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Family Language Policy: The Case of Arabic Sojourners in the United Kingdom

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Abstract: This study explored language ideology, language practice, and language management of ten Saudi Arabian families staying for a short period of time in the UK for a parent's graduate education. It also explored the challenges these families encountered during their stay. Exploring FLPs of such sojourning families can contribute to the literature as most of the previous research focused on permanent immigrants FLPs. The analysis of in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten parents revealed that the prospect of returning to their home country had an impact on their FLPs. The findings indicated that parents believed strongly in the necessity of maintaining Arabic language of their children for educational, religious, and cultural reasons. In practice, Arabic was found to be the dominant language of oral communication within family domain; however, parents' desire to develop their children's literacy in Arabic was not achieved as very limited efforts were made to do so. Therefore, parents expressed their frustration with their children's Arabic literacy and regretted not giving sufficient attention to Arabic literacy development. In terms of English language development, the majority of parents showed a strong interest in raising their children bilingually and developing their English during their stay in the UK. Finally, the findings demonstrated that most of the challenges these families encountered were related to the difficulty of developing their children's literacy in Arabic.

Keywords: Family language policy; sojourners; short-term stayers; Arabic; heritage language.

1 Introduction

With the rapid global mobility and connectivity, the use and exposure to more than one language has been an increasingly common experience for many families around the world. Such experience inherently involves making decisions about language use in family, which consequently impacts the family's language practices and forms family language policy (FLP), an area of study that has recently attracted significant attention [2]. FLP plays a crucial role in the family because it can influence children's language development and determine the maintenance of heritage language [3].

One of the contexts that have received most of the attention in FLP research is the context of migrants who live the experience of permanent move from their original country to another one that usually doesn't share the same first language (L1). However, short-stayer families or sojourners, who stay in a host country for a relatively short period of time and have the intention to return to their home country, have received little attention in the literature [4-6]. Understanding the FLP of such under-explored families can contribute to the literature as they are likely to have a unique experience due to the short-term staying in the host country and due to the prospect of returning back to home country.

This study explores the family language uses of Saudi Arabian sojourners staying for a short time in the United Kingdom (UK) primarily for the purpose of parents' higher education. These families are on government scholarships where they are required to finish their degrees within a limited period of time and return to their home country; therefore, they are likely to have FLPs that are different from those planning to stay permanently in the UK. Furthermore, it is very common among such families to spend summer vacations in their home countries, which might cause a unique impact on their language policies compared to permanent migrants. Informed by Spolsky's [1,7] framework of language policy, this study investigated language ideologies, practices and management efforts of Saudi sojourners in the UK to answer the following research questions:

1. What language ideologies, practices, and management efforts do Saudi short-term stayers in the UK have?

Or,

2. What challenges do Saudi short-term stayers in the UK encounter?

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Family language policy (FLP)

Family language policy has been discussed thoroughly and defined variously in the literature due to the growing recognition of the role of family domain in the language maintenance and language shift among family members [8, 9], especially in contexts where institutional support is relatively restricted to mainstream languages [10]. Liang and Shin [11] argued that children's loss or maintenance of heritage language is attributed to family practices and efforts. Thus, Curdt-Christiansen [12] defined FLP as "a deliberate attempt at practicing a particular language use pattern and particular literacy practices within home domains and among family members" (p. 352). However, Liang et al. [13] reported that the literature illustrated that FLP is likely to be shaped by a variety of internal and external factors in family contexts. Furthermore, researchers pinpointed that the processes of decision making regarding the use of language within family domain can be influenced by parental language-learning experiences, their socioeconomic status, and their beliefs [14], which are likely to be impacted by sociocultural contexts [3]; therefore, King et al. [3] defined FLP as "explicit and overt planning in relation to language use within the home among family members" (p. 907).

According to Spolsky's [1,7] framework of language policy, FLP comprises three interconnected components: language ideology, language practice, and language management. Language ideology refers to a set of beliefs and perceptions individuals have toward a language in terms of its value and utility [1,7]. It is worth mentioning that such family's beliefs are not formed in isolation from the influence of the broader societal context [11, 15]. Language ideology is an integral part of FLP as Curdt-Christiansen [16] argued that family members' attitudes and beliefs can shape their language practices and consequently their FLP.

