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Saudi Parents' Attitudes Towards Their Children's EFL Instruction

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Abstract: The current research aimed at investigating Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction. The participants were (334) Saudi parents who have children learning EFL at primary schools. The research followed the descriptive analytical research design and an attitude scale was designed by the researcher for data collection. The research was conducted during the academic year 2021. Results showed that the participants have high positive attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction. Additionally, there are no statistically significant differences between the participants' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction according to gender, studying abroad and educational level variables. Recommendations of the research included developing parental consultation in educational planning and English as a foreign language policy concern.

Keywords: Saudi parents, attitudes, children, EFL instruction.

Introduction

English has been worldwide spread as an international lingua franca, a global language of computing and technology as well as one of the dominant languages of many technological devices. Moreover, English language instruction has become an urgent necessity. Consequently, it has been implemented as a mandatory academic subject in a lot of countries across the globe. More specifically, Saudi Arabia has granted a special status to English language instruction in all the educational institutions through all over the kingdom.

For Marlina & Giri (2014), EFL (English as a foreign language) has become the main language in economic and cultural issues and cultural arenas for instance the language of global organizations, publications and education. Students need to improve their English language skills due to their significance in learning the foreign language. Implementing a foreign language at an early age should considerably contribute to preserving and highlighting the world's common values, such as accepting different cultures and linguistic background, mutual respect, and social solidarity and cohesiveness (Lujic, 2016).

Nikolov & Djigunović (2006) highlights the importance and value of early foreign language learning. Woodrow (2017) refers that "language learning is an essential element of a young person's education. This puts English into a very different category from other languages (p. 242)". Accordingly, language learning should take the first priority in education from an earlier stage.

Foreign language instruction at an early age could be

useful as it provides contribution to the child's motivation and positive attitudes towards learning and helps him/her to be proficient (Nikolov & Djigunović, 2006). Because children are at the golden age of learning, EFL can be easier to learn. The curriculum has begun to introduce English to pupils at younger grade levels, as English as a foreign language is being taught (Wati, 2016). Early childhood is a crucial time for language acquisition and development (Nikolov, 2009). It has been proven that early EFL teaching has a good impact on young children's views about English (Cepik & Sarandi, 2012). More specifically, early EFL students exhibited improved reading, writing, and spelling abilities (Sun, Zhou, and Zhu, 2013).

Saudi Parents recently prefer their children to join primary schools that depend on English as medium of instruction due to their conviction of the significance of English as the lingua franca, which promotes more future opportunities for their children (Al-Qahtani & Al Zumor, 2016). Moreover, Saudi parents, as confirmed by Mtawaa (2017), have also showed awareness towards the significance of teaching their children English due to its privileged status as a tool for communication, trade, business and travel.

Studying attitudes has been and indeed continue to be the focus of a great deal of research throughout the social sciences (McKenzie, 2010). Investigating attitudes towards languages, which is usually related to the term motives, is a fundamental subject in social psychology (Baker, 1992). Lasagabaster (2015) defines attitude as "a positive or negative feeling about some person, object or issue acquired through social interaction (p. 21)". Since attitudes determine people's manner of behavior as reflected in their

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feelings and opinions, Al-Qahtani and Al Zumor (2016) indicate that attitudes of parents play a significant role in their children education. Moreover, Mtawaa (2017) assures that measuring attitudes towards English language instruction leads to the improvement of the language instruction as well as the degree of learners' involvement.

The family plays an important role in instilling in children a positive attitude toward foreign languages. According to Medved Krajnovi and Leticia Krevelj (2009), parents' positive attitudes towards language instruction at an early age, is an important factor in enhancing foreign language instruction.

Because parents are the child's first instructors, parents, their attitudes and ideas, should be studied in depth (Cansler, 2008). Parents' involvement is also very important in the process of learning English since not only at school but also in the home environment is not enough (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2020). As parents have such a strong effect on their children's attitudes, it's crucial to look at their perspectives (Bago, 2018). Parental attitudes towards foreign languages can have a significant impact on their children's early language learning.

Due to the above considerations, the research investigates Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction. In addition, the research investigates the demographic variables (gender, studying abroad and educational level) that may affect their attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction.

