

EXPLORING HOW SAUDI FAMILIES STUDYING IN THE US SUPPORT THEIR
CHILDREN'S ARABIC

By
Ohud Alqurashi

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SAUDI FAMILIES SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S ARABIC LANGUAGE

State University of New York at Fredonia
Department of Curriculum Instruction □

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS/PROJECT CAPSTONE WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled EXPLORING HOW SAUDI FAMILIES STUDYING IN THE US SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S ARABIC by OHUD ALQURASHI, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Curriculum and Instruction in Inclusive Education, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.


Janeil C. Rey, Ph.D.
Master's Capstone Advisor
EDU 691 Course Instructor
Department of Language, Learning, & Leadership

12/18/15
Date


Robert Dahlgren, Ph.D.
Department Chair
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

11/01/2015
Date


Dean Christine Givner, Ph.D.
College of Education
State University of New York at Fredonia

1/5/2016
Date

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined how Saudi families studying in the US with children aged five to seven support their children's Arabic language development. The participants were Saudi parents aged 27-37 studying in American universities in New York State with their children aged five to seven. As part of this study, face-to-face interviews with five Saudi parents were conducted, recorded and transcribed. The findings are consistent with much of the literature reviewed. Three themes were revealed from the data indicating the parents' belief about teaching their children the Arabic language, the actions parents take in support of their children's Arabic language, and parents' expectations about their children's future education after returning to Saudi Arabia.

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Introduction

It was the last weekend in January 2015, and my son and I were at home watching television. It was noon in New York, but in Saudi Arabia, it was nearly eight p.m. I thought it was a good time to call one of my friends who I had not spoken with for a long time. We were talking about different topics when my son asked me a question in Arabic. My friend was waiting on the phone, and she heard my conversation with my son. Without any hesitation, she asked me in Arabic, "Why do you talk with your son in Arabic?" She did not wait for my answer to her question and continued by giving me her free advice. "You should talk with your child in English, so when you return to Saudi Arabia, his English will be excellent." I told her that my child speaks English very well compared to others of his age, and we speak Arabic at home. I think that my answer did not garner her admiration, so she resumed with our conversation. She told me a story about a son of one of her relatives who had returned from America after both of the parents received a master's degree in computer science. She said, "You may not believe that their son 7 years old does not understand when we talk with him in Arabic. He speaks fluent English like an American. I think that child will have a good future. As you know, all companies require English language certificate."

At that time, I could not find an appropriate response to my friend who was very impressed with the children who learn English at an early age. As a mother of a child aged 6 years old who lived his first years in Saudi society where we speak Arabic then moved and enrolled in school in America, where we both learned English, I found some questions and thoughts had grown in my mind. For example, will my child lose his Arabic language? Fortunately, this story and many others that relate with the subject of my research are helping me get a comprehensive overview of the various trends, individuals and ideas.

Research Question

There is a lack of research that addresses the issue of supporting the Arabic language in children who are studying English as a second language. I want my research to be a guideline for all Saudi families who are or will be studying in America. My research will clarify some of the challenges of having bilingual children in the U.S and how to maintain their mother tongue (Arabic) while they learn English in school. My research will be focused on Saudi families with children aged five to seven years old who study in the United States more than one and half years.

In the context of this qualitative investigation, I interviewed five Saudi parents who have children age five to seven, and have studied in New York State more than one and a half years. All of the parents had a scholarship from King Abdullah Sponsorship Program (KASP), and their children have been in pre-school, kindergarten, or first grade.

Generally, the interview was open-ended questions. My inquiry examined three main areas: the parents' belief about teaching children's Arabic language, the actions parents take in support of their children's Arabic language, and parents' expectations about their children's future after returning to Saudi Arabia. Precisely, the results of these interviews provided insight into my research question, "How do Saudi families studying in the US with children aged five to seven support their children's Arabic language development?"

Significance to the Field

The number of Saudi students in the United States continues to increase. According to the Ministry of Education website (2015), the number of Saudi students who have a scholarship from King Abdullah Sponsorship Program (KASP) studying abroad reached 148,000 students studying in 24 countries around the world. In the same context and according to the Saudi

Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) the U.S has the majority of King Abdullah scholarship program (KASP) students, currently exceeding 125,513 students studying in all states in the United States (2015). These students are varied between singles and families. Some of these Saudi families are newly married, and others have one child. There are also some families who have two, three, four, or more children. All parents in these families speak Arabic as their mother tongue, and all these families who obtained scholarships do not need to work and study at the same time. They receive a monthly stipend for their mission scholarships, and therefore can study full time.

These families, my family being one of them, face many challenges on the educational, cultural, and social level. One of the most important challenges is related to their children's education. Some Saudi children achieve success in overcoming their English language barrier, while others have some learning difficulties. Generally, learning English as a second language was successful for these children. However, the difficulty is in preserving their native language (Arabic) for these children who are still in the stage of language development. In addition, children need to understand and use language to make sense of the world and establish social relationships with others (Tabors, 2008). It is essential for Saudi children to learn English while they are in America in order for them to be successful in school. It is important to remember that these Saudi families will return to Saudi Arabia after graduating from American universities. This makes Saudi parents think about the future of their children. If the child grows up and learns English at an early age, what will happen to him when his family returns to the Arabic community where the majority of schools are in the Arabic? This makes it necessary for all Saudi parents to think about the balance between learning Arabic and English for their children.

Hopefully, there are no more difficulties related to language for their children after returning to Saudi Arabia.

Personal Significance

As an English language learner (ELL) and a mother to a 6 year-old boy, I have faced the challenge of teaching my child the Arabic language, our mother tongue, while studying the English language in school. I remember that there were many questions I wanted to get answered. The examples of such questions I had were: What language should I be speaking at home? Should I focus on English while we are in America? When we return to Saudi Arabia, will my son learn the Arabic language in school? For the past two years, I faced some challenges in helping my child learn and practice English, and educated him at home with the Arabic language. However, I am not alone as there are many Saudi families who study in the US and have children in kindergarten or first grade. These parents wonder the same questions about maintaining the native language while their children's English language is improving. It is important to me as an educator and a mother of a bilingual child to look for the appropriate answer to all my questions that relate to teaching and learning two languages simultaneously.

Literature Review

This literature review addresses research that connects to physical, cognitive, and social and emotional development of children ages five to seven. I will also be discussing language development in general, then highlight the Arabic language for young children, along with young English language learners (ELLs). I will also be discussing home learning practices with both first and second language. Finally, this literature review will discuss cultural development especially Saudi culture associated with the Arabic language, and the impact of this culture on children of parents studying in the United States.

Children Age five to seven

Physical development. During school ages five to seven years, a considerable amount of growth occurs in children's physical development. "The growth of a young child's physical abilities is truly amazing. Physical development provides children with the abilities they need to explore and interact with the world around them" (Brotherson, 2006, p.1). The school ages five to seven years are a time of steady growth and development. Staying physically active during this developmental phase will strengthen the fundamental skills needed to lead a healthy and active life as an adult, although the rate of children's physical growth is slower than the first years of a child's life. (Brotherson, 2006) "At this age, children have improved use of all their gross and fine motor skills and they are more aware of their body position and movements". (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p.261) On average, children in early school age grow two to three inches and gain three to five pounds per year. They develop enough muscle coordination to climb, swim, and skate in both boys and girls. Also, during these years, there is a growth spurt of the brain, and the ability of the eyes to work together, is usually well established, aiding children's participation in reading and closer-focus work. (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) In motor development children in school age become more capable of doing fine motor work without the neurological fatigue, however, they still have a fairly slow reaction time, but it normally improves over these years. Children also in this age demonstrate a preference for being right-handed or left-handed, and the permanent teeth begin to appear. The gender differences in motor skills are mostly insignificant in ages five to seven. The motor skills' developing is at a similar pace given similar opportunities. (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) "Children need to move and be active in many different ways to reach their full physical development" (Brotherson, 2006, p.6).

Understanding stages of young children's physical growth enables parents to modify the daily routine to avoid periods of fatigue and crankiness that can lead to challenging behaviors at home. Also, as Brotherson (2006) explained "The findings of a variety of research efforts suggest parents' goals for their children related to physical development often vary across cultures and socioeconomic groups" (p.2). For instance, in a culture where a sport such as soccer is played early and very competitively, parents will pay more attention to their child's physical abilities that are linked to performance on the soccer field. Understanding stages of children's physical growth enables parents to observe their children's physical growth and learn about whether their child's physical development is on track. Also, this knowledge helps parents know what to expect of children and what to do to help a child develop all of his or her abilities. For example, parents can begin to use fine motor skills to teach their children the letters and numbers in both the Arabic and the English languages. They can also teach writing in Arabic, which starts from right to left unlike writing in English, which starts from left to right.