Language practice is defined as "the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up its [a speech community] linguistic repertoire" [1, p. 5]. This is manifested in the observable and predictable language behaviors of family in everyday social life for different purposes in various contexts [2, 16], "both inside and outside the home" [10, p. 2). Such patterns of language use within the family domain are decided mainly by the parents [3, 17].

The observable efforts and measures employed intentionally to influence language practice are described as language management or planning [1]. Eisenchlas et al. [10] pointed out that language management efforts "can be seen as internal forces (parents) reacting to external (and oftentimes non-linguistic) circumstances, and as agentic practices by community members which help them maintain their diasporic relationships to language" (p.3).

Spolsky [1] emphasized the existence of language policies among members of countries, institutions, or even societies. He added that many of these policies are not always formally established or explicitly written but can be derived from a study of the speech community' language beliefs, practices, and management efforts. Similarly, Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza [2] highlighted the importance of exploring how decisions about language use are made among family members within home domain.

Family domain has been one of the domains that have received considerable attention in the literature (for a review, see Hollebeke et al., [18]). A growing body of research investigated the FLPs of immigrant families and their ideologies, practices, and management efforts in terms of children's heritage language maintain as well as mainstream language development. The researchers explored the FLPs of Chinese immigrants in Canada [12], Chinese immigrants in the US [11] Polish families in Melbourne [14], Arabic-English-speaking families in the UK [19], Miao families in China [20], the Brunei Malays families [17], second-generation Iranian immigrants in the US [21], and Spanish-speaking families of preschoolers in the US [22]. Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia [23] went a step further and conducted a cross-community comparative study examining three linguistic ethnic communities in the UK- Chinese, Italian, and Pakistani. While these studies mainly employed qualitative instruments, Liang et al. [13] utilized a quantitative approach (latent class analysis) to examine the FLP among Chinese parents of preschoolers in Singapore.

It is noticeable that the main commonality among these studies is the focus primarily on permanent immigrants rather than sojourners whose plan is to stay in a host country for a relatively limited and short period of time with an intention to go back to their original countries. Families living temporarily abroad have recently received the attention of researchers (e.g. [4,6], but there is still a need for more research in various contexts with various communities and ethnicities. Bahhari [4] explored the FLP of ten Saudi Arabian families sojourning in Australia with reference to religion beliefs that are claimed to have an influence. The study found a solid intention among parents to maintain their children's Arabic language for religion purposes and for easier reintegration into schools back home. In their study of short-term stayers in the US, Lee et al. [6] examined three Korean families' language use through the analysis of trans-language practices within family domain. The results revealed that these families practiced trans-language strategically to help their children learn English, which was important to ensure their success in the US schools, while maintaining their first language to facilitate their transition back into Korean schools.

Curdt-Christiansen [24] highlighted the complexity of understanding FLP and emphasized the need to investigate family domain as well as other external forces that can influence family negotiations; therefore, exploring FLPs of sojourners in

this study can contribute to the literature as such families are likely to have different policies compared to permanent migrants [5]. Exploring how parents of short-term stayers perceive bilingualism and how their perspectives can shape family FLP is needed [6] in the literature as Surrain [22] reported that little attention was given to the influence of language-minority parents’ perception of bilingualism on FLP. Few studies [4, 6] explored the FLPs of families living temporarily overseas for educational or vocational purposes. This qualitative exploratory study is an attempt to filling this gap and to contribute to the literature by employing Spolsky’s [1,7] framework of language policy to explore language ideologies, practices, and management efforts of ten families of Saudi short-term stayers in the UK. It also examines the obstacles that can hinder FLP efforts as reported overwhelmingly in the literature [2].

2 Methodologies

Informed by Spolsky’s [1, 7] framework of language policy, this study is an attempt to explore FLPs of Saudi sojourners in the UK by exploring their language ideologies, practices and management efforts. For the purpose of such exploration, qualitative approach of research was employed.

