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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Learning English by Kindergarten Children in Saudi Arabia: A Mothers' Perspective**

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**| ABSTRACT**

In an era where the English language has become dominant in all fields and is the prevailing language worldwide, many Arab parents and intellectuals are wondering about the optimal age to start teaching their children English. Should they speak to their children in English at an early age? Should they enrol their children in a pre-school that teaches English only? What is the effect of teaching English to children in kindergarten on their learning of Arabic and their academic achievement in later stages? This study aimed to survey the opinions of a sample of mothers regarding the teaching of English to young children. The results of interviews with a sample of 300 mothers representing all segments of society showed that 70% of the mothers believe that the best age to teach children English is between four and five years old. 70% prefer to enrol their children in a kindergarten that teaches English, and 50% prefer to use a mix of English and Arabic languages when speaking with their children at home. About 70% believe that teaching English to children at an early age has no negative effect on their learning of Arabic simultaneously and has a positive effect on their academic achievement in later stages of education. The study also revealed some misconceptions among mothers about the optimal age for learning English, the effect of learning English on young children's Arabic language skills and academic achievement, and that the reason weakness of junior and senior high school students in English is due to not studying English at an early age. The researcher reviewed the results of previous studies on children and first and second language acquisition in several countries around the world acquiring a second foreign language alongside their mother tongue, the impact of learning a second language on their learning and acquisition of their mother tongue, academic achievement, and factors that lead to successful foreign language learning.

**| KEYWORDS**

Second language acquisition, first language acquisition, kindergarten children, young children, acquisition of mother tongue, stereotypes, mothers' views

**| ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 25 June 2023

**PUBLISHED:** 04 July 2023

**DOI:** 10.32996/jlds.2023.3.2.3

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**1. Introduction**

Undoubtedly, English is the most widely spoken language in the world as one out of four people speaks English as a first, second or foreign language. English is the main language in international political gatherings, the official language of 85% of international organizations, and many international conferences, and the language of technology, commerce, banking and tourism and business, and the language of most scientific research, references, terminology, and the majority of famous newspapers, television programs, movies, airlines, multinational companies, foreign workers, and 90% of the material on the Internet (Al-Jarf, 2008).

Given the dominance of the English language in all fields, the number of people wishing to learn English is increasing every day. The number of students who learn English all over the world is about one billion (Crystal, 2003). Almost all countries in the world teach English in their schools and universities. Private institutes that offer intensive courses in English for non-native speakers are increasing, in addition to institutes opened by the British Council for teaching English to students. Taking a look at the number of private schools in the Kingdom that teach English intensively and international schools that teach all content courses such as history, geography, science and mathematics in English starting from kindergarten with one Arabic language course (5 hours a

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week), and one or two hours a week for an Islamic Studies course is on the rise. This number has increased significantly from what it was ten years ago. There is a plethora of advertisements for English language courses and computer-based English language training programs in the newspapers and on the Internet (Al-Jarf, 2022b; Al-Jarf, 2008).

In an era in which the world has become a small village, the English language has become the dominant, global language and the preferred language of education, studies by Al-Jarf, 2004b; Al-Jarf, 2004c; and Al-Jarf, 2008 found that 45% of the students surveyed at Jordan University and King Saud University prefer to educate their children at an international school where they can learn all the subjects in English at a very young age. About 96% of the students at Jordan University and 82% of the students at King Saud University believe that English is more appropriate for teaching medicine, pharmacy, engineering, science, nursing, and computer science, whereas Arabic is more appropriate for teaching religion, history, Arabic literature and education only. The student sample at both universities is keener on teaching their children English than Arabic. They consider English a superior language, being an global language, and the language of science and technology, research, electronic databases, technical terminology, dictionaries, and others. They gave many educational, vocational, technological, social reasons for favoring the English language. At the same time, there were misconceptions among the students about first and second language acquisition by children and adults, and about the language of instruction at medical and technological colleges around the world.