Cognitive development. Becker, Klein, & Biedinger explained in their study (2013) "the importance of children's cognitive and language skills for their educational performance may be self-evident" (p. 618). Children in school age five to seven make great strides in cognitive development. They become proficient and flexible in their use of mental representations and begin to acquire the ability to think about things more dimensionally and to solve a wider range of problems. Also, during this age, children enjoy reading, spelling, printing activities, board games, and computer games. They are interested in nature, simple science experiments, and collecting and sorting. Also, school-age children are able to understand the viewpoints of others and focus on several aspects of a problem at one time.

Throughout this developmental phase, the child will demonstrate a genuine enthusiasm for learning new concepts, make strides in gaining self-confidence, and develop the necessary skills to understand the world and people around them. At age five, the child will enter kindergarten, their first taste of the world of school. And, by age seven, they will be able to properly articulate their feelings, a range of ideas, and effectively solve problems through dialogue (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). For parents, understanding that young children's cognitive, and social development progresses at different rates may elicit an understanding of some children's behavior. Young children may lack a developmental understanding of what is expected of them socially, and cognitively especially, Saudis children with their parents studying in America. These children have moved to live in a new society and culture at the same time that their cognitive, and social development is developing. Most of the social and cognitive challenges they encounter will be mediated through language. This presents an additional challenge as students learn to communicate with teachers and friends in a new language while maintaining their first language (L1) to communicate with their family members.

Social and emotional development. School age children's social and emotional development is apparent during the early school years in their self-concept and self-esteem. During early school age according to (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), "children's self-esteem their estimation of their self-worth and their pride or shame in their competence becomes more realistic and accurate" (p. 267). Children in this age generally have a positive self-assessment. They start to understand the limits of their abilities and become more prone to social comparison, comparing themselves with others. Also, they become capable of having effective communication skills including the ability to listen to instruction and follow the rules (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Generally, understanding the common physical, cognitive, social and

emotional development stages of children especially, Saudi children who live in the U.S with their studying parents, will help parents know what to expect of children and what to do to help a child develop all of his or her abilities. All children grow in the same order but at different rates.

Language Development

As Richards (1994) mentioned "People learn language, whether it is a first or second language, because they are in real situations communicating about important and interesting things" (p.16). Even before school, children develop their language through conversations that they hear and have with members of their family. Normally, early school age children five to seven years old already understand what language is for and know a good deal about how their first language works. They have developed an extensive vocabulary; they can use all of the basic grammatical structures; and they have begun to learn when, where, and with whom it is appropriate to use certain language forms. Further, they have begun to gain control over a variety of discourse forms as well: scripts, personal reports, descriptions, event casts, plans, explanations, and arguments. All of these linguistic skills will, of course, continue to increase in sophistication during the school years, but the foundations have already been developed by the time a child is of preschool age (Richards, 1994).

Also, children of school age move from listening, speaking, and emerging reading skills to real reading and writing for self-expression. They have the ability to read and understand fiction and nonfiction, understand simple written interactions and describe in their own words what new information they have learned from the text. Even the vocabulary expands from simply spoken vocabulary to include written communication. School-age children learn new words at a much more rapid rate than ever before. Children at this age learn, "almost 20 words per day when they are in an environment where they hear new words, listen to and read books, and see

language and literacy valued and celebrated" (Copple, & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 281). By first grade, for example, children are creating their own texts for others to read. They use invented spelling to spell words and can use basic conventional punctuation and capitalization (Copple, & Bredekamp, 2009).

First language development. As Tabors (2008) mentioned "Developing a first language for all children occurs in the context of social interaction within the child's family structure, begins with the production of recognizable sounds around the age of one year, and continues intensively throughout early childhood" (p. 7). Children's improved memory during the early school-age period is in large part a result of their increasing body of accumulated knowledge and concepts (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Tabors, (2008) describes the process of learning a first language as a monumental task. Tabors (2008) notes, "To understand what a large task this is, one might think of the language system as a puzzle with a variety of interlocking pieces, all of which must fit together for the puzzle to be complete" (p. 7). The five pieces of the language puzzle are: phonology, vocabulary, grammar, discourse, and pragmatic. Phonology is the sound of the language, and vocabularies are the words of the language. Grammar is the way of making sentences in the language, and discourse, is the way of putting sentences together, for example, to tell stories, make an argument, or explain how something works. Finally, pragmatic refers to the rules about how to use the language. For children to be considered native speakers of language, they must have control over all of these aspects of the language system. Developing this control is a major undertaking of the first five years of a child's life (Tabors, 2008).

Arabic language. According to the British Council (2013), Arabic is a Semitic language with over 230 million native speakers, Arabic ranks as the fourth most widely spoken language in the world, not in terms of its speakers, but in terms of the countries that have adopted it as

their official language. As regards for the status of Arabic language for the Arabs themselves, Arabic has a special place and it is regarded with respect because it is the language of Islam. Also, it has special significance since it is the language of the Holy Qur'an. Abdalla (2006) mentions that "The relation of a language with a religion is a strong factor for people to maintain their language" (p. 103). In the linguistic situation, Arabic as a complex language comes after Chinese, Qur'an, and Japanese in terms of difficulty to learn. As Abdalla (2006) stated, the differences between the English language and the Arabic language also include the cultural difference between "a Western language" like English and "a Semitic language" like Arabic, so an Arabic translator should be conscious of this difficulty. The cultural differences are mostly pragmatic, such as the use of greeting, demanding, or promising. The reasons for the difficulty of learning Arabic are that Arabic has very few words that resemble those of other languages and written Arabic also uses fewer vowels, which can be difficult for those learning to read the language.

Extensively, there are three varieties of Arabic that can be distinguished: the regional dialects, which are used for everyday communication; classical Arabic, which is the language of the Qur'an and textbooks in schools; and modern standard Arabic, which is the language of the media and daily life. Furthermore, standard Arabic is a direct descendant of classical Arabic: it keeps the syntax but varies in vocabulary and phraseology. A comparison of standard Arabic to a dialect shows much greater variations in vocabulary and phraseology, and the syntax varies too. Two countries that are far apart may have mutually unintelligible dialects. In contrast, standard Arabic is essentially the same across the Arab world and thus serves as a unifying bond between all Arabs. However, there is no sharp divide between standard Arabic and dialects (Dünges,

2011). Dünge (2011) further describes the influence of the English language on the Arabic language in the Arab world:

In Arabic world the interest in foreign languages can go too far. In recent years, the influences on written standard Arabic from dialects and foreign languages, mostly English can be observed. These affect the syntactic level. These changes in standard Arabic may hinder communication across the Arab world in the long run. Moreover, they are seen as a threat to the purity of Arabic. In fact, growing number of young Arabs are fluent in English or French but cannot speak correct Arabic. (p. 177-178)

However, in the field of childhood, Dünge, (2011) mentions, "Arabic children's books are usually written in standard Arabic and often contain difficult vocabulary from standard or even classical Arabic, which makes them hard to enjoy for young readers" (p.177). Therefore, children need to learn classical Arabic and modern standard Arabic. Qur'an is the first and very rich source of classical Arabic. All schools in Saudi Arabia teach the Qur'an from kindergarten until high school, and this is what Saudi children miss in America. However, parents can teach their children at home how to read Qur'an which is the way to learn classical Arabic. The teaching of modern standard Arabic needs more attention, such as reading stories in modern standard Arabic to increase the child's Arabic vocabulary and teaching Arabic alphabet and letter sounds. Also, watching Arabic children programs on YouTube or online may help. It is necessary for the Saudi families who are studying in America and have school aged children to increase their interest in Arabic especially at home, the first place for the child to practice and listen to Arabic in the absence of Arabic television programs (Dünge, (2011).