Instrument

This study employed semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool for various reasons. Interviews allow exploring phenomena that cannot be observed directly, such as participants’ attitudes and opinions [25] and allow investigating the lived experience of the phenomena from the participants’ own perspectives [26]. Utilizing interviews with participants gives them the chance to provide historical information [27] and to explain in depth their experiences, motivations, and beliefs [26]. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, which is exploring a population that has not been investigated enough, and due to the breadth of information that interviews can offer, the researcher collected the data through interviews. Interviews can provide more comprehensive understanding of families FLPs because it can elicit participants’ actual experience and real voices [17].

Semi-structured interviews were designed to explore the FLPs of Saudi short-term stayers in the UK through a list of questions about participants’ beliefs, practices, and management efforts. The interviews also elicit the challenges these families encounter with respect to the use of language within the family domain. The questions were derived from the literature and from previous informal discussions the researcher have had with Saudi sojourning families in different countries.

Four interviews were conducted face to face during participants’ summer visit to Saudi Arabia. The rest of the interviews were conducted online using various video calling platforms, such as Facetime and Zoom. Although the participants were given the chance to choose between English or Arabic language to be used in the interviews, all of them preferred using Arabic. All of the interviews were conducted by the researcher, who speaks Arabic and English fluently. The interviews lasted around 45 minutes on average and were tape-recorded after obtaining signed consent forms from the participants.

Context and participants

The population of this study included parents of 10 Saudi families sojourning in the UK mainly for the purpose of one or both parents’ pursuit of higher education degrees. The length of their residency in the UK ranged from 3 to 6 years because they were on government scholarships where they ought to obtain their educational degrees and go back to their jobs in Saudi Arabia. At the time of conducting this study, the majority of them had already spent at least 3 years. Their first language was Arabic, and they studied in the UK colleges using English as a medium of instruction. Their children attended public schools in the UK. **Table 1** presents brief demographic profiles of the participating families. It is worth noting here that due to the Saudi cultural ethics, which are not in favor of interaction between unrelated male and female, the interviews were restricted to fathers in the participating families.

Table 1: Demographic profiles of participants

Family; Father’s name (pseudonym); age	Level of education	Father’s first language; proficiency in English	Mother’s age; level of education	Mother’s first language; proficiency in English	Children: gender, age	Expected length of stay in the UK (in years)
Family A; Ibrahim; 39	Master’s; PhD student	Arabic; advanced English	35; bachelor’s.	Arabic; basic English	m, 12; f,6	6
Family B; Nasir; 42	Bachelor’s.	Arabic; basic English	39; Master’s; PhD student	Arabic, advanced English	m, 9	4

Family C; Ahmad; 33	Master's; PhD student	Arabic; advanced English	31; master's; PhD student	Arabic; Advanced English	f, 3	6
Family D; Fahad; 39	Master's; PhD student	Arabic; Advanced English	36; high school; ESL student	Arabic; basic English	f, 12; f, 9; m, 6; f, 6; m, 6; f, 6 (twins)	4
Family E; Mohammad; 33	Bachelor's; Master's student	Arabic & Urdu; Advanced English	33; Master's; PhD student	Arabic; Advanced English	m, 6; f, 4.	5
Family F; Khalid; 38	Master's.	Arabic; Basic English	37; Master's; PhD student	Arabic; Advanced English	f, 14; f, 12; f, 7	5
Family G; Sami; 49	High school.	Arabic; Basic English	45; master's; PhD student	Arabic; Advanced English	f, 15; m, 12; m, 10.	6
Family H; Hamad; 40	Master's degree (KSA); Master's degree student	Arabic; Advanced English	35; Bachelor's.	Arabic; basic English	m, 6; f, 3	3
Family I; Abdullah; 33	Bachelor (KSA); Master's degree student	Arabic; Advanced English	28; high school; ESL student	Arabic; basic English	m, 4	3
Family J; Saleh; 34	Bachelor (KSA); training program	Arabic; intermediate English	35; Bachelor's; master's student	Arabic; Advanced English	m, 5	4

Data analysis

Once the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed, the author read the transcripts multiple times and wrote various notes and reflections to get to know the data and to obtain better understanding of the content. The transcripts then analyzed employing a two-stage coding process as suggested in Dörnyei [28], initial coding and second-level coding. Initial coding stage involved reading the transcripts carefully, highlighting relevant passages, and adding descriptive labels. Second-level coding involved identifying the commonalities among the initial codes, grouping the codes under broader themes. Finally, the emergent themes were classified into four predetermined categories, ideologies, practices, management efforts, and challenges.