At the elementary school level in Saudi Arabia, children go to 4 types of schools where they learn both English and Arabic: Public (government) and Quranic schools; private schools where Arabic is the medium of instruction with an intensive English course; international schools where English is the medium of instruction, and one course is allocated to Arabic and Islamic Studies. Parents reported that at public and Quranic schools, students take 1-2 hours of English a week which they consider insufficient. At private schools, between 5-10 hours a week are allocated to English. At international schools, English is the medium of instruction in all subject areas. Most parents would like their children to start learning English in kindergarten or first grade. English is the stronger and preferred language for international school children. Students who go to private school have a good command of English and Arabic. Arabic is the stronger and preferred language for Government and Quranic School children. Some parents think that the English curriculum used at Public Schools is good, but some teachers are incompetent in their instructional techniques. Some Public Schools in small towns and remote areas are understaffed which results in reducing the teaching hours from 2 to 1 hour a week (Al-Jarf, 2022b).

At the kindergarten level, teachers in Kuwait believe strongly in the importance of teaching English to children starting from kindergarten. They underscore the importance of children learning English as a global language as a means of empowerment and improved international communication (Al-Yaseen, 2021).

Moreover, people are extremely overwhelmed by the spread of English. Authors of many articles in Saudi newspapers call for teaching English to children at an early age, in addition to the desire of many parents to teach their children English from an early age. Other parents are keen to send their children to private kindergartens (Kg) and private schools in order to learn English from an early age. Some families hire a nanny or a teacher to teach young children English at home and communicate with them in English. The concern of many has become when to start teaching their young children English. What is the optimal age for teaching English to children is? Should parents talk to their children at home in English starting from an early age? Should they send their children to a kindergarten that teaches them only English? What is the effect of teaching English to young children on their learning of Arabic? (Al-Jarf, 2022b; Al-Jarf, 2005). Therefore, this study aims to explore the opinions of a sample of mothers regarding the teaching of English to young children in kindergarten, specifically: (1) the appropriate age for children to start learning English as perceived by mothers; (2) the language that mothers prefer children to learn in kindergartens; (3) the language that mothers prefer to use when communicating with their young children at home; (4) the impact of learning English as a second/foreign language by children in kindergarten on the acquisition of their native language (Arabic) as perceived by mothers; and (5) the impact of learning English in kindergarten on children's academic performance in later stages of education as perceived by mothers. In addition, the study aims to review prior studies in the literature on children's acquisition of a second/foreign language alongside their mother tongue at an early age, the optimal age for learning a foreign language, the impact of learning a foreign language on the mother tongue, the importance of learning the mother tongue first, the relationship between learning a foreign language and academic achievement, and the factors that affect children's success in learning a foreign language.

## **2.2 Methodology**

### **2.1 Study Samples**

A random sample of 300 mothers was surveyed. The sample included Saudi and non-Saudi mothers (from Yemen, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Egypt), mothers from all age groups (young vs older mothers), mothers with low educational levels and mothers with high educational levels (university education), working mothers and non-working mothers, mothers who know English and those who do not know English.

The sample also included 40 students from the author’s acquaintances, friends, colleagues’ children who have attended international schools in the Kingdom where they learned English only since kindergarten or learned all the subjects such as geography, history, science, and mathematics in English with only one Arabic language course.

**2.2 Data Collection**

Mothers in the sample were interviewed. A questionnaire-survey was used to record the mothers’ responses to the questions. The survey consisted of a closed questionnaire containing a number of questions about mothers’ opinions on the optimal age for children to start learning English and the reasons for that; the preferred language for teaching young children in kindergarten and the reasons for that; the preferred language for communicating with the child at home and the reasons for that; the impact of children learning English at an early age on their learning of Arabic; and the impact of children learning English at an early age on their academic performance in later stages. The survey questions were as follows:

- 1) In your opinion, what is the optimal age for children to start learning a second/foreign language? why?
- 2) Which language do you prefer your children to learn in kindergarten? Why?
- 3) Which language do you prefer to speak with your young children at home? Why?
- 4) Do you think that learning English by children in kindergarten negatively affects their learning of Arabic? Why?
- 5) Do you think that learning English by children in kindergarten will help them learn Arabic better? Why?
- 6) Do you think that learning English at an early age has a positive effect on the children’ achievement in later stages of study?