Home learning practices with L1. In home learning, children do not learn only linguistic structures and rules. They also learn how to communicate using the structures and rules

that make up the language. The speech of parents and other members of the family provides evidence about language use, helps the child interpret objects and events, and provides feedback on the effectiveness of the child's communication skills (Wells, 1986). Unfortunately, most English Language Learners (ELLs) in America have no chance to develop their native language in the classroom (Kim, 2010). Saudi young school age children who are growing up in the US and developing their first language (Arabic) need support for their first language through education at home. The subject of maintaining the first language in the country that does not speak it is defined in various ways in the current research (Abdalla, 2006, Kim, 2010, Richards, 1994 , Lao, 2004) For example, Abdalla's study shows that the majority of parents are trying to pass on the Arabic language to their children because it is a vehicle of Islam and it is part of their identity. But it is not expected that the level of their language will be like that of their fathers (Abdalla, 2006).

Kim's (2010) study examines ELLs' parents' beliefs about first language education and their home language literacy education practices. These beliefs and practices are then linked to the development of ELL identity and language skills and show how families are affected differently across households. Kim's study mentioned that to support first language education at home, parents first need to believe in the value of the first language, the home language and its corresponding culture, and then they must be informed about how to support it. Parents can provide support for their children's first language by spending more time with them or by engaging in activities that enhance education (Kim, 2010).

"Parents model behavior they expect children to learn; they do not typically accompany their actions with step-by-step directions. They seldom ask children to verbalize what they are doing while they work" (Richards, 1994, p. 20). Parents who want to enhance their children's

first language need to ask their children questions that require children to repeat facts or rehearse the sequence of events in the first language. Also, one-to-one conversations, which focus on topics of interest and concern to children, maximize the opportunity to achieve shared understandings of the topics raised (Richards, 1994). On the other hand, Lao's (2004) study, which focused on parents' attitudes toward Chinese-English bilingual education, shows that Chinese bilingual parents who emphasized bilingual proficiency and acknowledged the importance of using and maintaining first language during interviews actually contradicted themselves by speaking to their children in English at home (Lao, 2004).

Some researchers such as Brown, (2011) and Becker, Klein, & Biedinger, (2013) show multiple strategies and techniques available for parents to support their children's first language. Some children do not develop first language because their parents are busy working and are never home to speak with the children (Brown, 2011). Those parents may establish a weekend-school. For example, parents may send children to the nearest mosque in which there are Arabic classes for children. It is very common among many Arabs who are studying or living in America to send their children to learn Arabic in the mosque, or allocate certain hours of the weekend to teach the child the Arabic language. For instance, parents regulate their children's speech by declaring an "only mother tongue at home" rule, or by not responding to their children when they use English. "In order for a family to stay as one, there needs to be a shared language within the family" (Brown, 2011, p. 33). There is a link between parents' language use and children's language proficiency. For example, "reading aloud to children has positive effects on children's development regarding their cognitive skills and language skills" (Becker, Klein, & Biedinger, 2013, p. 626).

Second language development. Some young children develop language skills in not only a first language but also in a second language. When this happens, the child is considered to be involved in a process of second-language acquisition. Tabors (2008) explains in detail the two types of second-language acquisition among young children: simultaneous and sequential acquisition. The first type of second-language acquisition among young children is described thusly, "Simultaneous acquisition of two languages occurs when children are exposed to both languages from a very early age sometimes as a result of each parent speaking a separate language with the child" (Tabors, 2008, p. 11). The second type of second-language acquisition among young children is sequential. "Sequential acquisition occurs when a child begins to learn a second language after the first language is at least partly established" (Tabors, 2008, p. 11).

For the children who learn two languages simultaneously during childhood, the language development process is expected to be the same for both languages. However, there are a number of factors that make sequential second language acquisition different to simultaneous second language acquisition. Tabors, (2008) clarified these factors:

First, an aptitude factor: some people are more talented than others as second-language learners. Second, a social factor: some people are more outgoing and more willing than others to take risks as second-language learners. Third, a psychological factor: some people are more motivated than others because they want to become like the people who speak the language they are trying to learn. (p.13)

Young Saudi ELLs. Although English has become the lingua franca and is understood by 1.5 to 1.8 billion citizens, countries whose official languages are not English represent a large share of the gross world product (GWP). Obviously, not all languages will be equally rewarded by the labor market due to both supply and demand factors. (Ginsburgh, & Prieto-Rodriguez,

2011). Young Saudi children in America are treated in schools and kindergarten as English language learners (ELL's). Although, these students may learn oral or conversational English relatively quickly, proficiency in "academic English," or the language skills needed to fully engage with the curriculum, can take much longer to obtain (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000).

Generally, English language learners (ELLs), including Saudi children in American schools, "are taught to accept the school's rules for behavior and achievement; they learn to switch back and forth between two cultural frames of reference, that of the home and that of school" (Richards, 1994, p. 22). "Emerging evidence also suggests the potential for early intervention prior to school entry. For example, preschool attendance (including bilingual preschool environments) may provide increased opportunities to develop English language skills prior to school entry" (Goldfeld, O'Connor, Mithen, Sayers, & Brinkman, 2014, p. 49).

Furthermore, Richards (1994) mentioned the developmental sequence for young children acquiring a second language. It may be a period of time when the child continues to use his home language even in second language situations. Also, this is confirmed by Copple, & Bredekamp (2009) who note that children in school age who learn a second language, "sometimes mix-up grammar rules or use words from both languages in the same sentence" (p. 284). Most children then enter a nonverbal period, following the period of mixing up languages. Next, children begin to use telegraphic and formulaic phrases in the new language, then, finally, children begin to develop productive use of the second language. It is necessary for young children to adjust to the new situation in a new environment where a second language is used. There are, of course, differences between the children in the way they adjust. At this period, children should realize with their teachers, that an entirely new language is required with a new vocabulary, and a new set of rules for grammar, morphology, and social conventions. "This realization, and the resulting

effort that must then be expended to acquire the new language, presents the child with both social and cognitive challenges" (Richards, 1994, p. 105).

Home learning practices with L2. One of the reasons for the increase in speaking English, which is not the first language at home and with children, is that some parents decide to use English at home to improve their English as well as their children English. They do not want English to become an obstacle in children life as it had been in their life (Kim, 2010). Akresh (2007) mentions, "The use of English in public contexts and private contexts – at home and with a spouse – increases with time in the U.S., suggesting that language shift both inside and outside begins at home" (p. 931). Mouw and Xie (1999) found that children's bilingualism was beneficial contingent upon parental difficulty with the English language:

If parents speak English well, it is inconsequential for communication purposes which language the child speaks. The primary constraint on effective communication comes, however, if the parent is better at communicating in the native language than in English and the child is undergoing intense English-language socialization at school and feels less comfortable with the native language. As the child's English-language assimilation progresses, there may come a time when the parent feels compelled to switch to English when speaking to the child, even though the parent may continue to speak to his or her spouse in their native language (p. 245).

Simply, some parents who speak English to their children are more comfortable with English to begin with. Medvedeva (2012) mention that "Parents, were more likely to speak English to their children when the children lacked proficiency in their ethnic language; when the

children spoke English to their parents; when the mothers were proficient in English; and when the fathers were proficient in English" (p. 533).

Influence of first language and second language. According to Kim's study (2010) "The use of first language can facilitate ELLs' access to the resources and opportunities within their ethnic communities, while their proficiency in English positions them to enjoy the resources offered in English through school activities," (p. 16). Kim's study (2010) offers a new perspective for understanding how the L1 provides a good foundation that could be applied to the development of literacy in the majority language, English. The findings indicate that parents are one of the best resources for L1 education, but that they were not informed about the research evidence on the benefits of preserving L1. None of the participants in Kim's study were aware that literacy in their native language could provide a good foundation that could be applied to the development of literacy in the majority language, English. Also, Kim's study urges us to recognize the need for dissemination of research results on the benefits of preserving L1 and its culture in an L2 setting. In the same context, Goldfeld, O'Connor, Mithen, Sayers, & Brinkman (2014) mention that bilingualism is a strength that may subtly promote children's success in schools.

Cultural Development

From the cultural psychological perspective, culture is the most significant system within which human development occurs. Lee & Johnson, (2007) clarifies culture, as a "custom complex" comprised of both what people do and think in their local contexts. Cultural psychologists are interested not in how children develop generally, but in how children at a given time become African-American or Korean. D'Andrade (1984) for example, clarifies culture as something that is simply not "out there" and observable through people's behaviors, actions,

and customs. Culture is something that is “inside the head” and solely composed of people’s beliefs and ideas. Shweder et al. (1998) see culture as "all the things members of different communities think (know, want, feel, value) and do by virtue of being the kinds of beings who are the beneficiaries, guardians, and active perpetrators of a particular culture" (p. 867).