Hence, the research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction?
2. Are there statistically significant differences between the participants' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction due to gender and studying abroad variables?
3. Are there statistically significant differences between the participants' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction due to educational level variable?

Research aim

The current research aimed at the following:

1. Identifying Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction.
2. Determining the variables that affect Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction.

Research Hypotheses

1. Saudi parents have positive attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction.
2. There are statistically significant differences between the participants' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction due to gender and studying abroad variables.
3. There are statistically significant differences between

the participants' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction due to educational level variable.

Research significance

There is a scarcity of research concerning Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction. The current research provides a data-supported understanding of Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction, in particular, and presents insights into the parents' vision, in general concerning the integration of the English language in their children's instruction at an early age. The research contributes to the existing literature regarding the extent of parents' involvement in their children's education, and it addresses the Saudi parents' particular aspiration towards English as both a school subject and a medium of instruction at educational institutions.

Methodology

- Research Design

The research followed the analytical descriptive design to suit its subject and objectives. It aimed at collecting data about Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction using an attitude scale and analysing the obtained results. The descriptive design describes the studied phenomenon and also detects the relationship between the studied phenomenon and the variables that affect it.

- Instrumentation

An Attitude Scale

To collect data, the research utilized an attitude scale aimed at assessing Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction. It is a 5-point Likert scale that consisted of two sections. The first section included three questions to elicit demographic information, i.e. gender, studying abroad, and educational level. The second section included 28 statements addressing the Saudi parents' attitude regarding their children's EFL instruction. The scale presents this controversial issue in the Saudi context. The statements sought information on the visions, beliefs, fears, hopes and future aspiration towards young learners' EFL instruction as reflected in their parents' ideas. Participants were asked to select one of five possible options, with 'strongly agree' anchoring the left end and 'strongly disagree' anchoring the right end. The attitude scale was adjusted in terms of validity and reliability.

Validity and reliability of the attitude scale:

1. Validity of the attitude scale:

The correlation coefficient was used to calculate the validity of the internal consistency between the score of each statement and the total score of the attitude scale, by applying to a survey sample consisting of (20) respondents, as shown in table (1).

Table (1) The validity of the internal consistency between the score of each statement and the total score of the attitude scale

Statement numbers and correlation coefficients between the score of each statement and the total score of the scale						
Statement No.	1	2	3	4	5	6
correlation coefficient	0.28*	0.64**	0.52**	0.65**	0.49**	0.26*
Statement No.	7	8	9	10	11	12
correlation coefficient	0.41**	0.40**	0.75**	0.37**	0.28**	0.52**
Statement No.	13	14	15	16	17	18
correlation coefficient	0.66**	0.28**	0.35*	0.56**	0.39**	0.66**
Statement No.	19	20	21	22	23	24
correlation coefficient	0.69**	0.61**	0.49**	0.28*	0.28*	0.38*
Statement No.	25	26	27	28		
correlation coefficient	0.69**	0.65**	0.27*	0.43**		

(N= 20)

(**) significant at level of 0.01. (*) significant at level of 0.05.

Table (1) shows that the values of correlation between the score of each statement and the total score of the scale ranged between (0.26: 0.75), and all of them are statistically significant at (0.05 or 0.01) levels. This indicates the high internal consistency between the scale statements and refers to the high and adequate validity of the scale, which makes it valid as a research instrument for measuring Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction.

2. Reliability of the attitude scale:

In order to verify the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's Alpha formula was computed as shown in Table (2).

Table (2) reliability value of the scale

Instrument	number of statements	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Attitude scale	28	0.83

Table (2) shows that the value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is statistically significant at 0.01 level which indicates the high reliability of the scale.

- Participants

The participants were (334) Saudi parents who have children learning EFL at primary schools in the Central,

Northern, Southern, Western, and Eastern Regions derived from the population of parents who have children learning EFL in Saudi Arabia. All participants were native speakers of Arabic sharing a very similar social and cultural background. The participants were randomly selected and adjusted in terms of demographic factors: gender, studying abroad and educational level.

