vision 2030 itself encourages "preserving our environment" as a sacred duty, and using proverbs can make that duty tangible through ancestral voice.

Discussion

The analysis confirms that Al-Ahsa proverbs contain deeply embedded sustainable value frames that closely mirror both the environmental and social objectives of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This alignment is a central finding, demonstrating that while Vision 2030 articulates sustainability through modern policy discourse—emphasizing efficient resource management, renewable energy, and community participation—the traditional wisdom encoded in Al-Ahsa proverbs conveys similar principles of prudence, stewardship, and moderation that have guided local communities for generations. This intersection underscores the potential of proverbs as cultural instruments for promoting sustainability, translating the abstract language of policy into the accessible, value-laden idioms of everyday life (Mieder, 2004; Al-Bohnayyah, 2025).

By examining these proverbs through the lens of Vision 2030's three pillars—a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation—and mapping them conceptually to relevant SDGs such as Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 8 (Decent Work), Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and Goal 15 (Life on Land), the study demonstrates that traditional discourse offers a culturally grounded framework for advancing sustainability awareness. Proverbs that advocate restraint, patience, and conservation—such as "Sit on the clay until it softens" and "Walk the long road but don't cut the river"—directly parallel the principles of responsible resource use and environmental protection promoted in both Vision 2030 and the SDGs. In this way, Al-Ahsa's linguistic heritage serves not merely as a reflection of social history but as a practical repository of local sustainability ethics.

This connection between heritage and sustainability carries significant implications for Saudi Arabia's cultural framing of development policy. Vision 2030 seeks to integrate modernization with heritage preservation, recognizing that sustainable transformation must respect local identity. The Al-Ahsa proverbs analyzed here reinforce this agenda by providing vernacular models of environmental stewardship and social cohesion that predate formal sustainability policies by centuries. As Scarlat and Petrișor (2021) observe, traditional systems often contain "embedded sustainability," offering insights into how communities have historically maintained balance with their natural environments. The proverbs, as "expressions used by speakers of every language to depict an image of society, culture, history, and tradition" (Ganmote, 2024),



serve as a powerful vehicle for this cultural continuity. By incorporating such local expressions into educational, environmental, and communication campaigns, policymakers can enhance public engagement with Vision 2030 and the SDGs, reframing sustainability as an inherently Saudi—and not externally imposed—value system.

Furthermore, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how intangible cultural heritage supports localized SDG implementation. UNESCO (2018) has emphasized that cultural expressions, including oral traditions, are essential tools for realizing global sustainability targets at the community level. Al-Ahsa's proverbs exemplify this potential: they encode principles of empathy, reciprocity, and moderation that align with Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and Goal 15 (Life on Land) through moral and behavioral transmission. Proverbs such as "Do good and throw it in the sea" advocate altruism without expectation of reward, echoing the SDG ethos of social equity and shared responsibility. This linguistic continuity between local discourse and global goals reaffirms the interconnectedness of Saudi Arabia's domestic reforms and the global sustainability agenda.

Nevertheless, a critical dimension—drawn from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)—must be acknowledged. As Fairclough (1995) and Lazar (2005) remind us, discourse is not neutral: it reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social hierarchies. Some Al-Ahsa proverbs, such as "Don't jostle with camels when you're a calf", while pragmatic in cautioning against recklessness, could unintentionally reinforce social stratification or discourage risk-taking. Policymakers and educators seeking to mobilize proverbs for sustainability messaging must thus exercise interpretive selectivity, amplifying proverbs that foster collective responsibility, critical thinking, and innovation—values explicitly encouraged in Vision 2030's Human Capability Development Program—while contextualizing those that might limit agency or inclusivity.

This study, therefore, advances the emerging field of applied paremiology by illustrating how proverb analysis can inform environmental communication and policy discourse. Building on Mieder's (2004) foundational claim that proverbs are small moral and social compasses, the research situates Al-Ahsa's proverbial wisdom within the contemporary framework of Saudi and global sustainability. It also contributes to eco-linguistics and discourse studies by demonstrating that proverbs function as microcosms of ecological ethics—forms of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) articulated through metaphor and narrative (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Charteris-Black, 2004). In alignment with Alghamdi's (2019) sociolinguistic work on Al-Bahah proverbs and Al-Bohneyah's (2024) eco-linguistic findings in Al-Ahsa, this research underscores the role of linguistic heritage as a communicative bridge between cultural identity and policy-driven sustainability transformation.



In sum, the discussion establishes that Al-Ahsa proverbs, when reinterpreted within the discursive frameworks of Vision 2030 and the SDGs, emerge as powerful vernacular resources for sustainability education, environmental ethics, and national development. Their continued documentation and contextual application can enrich Saudi Arabia's cultural diplomacy and local sustainability initiatives alike, grounding the Kingdom's modern ambitions in the moral wisdom of its past.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study reveals that Al-Ahsa proverbs carry embedded messages of conservation, prudence, and social ethics that align with sustainable development. Key proverbs use everyday metaphors (clay, water, animals) to teach patience and moderation, implicitly encouraging stewardship of resources. By coding these proverbs thematically, we have shown that local folk wisdom can be reframed as support for Vision 2030's sustainability pillars. This finding suggests practical recommendations:

- **Integrate proverbs into sustainability education:** Curriculum planners and environmental NGOs in Al-Ahsa can use local proverbs to contextualize lessons on conservation. For example, a lesson on water-saving might begin with Proverb 5 to frame the topic culturally.
- **Use proverbs in public campaigns:** Government communications on recycling, energy efficiency, or ecological tourism could feature relevant proverbs. This strategy leverages cultural pride and familiarity to promote new behaviors.
- **Document and preserve proverbs:** Recognizing that these sayings are intangible heritage, cultural authorities should document their usage in contemporary speech. Proverbs could be included in museums or digital archives, highlighting their link to Al-Ahsa's UNESCO status.
- **Further research:** We recommend expanding this discourse analysis to broader corpora and other Saudi dialects, as well as evaluating the impact of using proverb-based messaging in real-world programs.

In conclusion, proverbs are not relics of the past but dynamic discourse tools. The Al-Ahsa corpus shows that traditional talk can embody the spirit of Vision 2030 by promoting sustainable values. Embracing these folk narratives allows sustainability efforts to resonate with local identity, bridging past wisdom and future development.

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