Each question was followed by a number of responses to choose from as in multiple-choice questions.

**2.3 Data Analysis**

The researcher interviewed part of the sample of mothers at King Saud University who were accompanying their daughters during the admission and registration period. She interviewed the rest of the mothers in an amusement park in Riyadh. Three graduate students participated in conducting the interviews. The researcher trained them in how to ask the questions and record the answers on the printed survey. Each mother was interviewed individually, and her responses were recorded on a questionnaire-survey form. Afterwards, the researcher marked all the responses, classified them, and calculated the percentage of responses to each question. Qualitative analysis was also used to report the reasons given by mothers for teaching English to children at an early age. What matters here is the quality of the responses given by the mothers, not the percentage of mothers who gave the same response.

**3. Results**

Tables 1 to 5 shows mothers’ attitudes towards teaching English to kindergarten children. Each table includes a question, with the percentage of responses for each response. The tables cover topics such as the appropriate age to start teaching a foreign language, which language should be taught in kindergarten, which language should be spoken at home, and whether early English learning affects Arabic language learning and academic achievement.

**3.1 Mothers’ Views on the optimal age for learning English**

Results presented in Table (1) show that 70% of the mothers in the sample believe that the optimal age for learning English is kindergarten (i.e. before the age of six), while 10% of the mothers think that the optimal age is first the three grades of elementary school (7-9 years old), and 15% believe that the optimal age is the three upper grades of elementary school (10-12 years old), while 5% believe that the optimal age is the junior high school grades (13-15 years old). Many respondents believe that children at the age of four and five absorb language more than older children aged ten and older. A child at this age is open and has a "clear brain" or "like a blank page" and will absorb the foreign language quickly. They believe that learning English at the age of four and five is easier than learning it at an old age (in the junior high school grades). Children at this age can learn English without effort and will not face difficulties in learning it when they grow up. These mothers want their children to master the English accent, learn the basics of the language, know its secrets, and become well established in it so that their language will be strong starting from early childhood on and they will be able to use it in all fields. They want their children to master English as well as Arabic.

**Table 1: Mothers’ Views on the optimal age for children to start learning English with percentages**

Responses	%
A. Before the age of six	70%
B. From 7-9	10%
C. From 10-12	15%
D. From 13-15	5%

**3.2 Justifications given by mothers for teaching English to Kg children**

All mothers in the sample believe that teaching English to children has become a necessity because we live in an era in which the world has become a small village, and the dominant language is English, and because the English language has become one of the necessities of life as it is used in travel, shopping, hospitals, restaurants, with the driver and maid, and even in the grocery stores. It is the language of computers, television and means of communication. Everything we want to see is written in English. Useful books are in English. The Internet is in English. So they want their children to be able to speak and communicate in English. Some mothers believe that the English language is more useful than Arabic, because it provides those who know it with better opportunities and broader fields.

Many mothers indicated that knowledge of the English language is a requirement for success in life. A student who knows English will have a better future and life will be easier for him/her than a student who does not. They believe that knowing Arabic only will make children limited in work opportunities, whereas English gives those who know it the opportunity to get a better job and it opens up broader horizons for them.

Mothers added that our Arab societies have become interested in conversing in English. Those who know the English have more prestige in the society, and people look at them with respect and admiration.

Many mothers mentioned that the English language needs to be taught and studied because we do not practice it at home. If children do not learn it at a young age, it will be difficult for them to learn it when they are older, and they may forget it. So, they must get used to using English from a young age, in order for them to feel it is important.