The author received approval for applying the research from university. Regarding ethical consent prior to administering the scale, the participants were approached and convinced to take part in the research through informing them how the research is significant and that their personal information and identity would be confidential as well as all the obtained information would only be restricted to scientific research purposes. They were distributed according to the following variables as shown in table (3).

Table (3) Distribution of the research participants according to the variables

Research sample variables		Sample	
		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	23	6.9%
	Female	311	93.1%
	Total	334	100%
Have you studied abroad?	Yes	51	15.3%
	No	283	87.7%
	Total	334	100%
Educational level	Pre-secondary	49	14.7%
	Bachelor	227	68%
	Postgraduate	58	17.3%
	Total	334	100%

It is clear from the previous table that all the research variables were represented in the light of the sample.

Research delimitations

The current research was delimited to a sample of (334) Saudi parents who have children learning EFL at primary schools in the Central, Northern, Southern, Western, and Eastern Regions in Saudi Arabia. It was delimited to the academic year 2021. It dealt with investigating Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction.

Literature Review

With regard to integrating foreign languages in academic curricula, parents play a significant role, thus their attitudes should be included in the time of planning or implementing teaching foreign languages to young learners (Fojkar, & Pižorn, 2015). Parents' attitudes towards the language have an impact on their children's ability to learn it. A great deal of research has found that parents highly influenced their children's language development as well as their participation in school and learning achievement (Müge

TAVİL, 2009). The attitudes of Saudi parents and their children towards English language and its use were moderately favorable (Mtawaa, 2017).

Oladejo (2006) investigated the attitudes of parents towards bilingualism. The study also investigated parents' perspectives on certain key problems connected to recent educational changes and their effects on foreign language education, particularly those components of the reforms that pertain to English as a foreign language acquisition. Results showed that parents had significant positive attitudes towards early bilingual instruction.

Müge TAVL (2009) conducted a study to investigate parental attitudes towards English instruction for children. As a data gathering tool, a questionnaire was employed. The findings revealed that most of the parents favor English immersion for their children in kindergartens, although they reflect evaluation of teacher qualifications.

In the context of English-medium international schools, Aboulfetouh (2011) conducted a study to assess parents' attitudes towards their children's bilingualism. A total of 131 parents responded to the survey, and 10 of them agreed to be interviewed. The findings reaffirmed English's important position in society and parents' hopes for their children to acquire a good education and find a decent profession in their coming life.

Similarly, Gao and Park (2012) conducted a study to investigate parents' attitudes towards bilingualism. The participants were 27 families and they showed positive attitudes toward children's education and bilingualism. The findings point to obviously complicated, non-determinant hierarchy of power between the prevalent and non-prevalent languages, implying that additive bilingualism in education is required to accommodate the referential and emotional language functions.

Griva and Chouvarda (2012) investigated the attitudes of 50 parents of children in the first or second year primary about their children's early foreign language instruction. They were randomly selected. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. According to the findings of the survey, the majority of parents feel that speaking two languages at least is required to contact and keep in touch effectively in a globalized society.

Tekin (2015) explored parental attitudes towards early EFL learning. Eleven parents with children participating in a bilingual early childhood program took part in the study. Interviews were done, as well as a demographic survey. Parents are fully aware of the benefits, obstacles, and solutions of early EFL instruction, according to the findings.

Alhabeeb's study (2016) attempted to explore Saudi parents' perceptions about their role in the education of their children in the United States with an emphasis on English literacy development. In general, the findings revealed that both male and female Saudi parents are highly involved in their children's education.

A study conducted by Al-Qahtani and Al Zumor (2016) sought to explore Saudi parents' attitudes towards using

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in private primary schools. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected via administering a questionnaire to 68 Saudi parents who are randomly selected. The study results indicated parental positive attitudes towards using English instruction due to their beliefs in the efficacy of learning English at an early age.

In his study, Mtawaa (2017) administered a written questionnaire to 58 Saudi male and female students who study English. In addition to that, a structured interview was administered to 14 Saudi parents.. The questionnaire aimed to collect data about students' attitudes towards English instruction, while the interview aimed to identify parents' attitudes towards their children's English instruction. Results showed that both male and female students as well as parents have positive attitudes towards English instruction.