3 Results and Discussion

Since the current study employed Spolsky's [1,7] framework to explore the FLPs of the participating families, the emergent themes were categorized under the three components of the framework: language ideology, language practice, and language management. In addition, to answer the second research question of this study, the challenges reported in the interview were listed under the theme of challenges.

Language ideology

In an attempt to understand participants' language ideologies, the interviewed focused on their perceptions of Arabic language (participants' heritage language), English language, and bilingualism. The studied participants unanimously expressed their strong belief in the importance of Arabic for their children, and they provided a number of reasons to support their belief. The most prominent reason was the need of Arabic for smoother transition from British school system, where English is the medium of instruction, to Saudi school system, which uses Arabic as the main medium of instruction. For instance, Fahad stated, "Arabic language is very important for my children because they are returning back to Saudi schools". Khalid elaborated more and explained,

I actually ... and my wife believe that our kids' Arabic ... should be very good to get them ready not to have problems in schools when we return to Saudi Arabia. We are really trying to improve their Arabic as much as we can to make it easier for them to join schools back there, but, as you know, language, especially reading and writing, is not something is easy to improve at home. They will face some difficulties .. I am sure .. but we're trying to reduce their suffering.

Children's lack of literacy in Arabic was one of the concerns that were reported in the interviews as Nasir stated, "Naif [his son] will be in middle school when we return back to Saudi Arabia .. if he cannot read and write properly in Arabic, it will be so bad for him". One of the participants (Ibrahim) expressed his fears that his children are likely to be bullied if they lack Arabic proficiency when the family returns back to their home country. These findings proved how sojourning families' prospect of returning back to home country, where first language is the dominant medium of instruction in the mainstream schools, enhanced parents' desire to develop and maintain their children's heritage language [4-6]. This reasoning could be considered unique to sojourning families rather than permanent immigrants who were found to maintain their children's heritage language primarily for family communication purposes [11].

The second most important reason was the perceived strong tie between Arabic and Islam religion [19, 29], which was deeply rooted in the participating families' beliefs. This was in consistent with the findings of Bahhari [4] who studied sojourning Saudi families in Australia. All but one of the participants in this study strongly emphasized the necessity of Arabic language for their children to be able to read and memorize some verses of the Qur'an and to perform daily rituals, such as the daily five prayers. Ahmad stated,

Our priority is to make sure she [his daughter] is able to read the Holy Qur'an .. and she can read it the right way.. to be honest, being able to speak Arabic is one of our religious principles. That is why I am doing my best to transmit Arabic to my daughter. My philosophy is to first ensure she can speak Arabic very well before I start thinking about the language in demand in the job market. It is a matter of prioritizing. Fortunately, my wife shares the same philosophy even though we both speak English fluently and we both finished our bachelor's and master's degrees in the United States. We want her to learn English, but not at the expense of Arabic.

The daily five prayers, which the participating families performed regularly, requires reciting some verses of the Qur'an and some religious prayers in Arabic. That is why Nasir explained that his son cannot perform the five prayers if he cannot speak Arabic. He also added, "I do not want my son to be like some Arab kids who do not speak any Arabic. This is a problem. I do not know how these kids are praying, if they". The interviews revealed that the Qur'an and Islamic traditions received the attention of the participants. This attention was demonstrated in the efforts that participating families made to teach their kids reciting the Qur'an and listening to stories of the prophet and his companions (e.g. participants Abdullah and Ibrahim). In addition, some families brought Islamic-related school books from Saudi Arabia to teach their children the Islamic teachings at home (e.g. participant Fahad).

In consistence with previous studies exploring the motivations to maintain heritage language among immigrants [10-12], all participating sojourners in this study perceived heritage language as an important language for their children because of its symbolic values that were associated with children's identity and original culture. "It [Arabic] is the language they will live with the rest of their life because it is the language of their heritage culture, and it is part of their identity" (Hamad). Romanowski [14] stated that parents believed that passing their heritage language onto their children could safeguard their cultural identity.