Other mothers added that teaching English to children in kindergarten will raise their self-confidence. They cited the popular Arabic saying, "*learning at a young age is like inscription on a stone.*"

Many mothers indicated that secondary school students have a low mastery of English and do not know much because they did not start learning English at a young age. Some students pass and get a certificate, but their English is poor.

In addition, the mothers do not want their children to face difficulties like they did during their school days and whenever they travelled with their husbands to study in the West.

A small percentage mentioned another goal for teaching children the English language, which is to introduce non-Muslims to Islam, and to introduce non-Arabic speakers to our issues and to be able to defend our causes.

**3.3 Mothers' views of the language that should be taught in kindergarten**

Table 2 shows that 70% of the mothers see the need to send their children to a kindergarten that teaches them Arabic as the main language and one course in English so that they can learn the basics of English, and to make it easy for the children to continue learning English later on, and in order for the child to benefit from both Arabic and English at the same time.

Results also show that 7% prefer to teach their children English only, with one Arabic course, because Arabic is the language of society, and the child can learn it from the surrounding community.

In addition, 23% believe that it is necessary to teach children Arabic only, because it is the language of the Holy Qur'an, and it is the main language for us as Muslims. children must learn it early in order to speak it without a foreign accent from childhood, and without interference from any other foreign language. Learning Arabic is very difficult and complex, especially classical Arabic grammar, rhetoric, dictation, and composition. Those mothers do not deny the importance of the English language, but they do not see it as essential to the educational process at an early age. What is more important is learning to read and memorize the Qur'an. By contrast, the child can learn English in school later, after he/she has mastered Arabic. These mothers believe that learning Arabic and English at the same time will lead to confusion between the two.

**Table 2: Mothers' Views on the language they prefer their children to learn in kindergarten with percentages**

Responses	%
A. Mainly Arabic with one course for English	70%
B. Arabic only	23%
C. English only	4%
D. Mainly English with one course for Arabic	3%

### 3.4 Mothers' views on conversational language at home

Table 3 shows that 13% of the mothers prefer to speak with their children at home in English only. They believe that children will learn Arabic from the community, and relatives around them. 8% prefer that one parent uses Arabic with the child and the other parent uses English. 42% prefer to converse with their young children in both Arabic and English (i.e. using words from the English language inserted in Arabic speech) such as words related to restaurants, shopping and the hospital so that they can use them when they go to those places. They think that this will not create confusion for the children and will not affect the child's use of Arabic in terms of pronunciation and ability to construct sentences. 37% believe that the language of communication with children at home should be Arabic in order for them to learn it in the correct way, and to strengthen their Arabic vocabulary before they enter school, in order to master Arabic. Because learning Arabic in the kindergarten stage is easy. On the other hand, if the child starts learning English before speaking Arabic, it would be difficult for him to learn Arabic and speak it later on. They believe that learning Arabic at a young age will help the children master Arabic pronunciation, read and memorize the Qur'an easily.

**Table 3: Mothers' views of the language they prefer to use when they speak with their children at home**

Responses	%
A. A mixture of Arabic and English	42%
B. Arabic only	37%
C. English only and Arabic learned from the community	13%
D. Speaking Arabic with the child by one parent and English by the other parent	8%

### 3.5 Mothers' Views on the impact of learning English on Arabic language acquisition

Results in Table 4 indicate that 77% of mothers in the sample believe that learning English in kindergarten does not have any negative effects on children's learning of Arabic, because people in the community around the children speak Arabic. The children will not confuse the two languages. The respondents stated that Arabic is easy to learn and the children know it and will never forget it, because it is their first language and the language of the Holy Qur'an. They added that the children can learn it at home from the family and from people around them in the community.

On the contrary, 23% believe that learning English in kindergarten will have negative effects on their learning of Arabic, because children who learn English first, find it difficult to learn Arabic afterwards. If a person wants to pronounce Arabic correctly, they must learn classical Arabic. The best age for acquiring correct pronunciation is in kindergarten, because Arabic is difficult and takes a long time to master. Some respondents noticed that when their nieces and nephews learned English before kindergarten, it had an impact on their learning of Arabic, which means that their Arabic was poor.