Punar & Karatepe (2019) conducted a study to identify what parents' views about studying a target culture in English as a Foreign Language classes, and to see if there are any differences in parents' attitudes based on their educational background, whether they know a foreign language, and whether they have travelled abroad previously. A total of 189 parents took part in this study, which employed a mixed research methodology. Results revealed that while some parents feel culture is essential and a good method to foreign language learning, others do not think it is required for language learning. Most parents feel that teaching their children about a foreign culture is harmful to their native culture and that they can acquire the target language without being involved in the target culture.

Latifa (2020) conducted a study to identify parents' perceptions on the value of English learning and their engagement in the learning process. A total of 16 parents were included in the study. Results indicated that parents have a high positive view of the necessity of children's English instruction, according to the findings.

Daqiq (2021) conducted a study aimed to investigate parental attitudes towards their children's English language learning. The data were obtained and collected from 160 parents. A questionnaire was utilized in this investigation. Findings demonstrated that parents have positive attitudes towards English instruction at an early age, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, or educational level.

Statistical analysis

The author analyzed the obtained data using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the following statistical methods:

- Pearson correlation coefficient for estimating the validity of internal consistency.
- Cronbach's alpha coefficient for estimating reliability.
- Relative weight
- Percentage
- Ranking.

- Mean.
- Standard Deviation.
- Mann-Whitney U test for calculating the significance of differences between groups.
- Kruskal-Wallis.

Results and discussion

- Testing the first hypothesis

Saudi parents have positive attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction.

Table (4) Responses of the research participants to the attitude scale towards their children’s EFL instruction

Statements	Total sample								
	Frequency					Mean	Relative weight	Percentage	Ranking
	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree				
1. I support using English language in education.	240	74	9	7	4	4.61	1541	92.3	1
2. I trust the scholars and thinkers' thought if they speak English.	112	93	70	50	9	3.74	1251	74.9	12
3. I believe in using English language in education to increase the students' knowledge.	194	94	27	12	7	4.36	1458	87.3	3
4. I am certain that English language is a reflection of the educated person.	137	105	53	28	11	3.98	1331	79.7	7

5. I believe that teaching English at an early age negatively affects learning Arabic language.	76	56	81	90	31	2.83	946	56.6	26
6. I agree that children's use of English language in all life aspects interferes with their belonging to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.	47	63	71	93	60	3.16	1058	63.4	22
7. I support teaching children English chants.	127	110	46	37	14	3.89	1301	77.9	9
8. I believe that learning English words is difficult.	30	62	52	129	61	3.38	873	52.3	28
9. I recognize the necessity of using English language in teaching all sciences.	104	68	63	74	25	3.45	1154	69.1	18
10. I confirm that English language learning positively affects academic achievement.	112	78	56	59	29	3.55	1187	71.1	16
11. I recognize that people may criticize me if my children speak with them in English.	36	82	69	121	26	3.05	1021	61.1	24
12. I prefer that my children read stories in English.	86	111	76	54	7	3.64	1217	72.9	14
13. I admire the child who uses Arabic and English in his/her speech.	85	55	65	91	38	3.17	1060	63.5	21

indicate that the research participants have high positive attitudes towards their children’s EFL instruction.

This result is consistent with other studies (Müge TAVİL, 2009; Aboulfetouh, 2011; Griva and Chouvarda, 2012; Al-Qahtani and Al Zumor, 2016; Mtawaa, 2017; Bago, 2018; Latifa, 2020; Daqiq, 2021). For instance, Bago (2018) conducted a study to explore parents’ attitudes towards foreign language instruction at an early age and if there was a correlation between parents’ educational level and their attitudes towards early EFL instruction. The sample consisted of 110 parents. A questionnaire was utilized to verify parents’ attitudes. Findings concluded that the participants have positive attitudes towards EFL instruction at an early age.

- Testing the second hypothesis

There are statistically significant differences between the participants’ attitudes towards their children’s EFL instruction due to gender and studying abroad variables.