Family as the nucleus of culture. Becker, Klein, & Biedinger (2013) describe a family as an important microsystem for children’s development, especially on the level of English language learners, such as Saudi children in America. Guardadoa, & Beckerb, (2014) mention that the benefit of the family to maintain the L1 and development of an ethnic identity becomes apparent. Especially when families visit relatives in their home countries and the children’s exposure and participation in the language and culture intensify. It is an important to the family who has children who learn two languages during childhood to maintain family relationships, however, the ways in which affective bonds between children and their extended family members motivate their own mother tongue have rarely been considered.

By the same token, the daily routine of the family is an opportunity for communication between parents and children. Spagnola and Fiese (2007) define family routines as being, “characterized by communication that is instrumental, possessing a momentary time commitment, and are repeated regularly, holding no special meaning,” whereas family rituals, “involve communication with symbolic meaning, establishing and perpetuating the understanding of what it means to be a member of the group.” (p. 285). Routines in the home can include many varied interactive situations such as mealtimes, playtime, storytelling, and bedtime practices to name but a few. All these activities create a cultural environment that supports the child's cultural development and, at the same time, supports the language production regardless of the type of routine or ritual. In the daily routine, children and parents when they use certain

language, such as Arabic, they are going beyond merely hearing the words of the home or majority language. Vygotsky (1978, 1986) sees language development taking place in the interactions children have with peers as well as with teachers and other adults. And such interactions often occur during family routines and meaningful rituals embedded in daily activities. According to Tse (2001), "the power of group membership in determining language proficiency and performance is stronger and broader than previously believed" (p. 699). Thus, as much as parents might like to blame themselves for, or credit themselves with, their children's proficiency in their L1, the past few decades of sociolinguistic research point to the fact that children's linguistic and cultural participation in a larger community can be as significant as the role of the family (Tse, 2001). Precisely, Kim, (2010) mentions that there is cultural gap between ELLs and their parents that is a common experience.

As ELLs develop English and lose their L1, they become more used to L2 cultural norms than those of the L1 culture. Their parents then face a dilemma. They do not feel comfortable with their children losing their L1 culture, yet they support their children's L2 development. In particular, when the values of L1 culture and L2 culture conflict, parents are unsure which rules their children should be taught to follow. (Kim, 2010, p. 18)

Cultural connections and Language.

Identity. In general, speaking any language does not mean only exchanging words, and information. It is more than that. Learners who speak the target language, according to Kim (2014), "are also constantly organizing and reorganizing their identities and their relationships with others. Accordingly, investment in the target language equates to investment in a learner's own identity" (p. 93). Besides, it has been argued that the preference among some immigrant

children for speaking only English may entail abandoning not only a mother tongue but also a personal identity (Rumbaut 1994). The relationship between the learners' target language, and their identity is dialectical. Language learning involves the social identity of the learner as a member of groups, cultures, and societies. Learner subjectivities may create conflict within an individual learner or between people and may also be constantly negotiated and co-constructed in interactional contexts (Ochs, 1993).

Seen from this perspective, L2 learners are active agents who would use L2 to not only position themselves in a particular context but also to position themselves as social relations would define them. Therefore, depending on which identity the parents of linguistic children want to invest for a given discourse, their language use may vary. "Language use can of itself affect learners' interactions with others, their experiences within the L2 community, and their attitudes regarding L2 and identity" (Kim, 2014, p. 93). However, language learners' identities may be multiple. These multiple identities can conflict with each other at times, causing learners to struggle with change over time (Norton, 1995).

Social capital and Academic success. The bilingualism extends beyond a strict definition of communication to encompass social values and practices intimately tied to language use. According to Mouw & Xie (1999) "bilingualism is an important way in which immigrant groups maintain ethnic social capital (i.e., culturally specific values and behaviors that reinforce academic achievement)" (p. 236). Also, active native language use between parents and children should correspond to a higher level of social capital. With regard to the practices and behaviors contributing to the academic success of the bilingual family, Becker, Klein, & Biedinger, (2013) mentions "An association between specific forms of cultural participation and cultural skills with children's educational outcomes" (p. 618). In contrast, Mouw & Xie (1999) mention that the

practices and behaviors contributing to academic success are not culturally specific, and " the preservation of ethnicity per se is not an important prerequisite for educational success" (p. 238). Therefore, Mouw & Xie (1999) stress the importance of the active use of the native language between children and their parents to maintain the ethnic identity and ethnic social capital. The language communication within the household should have a positive effect on achievement, knowing that the lack of using the native language means a loss of social capital.

Arabic language and Islamic identity. Rogoff (2003) argues that when one learns more about another culture, one also learns more about one's own. This is probably the best entrance to say that there is a deep and historical relationship between the Arabic language and Islam. Saudi Arabia is a Muslim country and the official language is Arabic. The holy book of Islam is the Qur'an and it is written in Arabic. Also, Saudis parents raise their children on the Islamic religion from birth. Therefore, the Arabic language is an essential part of the Islamic identity of Muslims in general and Saudis in particular. The Arabic language, in general, is closely tied to Islamic and Arabic identity.

As for the Saudi Muslims who are studying in the United States with their children, Dünge (2011) affirms the importance of the role parents play in the education of their children even if they live in countries that do not speak their first language. The entertaining children's book in Arabic is key to preventing children from turning away from Arabic. The duty of parents is to give their children time to read children's literature in Arabic in order to maintain interest and skill in the L1. However, unfortunately a growing number of Arab children are fluent in English or French but cannot speak correct Arabic (Dünge, 2011). Bankston, Carl & Zhou (1995) noted the difficulty of separating the cultural effect of language use from the cognitive/developmental effect and argued that these two effects should be viewed as

complementary. In the same context, Otheguy, Garcia, and Roca (1988) mention that the majority of parents want their bilingual children to retain proficiency in their native language in addition to learning English. "Research on the psychosocial adaptation of immigrant children argues that the preference of children for speaking English is an important predictor of parent-child conflict" (p. 236). If a child's preference for speaking English emerges as a point of conflict, it may contribute to a breakdown in the parent-child relationship and a loss of social capital (Mouw & Xie, (1999).

Mouw & Xie (1999) mention that children growing up bilingual may benefit from the cognitive effects of bilingualism, but their communication with parents may or may not shift to English when they enter school and develop a preference for speaking English. Native-language ability becomes latent if primary communication shifts to English. Most assume that one must be most fluent in one's first language. However, contrary to popular belief, one is not necessarily most fluent in one's first language, although one's first language generally coincides with one's home language and mother tongue (Pandey, 2013). "The social situation of a child is determined by the society and cultural context in which the child is embedded" (Fleer, 2006, p. 132).

In summary, the literature clearly indicates three parts. First, it explored children age five to seven's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Second, first language (L1) and second language (L2) development was explored. The third section of the literature review dealt with cultural development and its connection to language. Next attention will be directed to the theoretical framework that guides this study.

Coleman's Social Capital Theory

Coleman's social capital theory focuses on the importance of family resources for children's educational outcomes. Coleman (1988) claims that social capital within the family

consists of the presence of adults and the level of attention they provide to their children. The quality and quantity of this attention determines the degree to which children are able to access the human capital of their parents (Mouw & Xie, 1999). Coleman's social capital theory is the work of an American sociologist (1926–95), James Coleman, which was initially published in 1988. According to Gauntlett (2011), "Coleman's social capital theory leads to a broader view of social capital, where it is not seen only as stock held by powerful elites, but notes its value for all kinds of communities" (p. 3). This theory is very broad and includes several constructs. The extensions and applications of Coleman's theory make sense in many contexts such as combining the insights of sociology and economic theory, and seeing social capital as a way of making sense of the overly rational. However, the part in Coleman's theory, which links to this study, is the importance of the role of the family in maintaining the social capital.