In consistence with various studies in the literature [14, 22], this study found that the ability to communicate with members of extended family was one of the reasons behind the desire of some participating parents to maintain their children's Arabic language. Furthermore, some of them explicitly stated that maintaining children's Arabic language would protect them from an anticipated reverse culture shock when they return back to their home country.

It was found in this study that the participants' ideologies were shaped mainly by parents' ideologies and beliefs. This was in agreement with Orellana [30] who explained that parental involvement and support are the main factors affecting family language development. Their observations of children's proficiency in Arabic language among migrant Arabic families in the UK was one of the factors some participants in this study provided to justify their concerns about their own children's Arabic language proficiency and their desire to maintain it. When participant Ahmad was asked about the reason behind his and his wife strong desire to maintain their daughter's Arabic language, he replied,

I used to volunteer to teach Arabic every Sunday .. that was before the pandemic .. yes .. I was teaching children of Arabic families in the UK. They are from different parts of the Middle East, and they migrated to the UK a long time ago. They enroll them in our Sunday program to improve their Arabic language. Unfortunately, I saw many and many children who cannot speak any Arabic, except a handful of words. That made me think many times about my daughter .. I don't want her to be like them. I am and I will do whatever I can to improve her Arabic.

Similarly, Khalid explained that his perception of Arabic and English for his children had changed over time, and he had started to give Arabic more attention at home because he noticed that some of his Saudi friends' children in the UK shifted completely to English and lost their Arabic competence. All of this illustrated that family language ideologies are influenced by internal and external factors [13], such as parents' experiences and beliefs [14] and broader sociocultural context of the family [3, 11, 12, 15, 23].

Regarding the participants' perception of the importance of English for their children, they all showed an interest in developing their children's English language and they considered their stay in the UK as a valuable opportunity for their children to acquire the language. However, for most of them English was not as important as Arabic. Fahad stated, "we are glad they [his children] have the chance to learn English in the UK in this early stage of their life". The reasons behind their interest in English were mainly their children's future college education and job opportunities because they believed that English is the dominant language of international communication, international commerce, higher education, science, and some competitive job opportunities. For example, Nasir explained that many employers in Saudi Arabia started to recruit employees who can communicate in English because of the cultural openness the country has been witnessing lately.

Since it was noticeable that participants had positive attitudes towards both English and Arabic languages, they were prompted in the interviews to elaborate about their perceptions of bilingualism and raising their children to be bilingual. They unanimously showed positive tendency toward raising bilingual children, taking into account the importance of both English and Arabic for their children, as discussed above in details. In agreement with the findings of Liang and Shin [11], some of the parents in this study explained that when they first came to the UK they had concerns that exposing their children to more than one language might cause confusion and hinder their development in both languages; however, the actual experiences and practices proved the opposite. Participants' belief in the importance of raising their children bilingually was translated into actual practice by exposing their children to both languages, at least oral communication; however, only one of them reported that they used English only policy with their son, and they delayed his exposure to English until going back to Saudi Arabia to avoid confusing him. The rest of the participants believed that their children could easily acquire and develop both languages simultaneously. Their perception was informed by either personal experiences they went through or by the observation of others' experiences (e.g. friends or relatives). Moreover, some of them came to embrace this belief after reading about bilingualism and speaking to experts in the field of applied linguistics. Previous research showed that parents held attitudes towards raising their children bilingually as it provided children with more vocational and educational opportunities [12,13]. Sojourning families, in particular, had the desire to raise their children bilingually as they had the plan to eventually return to their home countries [6].

Generally speaking, the findings of this study revealed that participating families' language ideologies were dynamic in nature and could be influenced mainly by parents' personal experiences [12, 31], knowledge drawn from experts' advice about language acquisition [31] and observation of similar cases. In agreement with King et al. [3], parents' ideology had an impact on the studied families' language practices and management efforts.

Language practice

To contextualize the language practices of the participating families in this study, it is important to provide a panoramic description of parents' language competency, children's language competency, and children's schooling experiences. As described in **Table 1**, all of the parents spoke Arabic as L1, and each family had at least one parent who was advanced in English. In addition, one of the parents reported that his L1 was both Arabic and Urdu because he was raised in a balanced bilingual context. Out of the participating families, only two families had both parents speaking English fluently.