**Table 4: Mothers' views of the negative impact of learning English (L2) in kindergarten on learning Arabic (L1)**

Responses	%
A. Yes	68%
B. No	24%
C. Not sure	8%

### 3.6 Mothers' opinions on the impact of learning English in kindergarten on children's achievement in the later stages:

Table 5 demonstrates that 77% of the mothers in the sample believe that children learning English in kindergarten will be more superior in later stages of study than their peers who did not start studying English in kindergarten, and that learning English at an early age will help children acquire more information and cultural aspects better. What they learn in English will be transferred to Arabic, thus, the children will benefit from both languages simultaneously. Mothers in this group believe that those who study in English are better than those who study in Arabic only. A student who is poor in English will have less cultural knowledge and will be less superior academically than others. Those who do not know English will not advance in their education.

**Table 5: Mothers' Views of the positive impact of learning English in Kindergarten on children's academic performance in the later stages of study**

Responses	%
A. Yes	77%
B. No	23%

## 4. Discussion

Results of this study and the justifications mentioned by mothers in the sample revealed a number of common misconceptions about teaching English to children at the pre-school stage. In the next sections, the author will discuss those beliefs and present findings of research studies conducted on the acquisition of foreign languages by children in other countries.

#### **4.1 Misconceptions about teaching English to kindergarten children**

##### **4.1.1 Common beliefs about the relationship between learning a foreign language and age only**

Many mothers in the current study believe that age is the main factor in learning English (L2). They believe that children have an extraordinary ability to acquire a new language quickly and effortlessly, while many older children and adults find it difficult. They believe that the difficulties experienced by junior and senior high school students in the Kingdom in learning English are due to the fact that these students did not start learning English from kindergarten. Teaching students English at an early age will solve the problem. The misconceptions about foreign language learning in the current study agree with the misconceptions about foreign language learning found by Marinova-Todd, Marshall and Snow (2000) such as the misinterpretation of facts about the speed of language acquisition, the misconception about differences in language learning abilities at different ages, neurobiological factors, the mistaken belief that adult learners have poor ability to learn foreign languages, and the insufficient emphasis on the ability of adults to master a second language as native speakers. Although it is possible that older students are less able to master a foreign language than younger students, the differences between the different ages in learning a foreign language reflect differences in the educational attitudes more than differences in the ability or willingness to learn a foreign language.

##### **4.1.2 Misconceptions about the optimal age to learn English**

Many mothers in this study believe that the optimal age for teaching English to children is the pre-school stage, i.e. that is, the age of four and five, because children at this age will learn English easily and effortlessly, as if the children are a blank page or an empty cup that we can fill with whatever we want. In this regard, both Ladevie (1990) and Petrovic (1997) indicated that the optimal age for learning foreign languages had been the subject of controversy among linguists and educators for a very long time. The idea that young children learn a foreign language effortlessly and with a high degree of fluency when they are exposed to it in a natural environment has influenced the spread of the view that teaching foreign languages in the classroom at an early age may be beneficial. With the developments that have taken place in psychology and educational psychology, many studies have been conducted in many parts of the world based on the premise that young children are more able to learn foreign languages than adults and older children. There are still many foreign language teaching projects, but they are beset with many difficulties and obstacles. Despite the ongoing research, it did not reach a conclusive answer to the question of the optimal age for learning a foreign language. The fifties and sixties of the twentieth century witnessed a controversy over the teaching of foreign languages to children in kindergarten and primary grades versus older children. When Stern and Weinrib (1978) examined the results of research and educational programs in the United States, Britain, France and Canada, they found that these programs did not succeed in dispelling doubts about the effectiveness of teaching foreign languages at an early age. Foreign languages can be taught at any age. The choice of the age at which students may begin to learn a foreign language depends on the period of time required for the student to reach a certain level of proficiency, the amount of importance given to the study of a foreign language in the school curriculum, and the available educational and human resources.