In the educational context, social capital can be understood as the ways in which children benefit by being members of social networks that provide them with positive role models, encouragement, support, and advice (White & Kaufman, 1997). "Social capital, in any context, relies on people looking beyond themselves and engaging in supportive or helpful actions because they believe it's a good thing to do" (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 5). According to Kim (2011) in an English language learner's (ELL) family, the maintenance of the mother tongue is the crucial factor for ELLs to access enhanced social capital and a higher degree of parental supervision. ELL's parents are a vital source of valuable social capital. From a cultural perspective Mouw & Xie (1999) claim,

The cultural perspective claims that the importance of bilingualism among immigrants extends beyond a strict definition of communication to encompass social values and practices intimately tied to language use. According to this view, bilingualism is an

important way in which immigrant groups maintain ethnic social capital (i.e., culturally specific values and behaviors that reinforce academic achievement). More precisely, bilingualism allows immigrants to resist linguistic assimilation by maintaining their native language in addition to developing a fluent command of English. (p. 236)

According to Mouw & Xie, (1999), and Kim, (2011) bilingualism has been found to enhance ELLs' academic achievement only when ELLs can continue to communicate with their parents in their first language and access the social capital of their parents and the first language community. Therefore, Coleman's theory highlights the role of social capital, as a source of useful everyday information, and of norms and sanctions, which can facilitate certain kinds of actions, but can also be restrictive. (Coleman, 1988, p. 104–5)

Seminal texts. Coleman examined the social capital in the family and how family background could affect various factors on achievement in school. In particular, he singled out, "one effect of social capital that is especially important: its effect on the creation of human capital in the next generation" (Coleman, 1988, p. 109). This human capital emerges out of social capital, because this kind of development depends upon relationships, most obviously within the family (or other support network). As Coleman points out, "If the human capital possessed by parents is not complemented by social capital embodied in family relations, it is irrelevant to the child's educational growth that the parent has a great deal, or a small amount, of human capital" (Coleman, 1988, p. 110). Consequently, according to Coleman's theory,

[Social capital] is an important resource for individuals and may affect greatly their ability to act and their perceived quality of life. They have the capability of bringing it into being. Yet, because the benefits of actions that bring social capital into being are

largely experienced by persons other than the actor, it is often not in his interest to bring it into being (Coleman, 1988, p. 118).

Relation to the current study. Coleman's theory shows the importance of the family's role in maintaining the social capital inherent in the mother tongue of a child who lives and studies in a country that speaks another language. As Coleman mentions, parents can provide social capital to their children by spending more time with them or by engaging in activities that enhance education (Coleman, 1988). Therefore, by using the mother tongue between the linguistic family, members can access the resources and opportunities within their ethnic communities Kim (2011). In the same context, Kim (2011) mentions the possibility of development of the first language (L1) of children who learn English as a second language "Unfortunately, most ELLs in America are not likely to have a chance to develop their L1 in a classroom setting. Therefore, L1 education at home is necessary for ELLs to take advantage of their L1 and native cultures" (p. 16). The next section will lay out the methods that will be employed in the study along with the steps that will be taken to enable closer examination of maintain first language among Saudi parents studying in America with their children aged five to seven.

Methodology

This qualitative study examined how Saudi families studying in the US with children aged five to seven support their children's Arabic language development. To the best of my knowledge, no previous study has addressed the issue, with the same conditions that have been identified in this study. Nevertheless, this study was patterned after the investigation by Timothy Matthew Vetere in his thesis *Learning Through Language Socialization: A Case Study of Two Multilingual Families* (2013), specifically, his *Outline of Potential Interview Questions*

(Appendix B). I used face-to-face interviews, a strategy commonly employed in qualitative research, to gather descriptive data that provides insight for the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). "Qualitative research stresses a phenomenological model in which reality is rooted in the perceptions of the subjects. There is a focus on an understanding and meaning through verbal narratives and observations" (McMillan, 1992, p. 9). The interview data was ideal for developing the narrative of how Saudi parents are maintaining their children's first language. The interview sessions were a guided conversation with a list of questions used, but it was flexible to provide open-ended questions and follow-up questions in relation to interviewee responses.

Participants

This study was designed for five parent participants. According to the gender segregation of Saudi culture, I anticipated meeting only the mothers; however, I met four mothers and one father. The participants were native Arabic speaking parents from Saudi Arabia with an age range between 27 to 37 years old. Each participant was a student studying in the US and all of them had a scholarship from King Abdullah Sponsorship Program (KASP). All of the participants had spent one and a half years or more in the US and their children had been in pre-school, kindergarten, or first grade. Also, all parents who interviewed were Ph.D, Master, or Bachelor degree candidates, or an English Language learner in an English Language Institute; therefore, the parent's English language was appropriate to communicate.

In order to select participants, I planned to obtain from the Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission (SACM) information on the Saudi parents currently studying in America in 2015. However, there was no response from SACM to provide me with this information. Instead, I used social media (Facebook and Twitter) to search for the families who met the conditions. I posted a brief description of my study and the conditions. More than five parents contacted me and offered to

participate in the study. The first five parents who communicated with me and who had children age five to seven living in New York State were selected for the study. I communicated with them through email, to inform them of the purpose of the study. After the parents agreed through email to participate in the study by signing an informed consent form (Appendix A), we scheduled a meeting. Data was collected from Saudi parents studying in the US, who met the following conditions: (1) native Arabic speaking parents, (2) from Saudi Arabia with an age range between 27 to 37 years old, (3) student studying in the US with a scholarship from King Abdullah Sponsorship Program (KASP), (4) have children had been in pre-school, kindergarten, first or second grade in the US.

Setting

Data was collected during October 2015. I chose New York State (NYS) to conduct this study where the number of Saudis studying supported the KASP scholarship is more than 800 students. (SACM, 2014) There are also a number of large cities such as New York and Buffalo where there are Muslim minorities living near to mosques, Islamic centers, Islamic schools and an Arabic public library. As I was also living and studying in NYS, I was able to travel and meet the parents. As well, because of my son attending a NYS public school, I had knowledge about the school system and services for ELL students in NYS. I planned to conduct the interviews at the participants' homes to allow them a comfortable space where they would be more willing to open up and share their beliefs and experiences. However, all the families preferred that the interview be in a public place such as coffee shop, and I accepted that. Broadly, each interview took approximately one hour.

Design

This qualitative study was designed to answer my research question: “How do Saudi families studying in the US with children aged five to seven support their children’s Arabic language development?” The interviews were conducted during October 2015. Each individual interview took approximately one hour. Also, for the language of the interview, I asked all the questions in English then in Arabic and the participants had the option to choose the language that they were comfortable with to respond. Almost all participants spoke Arabic with some English vocabularies. All the parents in the study were Ph.D., Master or Bachelor students or graduates, therefore, the parent's English language was at an appropriate level to communicate and answer the interview questions. I encouraged the parents to talk in the area of first language then I probed more deeply, picking up on the topics and issues the respondent initiated. This type of interview is considered a guided conversation that includes open-ended questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The interview questions were patterned after those developed by Timothy Matthew Vetere in his thesis *Learning Through Language Socialization: A Case Study of Two Multilingual Families* (2013). See Appendix B for his *Outline of Potential Interview Questions*.

Data Collection

The interview data were collected using a medium sized audio voice recorder placed in the middle of the table at the location of the interview. I began my interview by telling the parents of my background and conveying my interest in their experiences in maintaining the first language of their children. During the interviews, I tried to adhere to my list questions as much as possible. While the interview was being conducted, I took some notes in a notebook along with audio recording each interview session. I used the notes as an extra resource tool for data analysis. During the interviews I asked the questions in English then in Arabic for more

clarification. All the answers of the participants were in the Arabic language, with some English words. Once each interview was completed, I listened to each parent's interview recording multiple times to transcribe the interviews verbatim and ensure accuracy. After transcribing the interviews into Microsoft Word, I typed up my notes that were recorded during the interview process, using the same word processing program. Any identifying information that the parents disclosed during the interview was removed from the transcript. The interviews were transcribed in Arabic then I translated them into English. I did this with all the transcripts.

I read each interview multiple times and coded for common themes. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) describe the steps needed for a coding process. They say there could be many ways to sort data, so it is important to look for regularities and patterns and then find key words and phrases to support those patterns. They state the key words and phrases become the codes. For this study, after reading the interviews multiple times, I looked for similarities and variations in the transcripts then I decided how many codes I used. The interview transcripts and audio recordings will be stored in a locked box for five years before being destroyed.

Data Analysis

With the combination of written notes and the transcribed interviews, I examined and critiqued the information for commonalities using highlighter coding, which allowed me to assign meaning to the data I collected and group it accordingly. I coded commonalities in different highlighted colors to represent similar themes in three areas: the parents' belief about teaching their children the Arabic language, the actions parents take in support of their children's Arabic language, and parents' expectations about their children's future after returning to Saudi Arabia. After these themes had been highlighted within the transcribed interviews and notes, I

cut out each highlighted section from both documents and taped them onto a blank sheet of printer paper.