With regard to children's language competency, it is important to distinguish between their oracy and literacy skills in both languages. With the exception of Family J whose son (5 years) spoke only English, all of the children in the participating families were described capable of communicating orally in Arabic. However, children literacy skills were different from one family to another and one child to another within the same family due to children's ages and their schooling experiences. Older children who had the chance to finish at least elementary schools in Saudi Arabia tended to have better literacy skills than younger children who lacked the experience of studying in Saudi Arabia or studied only one or two years. On the other hand, younger children tended to have better literacy skills in English than older children, with the exception of the older child (15 years old) from Family G who attended international school in Saudi Arabia before coming to the UK. It was reported that all children mastered both literacy and oracy skills in English.

The interviews revealed that nine out of the ten participating families used a home language that was different from the language outside the home. Arabic was the dominant language of communication in these families. With the exception of Family J, whose child spoke only English inside and outside the home, English was used among children of these families only in the mainstream schools or with British peers or Saudi peers who preferred to use English in some contexts. One of the commonalities among these nine families was that Arabic dominated the communication between children and parents although there was no explicit family language policy in most cases. For instance, Khalid stated, "most of the time Arabic is the language we use at home. I can say ... I can say .. 80% or more" and Fahad stated, "they [his children] use Arabic when they speak to me or to their mom. I don't force them .. she doesn't too .. this is how they like to speak to us. I do not know". More interestingly, Ibrahim mentioned that his wife, who spoke basic English, had the desire to speak English with them to improve hers but they resisted and whenever she used English with them, they responded in Arabic. However, in agreement with the literature [14], some topics could cause the use of English in some families

communication practices as Nasir explained, “Naif [his son] uses Arabic with us all the time except sometimes when he speaks with his mom about things related to school”. This dominance of heritage language in family communication pinpointed one of the differences between sojourning families and permanent immigrants whose communication was found to be dominated by the mainstream language of the host country [21, 23]. Not only did the participating families use Arabic at home, but they also used it comfortably in public unless an English-speaking person was to be involved in the discussion. This was not in line with Said [19] who found that some second-generation Arabic bilinguals in the UK did not feel comfortable using Arabic in public because they fear being identified “others” and that their belonging being questioned.

In terms of communication among siblings, the data of this study showed that older children tended to use Arabic more than English, whereas younger children tended to use English more. Khalid demonstrated that by stating, “older daughters [14 and 12 years old] use Arabic with each other, but when they speak to the younger daughter [7 years old] they use English. She tended to use English more”. Moreover, some participants believed that attending mainstream schools and the length of their stay in the UK could be attributed to the tendency to use English more than Arabic among siblings. The twins in Family D for instance “used to use Arabic more, but now they use English more when they speak to each other. They fight in English [laugh] and they come to me to complain in Arabic”.

Most participants reported that code-switching between English and Arabic was a common practice in family communication due to the exposure to both languages. In addition, the topic of discussion was found to have an effect on language choices of the language among siblings in some families.

Khalid [his son] and Nora [his daughter] use English most of the time when speaking to each other. Sometimes they speak Arabic .. yes .. I’ve noticed they actually use Arabic when they speak about something happened back home. But when they speak, for example, about a YouTube video they saw here [in the UK] they use English. That is interesting, isn’t it? (Ibrahim)

Regarding communication with extended families, all participants but one (Saleh) emphasized that their children faced no difficulties communicating in Arabic with members of extended family during their annual visits to Saudi Arabia and during occasional video/voice calls. Some parents reported that the only difficulties their children had when they visited Saudi Arabia was their lack of Arabic equivalents of some English words.

In terms of social activities with other Arabic families, all of the participants had at least a weekly gathering with Arab families, especially Saudi families. Khalid explained, “we get together with other Saudi families every week .. on Saturdays. We bring our dinner, and we enjoy the weekend”. Ibrahim elaborated on the communication among peers in these gathering by stating, “kids can be divided into two groups: kids of 10 years and old speak Arabic mostly and those who are less than 10 speak English more. We have different local Saudi dialects. They have affected my son’s dialect”.