Since gender and studying abroad variables include varying and heterogeneous data in terms of distribution, a non-parametric coefficient was used, which is “Mann-Whitney” coefficient as an alternative to “T” test coefficient, as shown in table (5).

Table (5) Indication of significance of differences between the research participants’ attitudes towards their children’s EFL instruction due to gender and studying abroad variables

(N = 334)

Variables	Males= 23		Females= 311		Value) (Z	Type of significance
	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks		
Attitudes towards early childhood EFL education	146.57	3371.00	169.05	52574.0	-1.078	Not statistically significant
	I studied abroad= 51		I did not study abroad= 283		Value) (Z	Type of significance
	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks		
	162.08	8266.00	168.48	4779.00	-0.436	Not statistically significant

The above table shows that there are no statistically significant differences between the participants’ attitudes towards their children’s EFL instruction according to

gender variable. Additionally, there are no statistically significant differences between the participants’ attitudes towards their children’s EFL instruction according to studying abroad variable. This means that gender and studying abroad variables have no impact on Saudi parents’ attitudes towards their children’s EFL instruction, which highlights the importance of English as a foreign language and parents’ awareness of the necessity of teaching it to their children.

Similarly, this result agrees with Daqiq (2021) who conducted a study confirmed that parents have positive attitudes towards their children’s EFL learning with no differences in gender. Furthermore, the research result goes in line with Mtawaa (2017) who concluded that students have positive attitudes towards EFL with no differences attributed to gender variable.

Nevertheless, the research result contradicted with the findings of Griva and Chouvarda (2012) that found significant differences parents’ views attributed to gender variable.

- Testing the third hypothesis

There are statistically significant differences between the participants’ attitudes towards their children’s EFL instruction due to educational level variable.

In order to answer the third hypothesis and calculate the significance of differences, Kruskal-Wallis test was used as an alternative to One Way ANOVA, due to the heterogeneity of the categories of the educational level variable, as shown in table (6).

Table (6) Indication of significance of differences between the research participants’ attitudes towards their children’s EFL instruction due to educational level variable

Variables	Educational level	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	Sig.	Type of significance
Attitudes towards early childhood EFL education	Pre-secondary	49	184.48	1.867	0.393	Not statistically significant
	Bachelor	227	165.45			
	Postgraduate	58	161.19			

Table (6) shows that there are no statistically significant differences between the participants’ attitudes towards their children’s EFL instruction due to educational level variable. This result is consistent with Bago (2018) who concluded there was a weak correlation between parents’ educational

level and their attitudes towards early instruction of foreign language. Similarly, the research result agrees with Daqiq (2021) who conducted a study revealed that parents have positive attitudes towards their young learners' EFL instruction with no differences in level of education.

Nevertheless, the research result contradicted with Knežević & Šenjuga Golub (2015) who indicated a favorable relation between parents' educational level and their attitudes towards instruction of a foreign language at earlier age.

Conclusion

Parents' attitudes towards foreign language instruction have a significant impact on their children's foreign language performance. To verify how parents' views and attitudes towards their children's foreign language instruction impact their choices and home practices, it's necessary to investigate these attitudes. Using the descriptive analytical research design, the research utilized an attitude scale that aimed at investigating Saudi parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction. The research results proved that parents have high positive attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction. Additionally, there are no statistically significant differences between the participants' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction according to gender, studying abroad and educational level variables.

Recommendations and suggestions for further research

In the light of the obtained results, the research recommends that collaboration is needed between teachers and parents for determining knowledge deficiencies, misunderstanding and misconception about the importance of EFL learning. Furthermore, prior to implementing such reforms via the educational process, the research recommends that a method of society engagement and parental consultation in educational planning and language policy concerns be developed. Additionally, holding teacher-parent meetings by education stakeholders is highly recommended in order to broaden awareness about parents' role in the educational process and identify their views towards children's EFL instruction at an early age. The present research could be replicated on another sample of parents who have children learning EFL in other educational stages such as kindergarten stage. The relation between parents' involvement in their children's foreign language instruction and their children's performance in the foreign language should be investigated. Moreover, other variables should be investigated in relation to formulating parents' attitudes towards their children's EFL instruction, e.g. age, socio-economic status and English proficiency.

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