This methodology section described the qualitative research methodology of this research, in particular the interview design and transcription process. The methodology included participants, setting, design, data collection, and data analysis. In the next section I will report and analyze the data that was acquired from this research study.

Findings

The following findings provide insight into how Saudi families studying in the US with children aged five to seven support their children's Arabic language development. Several themes emerged from the analysis of the parent's interviews, which are evident in various interview excerpts. These three themes are: the parents' belief about teaching their children the Arabic language, the actions parents take in support of their children's Arabic language, and parents' expectations about their children's future after returning to Saudi Arabia.

Parent's Profiles

The five participants in this study were international students from Saudi Arabia studying in the US with children aged five to seven. The families included in the study did not know each, and they did not have close relations living nearby nor did they live near each other. All of the parents are married. Interviews were conducted with one parent of each family without the presence of their children or spouse. Their time in the United States ranged from one and a half years to five years. All the participants speak English as a second language. All of them speak English fluently except Parent III, who is studying English at the Intensive English Program (IEP). The interviews were conducted in Arabic and I translated all transcriptions to English. Three out of five participants lived in western New York State and the rest lived in eastern New

York State. One of the mothers is pursuing a Master's degree. One is studying for her Bachelor's degree, and the third is studying at English Language Institute. The other two parent participants are pursuing their doctorate degrees. All the participants have more than one child, except Parents IV who have only one child. Also, all participants speak Arabic and English with their children at home and outside the home, and all the families have shown interest in educating their children in the Arabic language while studying in America. (See Table 1 and 2 for a demographic overview of the participants and their children).

Table 1

Parent Demographic Information

	Age of parents	Degree being pursued	Years studying in America	Location
Parent I	37 years old	Bachelor graduate	4.5 Year	Western New York State
Parent II	33 years old	Ph.D.	4 Year	Western New York State
Parent III	30 years old	ELLs	1.5 Year	Eastern New York State
Parent IV	27 years old	Master	2.5 Year	Western New York State
Parent V	35 years old	Ph.D.	4.5 Year	Eastern New York State

Table 2

Children Demographic Information

	Gender of child	Age of child	Grade	Number of Children in Family
Parent I	Girl	7 years old	2nd grade	2
Parent II	Girl	7 years old	2nd grade	2
Parent III	Boy	5 years old	Kindergarten	5
Parent IV	Boy	5 years old	Kindergarten	1
Parent V	Boy	7 years old	2nd grade	3

Parent I. At the time of this study Parent I had been living in the United States for four and a half years. All her immediate family lived in western New York State. The interview was in a coffee shop with the mother. She is 37 years old and has a bachelor's degree from Saudi Arabia. She had been studying for a year at the Intensive English Program (IEP) offered by the local university in order to improve her English language. At the time of the interview, Parent I was a housewife. She has two children both of them school aged. The child who is related to this study is a 7 years old girl. When the family came to America, the girl was three and a half, so she entered daycare then kindergarten then first grade and now she has started the second grade in an American public school. In each of these settings the caretaker or teacher and the other children were native English speakers.

Parent II. At the time of this study, Parent II had been studying in the United States for three years. All his immediate family lived in western New York State. The interview was in a coffee shop with the father. He is 33 years old and studying for his doctorate degree in an

American university located in western New York State. He has two children one of them who is school aged. The child who is related to this study is a 7 years old girl. When the family came to America, the girl was three and a half, so she entered daycare then kindergarten then first grade and now she has started the second grade in an American public school. In each of these settings the caretaker or teacher and the other children were native English speakers.

Parent III. At the time of this study Parent III had been living in the United States for one and a half years. The interview was in a coffee shop with the mother in a New York City where the family lived. She is 30 years old and she is studying English at the Intensive English Program (IEP). She has five sons, four of them who are school aged. The child who is related to this study is a 5 year-old boy. After the family came to America, the boy entered pre-school and now he is in kindergarten in an American public school. His teacher and the other children in his class are native English speakers.

Parent IV. At the time of this study Parent IV had been living in the United States for two and a half years, living in western New York State. The interview was in a coffee shop with the mother. She is 27 years old and she is studying for her Master's Degree in an American university. The child who is related to this study is a 5 year-old boy. After the family came to America, the boy entered daycare and now he is in kindergarten in an American public school. In each of these settings the caretaker or teacher and the other children were native English speakers.

Parent V. At the time of this study Parent V had been living in the United States for four and a half years. The interview was in a coffee shop with the mother in New York City where the family lived. She is 35 years old and she received a master's degree from an American university, and now she is pursuing her doctorate in an American university. She has three sons.

The child who is related to this study is a 7 year-old boy. His mother explained that when the family came to America, the boy was four years and 10 months and he was supposed to enter kindergarten, but because he was born in November, they did not allow them to start kindergarten. He entered daycare then kindergarten then first grade and now he has started his second grade in an American public school. In each of these settings the caretaker or teacher and the other children were native English speakers.

Common Themes

The data collected through the interviews and the comparison between all five participants, helped provide a significant wealth of data. Three themes emerged in answer to how Saudi families studying in the US with children aged five to seven support their children's Arabic language development. These three themes are: the parents' belief about teaching their children the Arabic language, the actions parents take in support of their children's Arabic language, and parents' expectations about their children's future after returning to Saudi Arabia.

The parents' belief about teaching their children the Arabic language. The first common theme between all parents is the importance of their children learning multiple languages at an early age. Parents I and III have the same vision for learning languages at an early age especially English. Parent I explains, "In early age children learn English so quickly. So when they come back to Saudi Arabia the English, which they learned in the US, will be like a foundation of English language for their future." Parent IV emphasized that "Children in early age should learn two or even three languages. It does not mess them up if we know how and when to teach them." And as to the benefit of learning multiple languages Parent IV mentions, as all other parents, "Learning English helps our children to connect with another culture, gain experience, be more open over another culture and inspires them to learn and study more."

With regard to learning Arabic and English at an early age for Saudi children, all the parents said that one way or another, their children are weak in reading and writing in Arabic.

However, some of them give more explanations such as Parents V and II. Parent V said,

In childhood kids can simply acquire language even if it is just speaking and listening. Reading and writing will come later. For me, it is not important that my children learn to read and write in many languages. What is very important is when my children learn how to communicate with others who are different from them. It is something important and a benefit for their life.

In the same context Parent II added,

Our children will speak Arabic well when we go back to Saudi Arabia, but they will be weak in reading and writing in Arabic. Overall the main goal of reading and writing is to access to knowledge and our kids can do that through the English language.

The actions parents take in support of their children's Arabic language. The other common theme between all parents is the personal endeavor to maintain their children's Arabic language depending on their circumstances. All participants agreed that learning Arabic is important for their children. Parents III send their five children to the mosque every Saturday from 9 am to 1 pm for Arabic language and religious study. The mother explains what her children do in the mosque.

They are studying the Arabic language and the Quran. All the teachers over there are volunteers (educator or parents). In the mosque they group them according to their knowledge of the Quran, Arabic language, reading and writing. For example, children who do not know how to read and write in the junior group and who know the letters in

another group and so on. We noted that volunteers (parents and teachers) focus on the prayer, ablution, Arabic letters, reading, and the basics of writing.

She mentions that going to the mosque every Saturday became a motivation for her children to speak Arabic at home. For example they asked her some questions about the meaning of some classical Arabic words that they encountered in the Quran, also she mentions that on Sunday, when the whole family is together, they try to speak Arabic as much as they can.

On the other hand, Parent I preferred not to send her children to study in the mosque near their neighborhood. She explained, "I feel it is not good. And also the number of children of Arab and non-Arab are too many. All of them want to learn Arabic and the teachers over there are volunteers, so, I do not know their education." However, Parent I has her way to teach her children the Arabic language because she is not studying at the time of this study, she has free time as she mentioned during the interview. "I sit with them like one to two hours every day to read Quran and learn some Arabic words or letters and teach them how to write their names in Arabic and when they are doing good they have a reward."

Parent II and Parent IV recently began to speak Arabic at home to make their children be familiar with basic Arabic conversations. However, Parent II was interested in teaching his daughter, when she was six years old, at home Arabic language (letters and words), but after a while he decided to stop. He had noticed that his daughter stuttered and had delayed speech. He believes that learning two languages at one time was not suitable for his daughter, and he said, "If we want to promote her Arabic language, it will be in an indirect way. Saying Arabic language during daily routine should be good for her."