As for the theories that adopt the point of view that younger students are more able to learn a foreign language than older students, one of those theories is the critical age theory or the critical period of Lenneberg (1964), which says that there is a deterioration in the ability to learn English related to the observed age, and that the optimal age for learning foreign languages is between two years old and puberty.

Another theory is the neurophysiological theory of Penfield and Roberts (1959) that states that the best age for learning foreign languages is the first decade of life. That is, for foreign language learning to be successful, it should take place before the age of ten, in line with the requirements of brain physiology. Andersson (1973) reported on Montessori that a child under the age of three is able to form language mechanisms and can speak any number of languages if they were used in his environment at birth. Andersson (1973) quoted White, director of the Kindergarten Project at Harvard University, and other observers and students as saying that the first three years of a child's life are the best period for learning.

The results of linguistic studies showed that younger students are more able to learn a foreign language than older students, including a study conducted by Magiste (1988) on German school students in Stockholm. First through fourth graders learned the courses in the mother tongue with an increasing amount of the second language, whether German or Swedish. The study found that elementary school students between the ages of 6-11 years were able to learn a kind of balance in the use of the Swedish and German languages faster than secondary school students between the ages of 14-19 years.

A study conducted by Vilke (1976) at the University of Zagreb on a group of students who are 9 years old and 60 students between the ages of 17-19 years, who studied the same scientific subject using the same teaching method and the same time period, which is nine hours showed that younger students outperformed older students in pronunciation accuracy and in learning the English phonemic system. The study recommended starting the teaching of the foreign language at the age of six or seven so that they can master its pronunciation and sound system, and then move forward after the stage of mental maturity to more complex and abstract uses of the language.

In Brazil, Ferrari (2002) conducted a study on two samples, each of which studied English for two hours a week for seven years. One group began learning English at the age of eight and the other at the age of thirty-one. The results confirmed the view that learning a foreign language before puberty results in better performance in all skills including fluency, rate of speech and appropriate use of grammar.

Another reason why an early age is preferable for learning a foreign language was given by Qizi (2021) who declared that The younger the child, the less vocabulary he has in native language. But at the same time, his speech needs are also less. A small child has fewer spheres of communication than an older one. He does not have to solve complex communication problems. This means that, while mastering a foreign language, the child does not feel such a huge gap between the possibilities in his native language and the foreign language he is learning, and his sense of success will be higher than that of older children.

On the other hand, another group of studies proved that older children are better able to learn foreign languages than younger children. One of these is a study by Cenoz (2002) on 60 secondary school students whose mother tongue is either Basque or Spanish, with Basque as the language of the instruction in the courses except for Spanish and English courses. All the students studied English for six years, but half of them started learning English in the third grade, while the other half started learning it in the sixth grade. At the end of the study, test results indicated that the English proficiency level of older children was higher than that of younger children.

Likewise, Stockmal, and Others (1994) found that the ability of kindergarten children to recognize the differences between patterns heard from several foreign languages was less than the ability of elementary school students and university students, especially when the speakers or phrases differ, although kindergarten and primary school students were able to recognize the phrases. What is heard when the two languages differ is like that of adults.

In a third study by Chang (1986) on a group of Singaporean, Chinese, Malay and Indian children between the ages of 3.5-6 years, enrolled in six early childhood centers, results of tests of English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil as a foreign language showed that children found it difficult to learn English as a second/foreign language simultaneously. The amount of difficulty varied according to the degree of exposure to the languages and the socioeconomic background of the children. Although there were difficulties in learning English and Malay, the difficulties were less than learning English and Chinese simultaneously.

In addition to the foregoing, Singleton (2003) indicated that there are large individual differences in learning foreign languages, and that the ability to learn foreign languages is continuous and linear.