Corresponding with previous research [32], the majority of parents in this study reported that English was the language of home TV. When participants were asked about the language used in the TV, six families reported the use of English-language TV, one family reported the use of a Saudi TV (Arabic), and the rest reported that they did not have TVs of any language. The father of Family D, who had a Saudi TV explained that they subscribed to this TV to enhance their children’s Saudi identity, to watch the national events, and to keep connected with life in Saudi; However, their children did not show any interest in this TV. He stated, “my children, unfortunately, did not like this TV and they prefer to use YouTube. If I or my wife do not turn it on, they would not turn it on”. When participants were asked to describe the language of media platforms their children used, seven families mentioned that they used English, two families explained that they used both languages, and one family emphasized that they used only Arabic content for their 3-year-old daughter.

Language management

In order to obtain a rigorous understanding of language management efforts made by the participating families, we asked them to describe their efforts before they came to the UK, their efforts during their stay in the UK, and their plans for the future. The data revealed that only two families enrolled their children in international schools that use English as a medium of instruction in Saudi Arabia upon coming to the UK. The rest of the participants did not make any special efforts to develop their children’s English language.

With the exception of 4 families, the participating families described that they did not have an explicit FLP that was declared and agreed upon by parents. Instead, they explained that they did not plan to speak a specific language and they spoke naturally once they first came until they found themselves then speaking Arabic most of the time at home. They were thankful to have Arabic as the home language and they were proud that such use of Arabic at home allowed their children to develop their oral Arabic skills. One of the four families that had explicit FLPs embraced English-only policy at home whereas the rest of them adapted Arabic-only policy at home. When the families that had explicit FLPs were asked to justify their decisions, they explained that their decisions were based on either language ideology, personal experiences, observations, or/and others’ experiences. In addition, some families revealed that their FLP had changed

over time because of the experiences they had been through. For example, Hamad explained that their FLP was adapted after the following incident:

My son used to speak English most of the time .. he speaks English very well .. like native speakers. At that time, I also used to speak with him in English, and my wife was also trying her best to speak English with him. One day he got so mad at his mom, and he screamed and shouted that she is stupid, and she does not speak English well... etc. Then, immediately, I realized that we need to enhance his Arabic and make him proud of Arabic and I stopped using English with him completely. We switched to Arabic completely within, I guess, two or three months. (Hamad)

Ahmad stressed that even though his wife and him spoke English fluently, they chose to use Arabic with their daughter, and they used it intentionally to serve various cultural and religious objectives. Ahmad stated. "School is more than enough to develop their [children's] English. They need us in Arabic".

It can be inferred from the reported FLPs and the language practices revealed in the interviews that the majority of participating families managed to maintain their children's oral skills of heritage language; however, that was not the case with their literacy skills of the same language. Since they highlighted the importance of maintaining their children's Arabic language to facilitate their integration into schools back home, they were asked to describe the efforts they made to develop their children's literacy skills in Arabic. With the exception of the FLPs that were employed both explicitly or implicitly and that were effective in maintaining children's oral skills in Arabic, their desire to develop their children's literacy skills in Arabic was not translated into practice in most cases. For example, although some families brought Arabic books to teach their children, they failed to achieve that goal. Close analysis of the data showed some discrepancies between parents' declared ideologies and the reported actual practices, in agreement with the findings of Romanowski [14, 34]; and Shen [20]. Therefore, most of the participants expressed their deep frustration with their children's literacy in Arabic and regretted not putting more efforts into literacy development. Such regret and frustration aligned with the findings of previous studies reviewed [18].

It is worth mentioning here that the participants unanimously reported making some efforts to make their children orally recite and memorize some verses of the Quran. This could be attributed to the fact that some verses of the Quran are required to perform the daily five prayers.

Regarding the formal instruction of Arabic literacy, none of the participating families enrolled their children in any Arabic schools in the UK due to the lack of such schools in most cities and due to the high cost that Arabic schools charged. There was only one family (family E) who sent their children every Sunday to a weekend school teaching them Arabic literacy. This family and three other families hired an Arabic female tutor to come every Monday to their residential complex and teach their children Arabic literacy after school. The findings echoed Liang et al.'s [13] report that one-third of the Chinese parents in Singapore arranged private Chinese tuition for their children. In addition, two families took advantage of the family annual visits of their home country and enrolled their children in summer Arabic courses there.