Moreover, as for Parent V, the mother explained her strategies to maintain her children's Arabic language.

My first strategy is that I prevented any communication at home in English. The entire home speaks Arabic. Myself, their father and any visitor who comes to our home should speak Arabic as long as our mother tongue is Arabic. When we go back to Saudi Arabia during the summer, I completely refuse that anyone speaks with my children in English. I want my kids to be familiar with and have a deep comprehension in Arabic. The second strategy is there is an Islamic school in the city where I study my Ph.D., so I went to the school and I talked to one teacher over there. I hired her to teach my kid primary classes every Sunday. Every Sunday my son goes to the Islamic school with his Arabic textbooks, which I bring from public school in SA. He learned how to speak correctly and learned to pronounce the letters properly. Third strategy is I try to stay in Saudi Arabia as long as I can. I mean, I spend all summer in Saudi Arabia. Honestly, being in Saudi Arabia all the summer affected their language. Their Arabic has improved very significantly.

In the first common theme between all the parents, which is maintaining Arabic language, there were a lot of similarities especially the parents' desire to talk in Arabic with their children. The next common theme, which is the education goals, clearly shows some of the differences between the parents.

Parents' expectations about their children's future after returning to Saudi Arabia.

The parents reported that their children's future education is very important to them. However, some differences are evident between parents' orientations of their children's education goals when they go back Saudi Arabia. There were two different sets of answers. Some parents want their children to study in international schools in Saudi Arabia, where English is the language of

instruction, and some want their children to study in Saudi public schools, where, of course, Arabic is the language of instruction. Each of them has reasons for the decision.

Three out of five parents decided definitively that their children would attend international schools in Saudi Arabia where they will complete their education in English. Parent II explains his decision about his daughter. "It is not about preferring international schools in Saudi Arabia but because of our child's language level. She is not at the same Arabic level as her Saudi peers who speak fluent Arabic." Then he explains his idea of international schools, "When we say an international school that means students will be taught all subjects in English. It does not mean that the child loses the Arabic language if their parents work with him/her to improve the Arabic language." In the same context Parent III adds some point, "In an international school, my children will continue to have an education similar to the US education." Furthermore, Parent V has a clear and specific plan for her children's education goal. She wants her children to study in an American school in the US embassy in Riyadh the capital of Saudi Arabia. As for the reasons that motivated her to choose an American school subsidiary of the US embassy in Riyadh she clarifies, "First, I do not want my kid to change the curriculum that they already started with in the US schools. Second, I do not want them to lose the English language. Thirdly, I'm believing in US Education."

On the other side, Parent I and Parent IV definitively want their children to study in Saudi public schools. Parent I mentions the price and the curriculum in the international schools, "They are so expensive, and I know that in international schools they do not focus a lot in Arabic and religion classes." Also Parent IV spoke in detail about her opinion about international schools.

I feel that my child must learn Arabic, especially when we go back to Saudi Arabia. If English is important, so Arabic is also important. As well as the most important thing is

we are Muslims. It is really depressing, that you as a Muslim raise your child and you see he cannot read Quran. So, I think when they learn Arabic, it will help them to understand Islam more. I think it is important that my son learns to read Quran and reads and writes in Arabic."

Saudi parents have different plans for their children's future education after returning to Saudi Arabia. Parents with older children who have studied years in American schools prefer international schools in Saudi Arabia. The parents who will return to Saudi Arabia while their children are still in the age of pre-first grade prefer the Saudi public schools. However, the third common theme between all parents in next section is the value of multiple languages.

This study provides insight into how Saudi families studying in the US with children aged five to seven support their children's Arabic language development and their strategies at home to maintaining their children's Arabic language. Using the data collected through the interviews and after comparing and contrasting between all five participants, I emerged with a significant wealth of data. I have chosen to narrow my focus on three relevant themes that I believe best answer my research question. These three themes are: the parents' belief about teaching their children the Arabic language, the actions parents take in support of their children's Arabic language, and parents' expectations about their children's future after returning to Saudi Arabia. Discussion of these results will be detailed, along with their implications, and future recommendations in the next section.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how Saudi families studying in the US with children aged five to seven support their children's Arabic language development. The results of this study indicate that there are positive results of maintaining the Arabic language of Saudi

children who are studying in the US. The findings summarized and discussed include; the parents' belief about teaching their children the Arabic language, the actions parents take in support of their children's Arabic language, and parents' expectations about their children's future after returning to Saudi Arabia. In this section the implications of this research will be discussed. Specifically, the implications of these results on practice and the implications for policy will be presented. Finally, the recommendations for further study and the limitations regarding this study will be offered.

In the literature review most of the sources talked about immigrants to America who come to America to live for a long period. As for the Saudi parents studying in the US with their children aged five to seven, they remain in the United States for a limited period from three years to a maximum of ten years. The majority of these parents come to America to study for their Bachelor or Master degrees like Parent I, Parent II, and Parent IV in this study. Or, perhaps they are lucky enough to complete their education in America, for example, getting a Master's then studying for their doctorate like Parent II and Parent V in this study. This makes the Saudis and their children who are studying in America through the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) different cases from more traditional long-term immigrants to America. There are differences between the Saudis who are studying in America and immigrants in terms of culture, social relations, education, and language. For this reason, perhaps the studies of immigrants and immigrants' children to America does not apply on the Saudi parents and their children who studying in America for a specific finite period.

In addition, the second section of the literature review was about language development. For Arabic language the sources such as Dünge (2011) and Abdalla (2006) clarified that there are three varieties of Arabic that can be distinguished: the regional dialects, which are used for

everyday communication; classical Arabic, which is the language of the Qur'an and textbooks in schools; and modern standard Arabic, which is the language of the media and daily life. The results of this study showed that parents found it difficult to find good electronic educational programs (for example, applications on tablets) to teach their children the classical Arabic. Most of the applications are in the Arabic regional dialects and these dialects may not match the family's dialect. As for programs that rely on classical Arabic language, they are not designed for and therefore are not interesting to children.

Coleman (1988) claims that social capital within the family consists of the presence of adults and the level of attention they provide to their children. The quality and quantity of this attention determines the degree to which children are able to access the human capital of their parents. It was very clear from the parents' responses that the Arabic language and Islamic culture among Saudi parents was a source of social capital for their children. Saudi parents tried to transfer their social capital to their children by talking in Arabic at home and sending their children to the mosque to study Islam and the Arabic language. Parents have shown interest in their own Arabic and Islamic culture. This also applies to what Gauntlett (2011) claims, "Social capital, in any context, relies on people looking beyond themselves and engaging in supportive or helpful actions because they believe it's a good thing to do" (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 5).

Implications of Results

The data shows that overall the Saudi children aged five to seven years who are attending an American daycare, kindergarten or first or second grade have excellent English language skills matched by a weakness in Arabic language skills. According to Kim's study (2010) the native language could provide a good foundation that to be applied to the development of literacy in the majority language, English. None of the participants in this study were aware that

literacy in their native language would provide a good foundation for second language acquisition by their children. This is probably because of the disparity between the Arabic and English as Semitic and West Germanic languages. Perhaps this shows that the language that a child learns at an early age in kindergarten and first grade is the language that is stronger for him, and also is the base language of knowledge and learning. It is recommended that further studies explore ways to empower ELL parents by reinforcing the value of their children's first language and native culture.

Implications for practice

It is expected that Saudi families who plan on coming to the US and want their children to learn English and maintain Arabic could use the results in this study. If Saudi families coming to the US with children aged five to seven were to use this study to support their children's language development there are two specific recommendations. These two recommendations are to have a specified future educational goal for the children, and to work consistently maintaining the Arabic language at home.

Having a specified future educational goal for the children is the common theme among the parents in this study. Focusing on educational goals for children, even before coming to the United States is good advice from the beginning. If the parents want their child to complete his or her education in the Arabic language, then they should intensify the maintenance of their children's Arabic language while they are in the United States. For example, before coming to the United States parents can choose an American city where there is an Islamic center or International Arabic school, so their children can study in this kind of school. However, if the Saudi parents plan to continue their children's education in an English-language school, it is

recommended to focus on English language development of the child, during the period of study in the United States.