In Sweden, Ekstrand (1975) conducted a study on 2200 immigrant children belonging to 36 nationalities. The children were distributed over 9 classes in comprehensive schools. Ekstrand administered tests to students and questionnaires to teachers to examine the relationship between age, length of stay, a number of functional Swedish as a second language skills, nonverbal intelligence, and socio-emotional adjustment. The researcher found a strong correlation between age and all linguistic variables except for free oral conversation. There was no correlation between the duration of residence and the language variables except for free oral conversation. There was no correlation between the social emotional variables, age and length of stay. The results for intelligence were inconsistent. They revealed a positive correlation between language and age, meaning that the ability to learn a second language increases with age during the period between the ages of 7-17 years. However, the results did not reveal an optimal age for learning a foreign language. Rather, they proved that the theories of the optimal age for language learning, which were put forward by Penfield and Lenneberg, which say that the best age for learning a foreign language is the period before adulthood, are incorrect.

Moreover, Olson and Samuel (1972) declared that the previous theories of Lenneberg, Penfield, and Roberts are not based on deduction or on direct observation and are not supported by results of scientific experiments. Other studies that claim to find evidence in favor of early foreign language learning are either anecdotal stories or are limited in scope and lack control procedures. As for the studies that aimed to obtain a high degree of accuracy and precision, they did not succeed in providing evidence of the effectiveness of teaching a foreign language at an early age. These theories and studies could not provide scientific evidence to support their views, except in the area of child's acquisition of pronunciation and phonetics at the age of five. Olson and Samuels

believe that the skill in using a foreign language comes as a result of the amount of time a student spends studying the language as affected by the age of the learner, noting that older learners are more efficient.

#### **4.1.3 Believing that learning English (L2) at a young age does not negatively affect learning of Arabic**

A large percentage of mothers in the current study believe that English learning at an early age will not negatively affect the young child's learning of Arabic, such as mixing Arabic and English during conversation, the wrong use of Arabic grammar, confusing the masculine and feminine genders, reducing bound morphemes at the end of Arabic words, and adding Arabic prefixes and suffixes to English words, the inability to pronounce Arabic sounds correctly such as ق ض ع غ, confusing the direction of writing (right to left and vice versa), mixing English and Arabic letters and words, and the tendency to use English instead of the mother tongue (preferring to use the foreign language) and gradually forgetting the mother tongue. Here, too, the research results do not agree on the effect of learning a foreign language on the mother tongue, and the relationship between age and loss of the mother tongue. Issa and Al-Mutawa (1998) analyzed students' scores from thirty primary schools in Kuwait in Arabic, mathematics and science courses in the year preceding English language teaching and their achievement in the following year. They found that the achievement level of second grade students in Arabic was not affected by their study of English. That is, teaching English to children in the first grade for three hours a week had neither a negative nor a positive effect on children's achievement in Arabic.

The results of a three-year study conducted by Jia and Aaronson (2003) on ten Chinese children who immigrated to the United States between the ages of 5-16 years old showed that children who arrived in the United States at the age of nine and under had changed their preferred language from the mother tongue to the second language in the first year of their arrival, as they lived in an environment that was richer in the second language than the first language. As a result, they became more proficient in the second language. As for older children, they maintained their preference for the first language during the three-year period, as they lived in an environment richer in the first language than the second language. They maintained the first language and were more proficient in it than the second language. The interaction between the mastery level of the first language, interaction between peers, social abilities, and cultural preferences together led to the transition to the stronger language or the maintenance of its use.

Another group of studies showed that learning a foreign language by children at an early age has led to language loss, i.e. forgetting the mother tongue. In a study by Hansen-Strain (1990) conducted with 4 American children, ages 3, 4, 7, and 9 years old, who studied Japanese for two years and a half during their stay in Japan, the two older children attended a Japanese school. Hansen-Strain indicated that the younger the child, the fastest he/she is in forgetting his/her mother tongue in the absence of the educational environment (they forgot the English language).