In terms of future planning, participants planned differently and view their children's future differently. Some of them had the plan to enroll their children in international schools in Saudi Arabia because they teach English intensively, which could help children maintain their English. Others intended to send their children to public schools, which use Arabic as a medium of instruction, and they argued that their children had enough English in the UK. Some participants had the plan to use the opposite FLP once they go back to Saudi Arabia; they would use English at the home and Arabic outside the home.

Challenges

Most of the challenges participants brought to discussion were related to their language management efforts. The most common challenge was the difficulty of developing their children's Arabic literacy during their stay in the UK where English was the medium of instruction in public education system. Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza [2] reported that it was evidenced in the literature that the mainstream public educational system posed an obstacle to family language management efforts and measures. In addition, the participating parents shared their concern about the difficulty of maintaining their children heritage language literacy while developing their English in the UK. The same challenge was reported among Korean short-term immigrants in the US [6]. Thus, migrants' children tended to have strong oral skills in their heritage but limited ability in literacy skills [32, 33].

Some of the participants believed that the lack of Arabic schools in the cities of their residence was the biggest difficulty they were facing while other participants who had Islamic schools, which teach Arabic beside English, in their cities stated that they could not afford the tuition fees. Some participants explained that they brought some Arabic resources, and they had ambitious plans to help their children develop their Arabic literacy; however, once the parents and the children started going to schools they recognized the time constraints, which confirmed the findings of Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia [23], and Liang and Shin [11].

In addition, most of the participants' children tended not to share their parents the same level of interest in Arabic literacy learning. Thus, some children showed some resistance to any programs arranged in the family domain to develop their Arabic literacy. The participants also argued that the differences between children's ability in Arabic made it even more difficult to put them in one program of literacy development at home or outside the home.

Finally, because most of the participating families brought their children to the UK without any English preparation upon coming, their children faced so much difficulty at first to merge into the education system and to get engaged, especially older children.

4 Conclusions

This study explored the language ideology, language practice, and language management in Saudi sojourning families in the UK. It also explored the challenges they encountered during their stay in the UK. Generally, the prospect of returning back to home country was found to have an impact on these families' FLPs. For example, the participating parents emphasized the need of their children for good Arabic repertoire to facilitate their transition to the education system in Saudi Arabia and to alleviate their reintegration into heritage culture.

The findings of the current study showed that participating parents held a strong belief in the importance of Arabic language for their children because of various educational, religious, and cultural factors. This did not prevent them from having an interest in grasping the opportunity of being in the UK to develop their children's English for future higher education and jobs. This interest in both languages resulted in forming positive attitudes among the participating parents toward raising their children bilingually. Such language ideologies among the studied families were found to have an impact on their language practices. For instance, parents' belief in the importance of Arabic for their children made Arabic the dominant language of communication with immediate and extended family members. However, some participants' ideologies were not in congruent with their language management efforts. Most of the parents expressed their regret not giving sufficient attention to literacy development. The majority of them reported that their failure to develop their children heritage language literacy was a result of the lack of Arabic schools in the city, time constraints, and children's lack of interest in Arabic literacy.

5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is amply clear that parents are in the midst of a big dilemma about their children's language development as they struggle to ensure their transition into English instruction in their residency and practice English to develop their literacy, while being desirous of preserving their Arabic which may not be only rudimentary if the children are very young or not yet started to speak. Support groups of sojourners should be formed to inculcate home language, culture, and values amongst the children during their stay. The feeling of equality of human values irrespective of where one lives should be encouraged in adults, which will, then, automatically be imbibed by the children in their home environment. Special scholarships for Saudi children living abroad should be launched for children who are achievers as bilinguals. Finally, the change has to start from the top and percolate to the grassroots: In other words, acculturation of adults will ensure the same for their children. Studies need to be carried out on how some cultures preserve themselves despite massive foreign influence and results derived should be therefore used in the Saudi context.

Conflicts of Interest Statement

The authors certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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