The second recommendation based on the search results is maintaining Arabic language at home. Saudi children aged five to seven who come with their parents in the US are at the educational level where they are starting to read and write in terms of language development. Parents should understand the language development of their children, whether in the first language, Arabic or the second language, English in this case. Maintaining the native language in a society that speaks a different language is a challenge. It is helpful if the Saudi families who come to the US with children choose to study in an American city where Saudi or Arab families with children live. Children can play together and they will speak Arabic. They will hear the Arabic language and see Arabic culture around them. Also, the daily routine at home is a good opportunity to maintain the Arabic language and teach children Arabic words and sentences of everyday life. Parents can provide support for their children's first language by spending more time with them or by engaging in activities that enhance education (Kim, 2010).

Implication for policy

As we have seen in the results, some parents are apprehensive about their children's ability to understand the lessons in the Arabic language in public schools in Saudi Arabia when they return. They know that their children academically and in English are at an excellent level compared to their peers in Saudi Arabia. However, these children are not in the same level in the Arabic language compared to their peers in Saudi Arabia. For this reason, it is important to provide public schools in Saudi Arabia with Arabic language teachers to give Saudi children who have studied in America extra Arabic classes, similar to what happens in the US public schools with foreign children who do not speak English. In this case, the school hires English as a second

language (ESL) teachers to work with children on developing their English language. This idea can be applied in public school in Saudi Arabia with Saudi children whose Arabic language is weak, but who are in a good academic standard.

Implications for Future Research

Each of the limitations of this study could easily be countered by further research. For example the first limitation was the sample size. This study addressed only five Saudi parents who were currently studying in America with their children. However, it did not address Saudi parents who have graduated from American universities and returned with their children to Saudi Arabia. What are the challenges that they faced with their children in both Arabic or English languages? Does the children's Arabic language improve? Or, do the children refuse to study in Arabic language in public schools? And what about the children's English language, does it recede? Or do they keep speaking in English at and out of home? What are the strategies that Saudi parents use with their children's education in Saudi Arabia? In general, after the expiration of the scholarship with all advantages and disadvantages of this period, what is the parents' view of studying in America with children of school age? All these questions could be future research questions. Further research, perhaps over a longer period of time, could give deep insight into the effect of studying in America with children aged five to seven years. Further research could also investigate not only how Saudi parents maintain their children's Arabic language while studying in America, but address the Saudi children's language, either Arabic or English, upon their return to Saudi Arabia. According to the results, Saudi children have achieved a resounding success in learning English, which is considered an important achievement for their education. Perhaps it is essential that there be a study on the subject to see what are the successes and failures to maintain the children's English language of Saudi children aged five to seven years who studied

in American school and returned to Saudi Arabia.

Because of the persistent number of Saudi students studying in the US with their children of school age who are facing challenges of maintaining their children's Arabic language, it is essential for research to focus on testing the efficacy of practices and initiatives that bridge the cultural, socioeconomic and linguistic divides. All of this research will be very important for Saudi parents who want to study in the United States with their children who are school aged.

Limitations of this Study

As with every study, there are limitations that coincided with this study. The first limitation in this study is small sample size. The number of participants was only five Saudi parents. In the future a study could be designed to include more Saudi parents who are studying in America with their children aged five to seven. Another limitation was the setting of the study. The research took place in New York State where I could interview the parents. The description and findings may have been different if the study had taken place in other cities across the country given the cultural differences between big American cities. There are some Arabic schools in some American cities, and I wonder how this impacts the Saudi parents in maintaining their children's Arabic language. A third limitation is that what parents say they do with their children may be different from what they actually do. The parents in this study are international students studying in universities, and this requires concentration and a large commitment of time. They may intend to teach their children the Arabic language at home, but the time and school responsibilities may pressure them to postpone some of these plans. Some of what came out in the interviews may be more parents' opinions or ideals than the reality of daily life. Nonetheless, the data from the interviews is useful for Saudis parents and other international students studying in the US with children aged five to seven years.

The overarching goal of this study was to examine how Saudi families studying in the US with children aged five to seven support their children's Arabic language development. I was pleased to see that some of my beliefs were confirmed. One such belief is that Saudi students who are studying in the US with children aged five to seven, in many ways, maintain their children's Arabic language especially since these children are at the age of significant physical, language, and cultural development. All parents have shown attention to teach their children the Arabic language one way or another. Almost everyone understands that the period of study in America is temporary. However, there is a long time after returning to Saudi Arabia in the parents' future themselves or in their children's educational future, which is divided between the Arabic and English language. In Saudi Arabia parents might maintain their children's English language that they learned successfully in the US as well as the Arabic. All the parents who I interviewed in this study have their own experience of studying in the US with their children. I believe that all of them shared with me their experience because they hoped this research would be able to shed light on some of the issues associated with maintaining their children's Arabic language while studying in the US.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Consent Form

I, Ohud Alqurashi, am doing research on the participation of parents in their children's education. The purpose of this research is to understand how Saudi families studying in the US with children aged five to seven support their children's Arabic language development. A possible benefit of this study is to gain insight into what parents can do to help their children maintain their Arabic language. Since the study is focusing on positive aspects of parental practices, participants will not be put at risk.

As part of the study, I will visit your home to interview you, which I will audio record. The interview will require approximately one hour.

The recordings will be destroyed after transcription. In the transcripts, I will not use actual parent names to ensure privacy. The participant list and referenced names will be maintained on my personal password locked computer until the study is complete, at which time the list will be destroyed. The transcriptions will be destroyed five years following the study.

Your children are not affiliated with this investigation in any way. Also, your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to change your mind at any time or cease participation in this investigation at any time. If you decide to change your mind, all interview and observation material already collected will be immediately destroyed and will not be used in this study.

If you agree with the conditions, please sign this form. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact the following persons.

Ohud Alqurashi

Student/researcher

State University of New York in Fredonia

Fredonia, NY 14063
716-907-7608 or alqu8948@fredonia.edu

Dr. Janeil Rey

Assistant Professor
Thompson E 232
State University of New York in Fredonia
Fredonia, NY 14063
716-673-4650 or janeil.rey@fredonia.edu

Dr. Judith Horowitz

Human Subjects Administrator and Associate Provost for Graduate Studies,
Sponsored Programs and Faculty Development
State University of New York in Fredonia
Fredonia, NY 14063
716-673-3335 or judith.horowitz@fredonia.edu

I, _____ understand the nature of this research.

With my signature, I _____, give Ohud Alqurashi
permission to use the recorded interview material and observation notes for her
investigation.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Parent Questionnaire

*Most of the questions are from Learning Through Language Socialization: A Case Study of Two Multilingual Families (2013) by Timothy Matthew Vetere

** I added four questions: 2, 11, 12, and 13 for the purpose of this study.

1. Would you mind telling me a little bit about your selves?
 - A. How old are you?
 - B. What are your occupations?
 - C. When did you begin learning English?
 - D. What are some of your experiences in learning English?
2. Would you mind telling me a little bit about your child?
 - A. How old is she/he?
 - B. What is your child's name?
 - C. When did your child begin learning English?
 - D. How long has your family lived in the US?
3. In what ways is learning multiple languages important for your child or children?
4. What do you do in order to promote multiple languages at home? Please describe each activity.
5. What types of media materials (video, radio, computer, or Skype) is your child exposed to on a regular basis? For each media material, what is the predominate language used?
6. Describe some instances where different languages are used in the home. For instance...
 - A. Getting ready in the morning. (When the child first gets up, do you greet them in English or Arabic?)

- B. Breakfast time
 - C. Getting ready for school
 - D. Lunchtime
 - E. Playtime (What language does your child sing in?)
 - F. Grocery Store or stores in general
 - G. Dinnertime
 - H. Storybook time
 - I. Between yourselves as parents
 - J. asking questions such as "why", "how", "when" – what language is being used?
7. If your child is learning something new, do you explain it in English or in Arabic? For example, cultural differences – such as Christmas – what do you label a new experience first? And why did you choose that language first?
 8. Are there times when you speak one language or another? If so, why is this?
 9. What do you see as a value of learning multiple languages at a young age?
 10. Is there anything else you would like to discuss in terms of raising your child in a multi-lingual context?
 11. What do you think your role is at home as far as helping your child speaking Arabic?
 12. Do you involve yourself in at-home learning activities to teach your child Arabic language? And why?
 13. What educational goals do you have for your child when you come back to Saudi Arabia? And why?