Merino (1983) studied the phenomenon of language loss among 41 children in kindergarten to fourth grade who spoke both Spanish and English. The researcher found differences between kindergarten and upper grade children in the use of Spanish. The children's performance deteriorated significantly by the time they reached the fourth grade, and there were no significant differences between the different grades in understanding the Spanish language. When the students were tested two years later, the researcher found that the ability to use English improved in all students, but their ability to use Spanish deteriorated. The severe cases of language loss occurred in children who used both Spanish and English with the same speaker.

Orellana (1994) conducted a study with children aged 5-6 years who spoke mainly Spanish at the beginning of the study (Spanish is the strong language). Each child had a father who spoke the language and they learned English easily. In the early stages of the study, the strength of the English language was manifested in the English-speaking heroes during the children's play, in the interaction between the heroes, and in role-playing. Three years later, the strong language situation reversed. Observations and interviews with the parents revealed that the children no longer spoke Spanish automatically with their peers or with their parents and were reluctant to use Spanish even when asked or pressured to speak it. In other words, the children reversed their dominant language after three years.

Bettoni (1989) found that language loss (forgetting Italian) among Italian immigrants in Australia's occurred at an unexpectedly rapid rate. One dialect of Italian was the mother tongue of the first generation of immigrants at home, Standard Italian was the second language, and English was the third language. Children learned the Italian dialect at home, and after a short period of time they started learning English outside their homes, and Standard Italian was their weak language. There was confusion between the two dialects, and the line between colloquial and classical, which parents kept at home, was lost. The children's Italian became English. They felt the inadequacy of the transition from the vernacular to English, and they began to gradually exclude Italian from everyday use.

In Kuwait, kindergarten teachers were concerned that learning a foreign language at a young age may have a negative impact on their mother-tongue (Arabic), especially their writing skills (Al-Yaseen, 2021).

In Saudi Arabia, the author conducted an exploratory study on a sample of 40 male and female students who are the children of her acquaintances, friends, and some colleagues in different educational stages (from primary to university) who attended international schools in the Kingdom, where they were mainly taught English since kindergarten with one Arabic course, the author found that the strong language among all students was English, and Arabic was the weak language to varying degrees, especially in reading and writing. As for the preferred language in communicating with others, 35% used English only, 25% mixed Arabic and English while speaking, and 40% spoke colloquial Arabic and inserted English words (Al-Jarf, 2020b; Al-Jarf, 2005).

The literature revealed a number of factors that lead children to lose (forget) or maintain their mother tongue, as shown by the results of a number of studies. Verhoeven (1997) reviewed a group of prior studies and concluded that if the view of the mother tongue is prestigious and has a status in society, foreign language learning will not have negative effects on the first language. But if the mother tongue does not have a prestige, it is then forgotten. Forgetting the mother tongue, as Crawford (1996) pointed out, is not imposed from outside, but rather from internal changes in the language-speaking group. The choice of language is affected by the social changes that societies are exposed to. These shifts include demographic factors, economic forces, the media, and determinants of social status. The shift to another language also reflects changes in social and cultural values that include encroachment of individualism, pragmatism, and materialism. Returning to the mother tongue (the language of the minorities) requires a change in values, which cannot come from outside, but rather depends on the language-speaking community and what it does with it. It requires knowledge of the current stage of linguistic forgetting, and this requires creating leadership for the ethnic group.

Teaching the mother tongue to children, as Wooden and Hurley (1992) suggested, should include meaningful activities for the children in an atmosphere that provides moral support and uses an input into education that takes into account the development of the child and emphasizes the national culture and the use of literature written by authors belonging to the same culture. Among the factors that lead to forgetting the mother tongue are cultural and demographic influences such as receiving all education in English and communicating with other children in English.

#### **4.1.4 The Importance of Learning the Mother Tongue First**

Findings of the current study show that about a quarter of the mothers in the sample (23%) believe that it is necessary for children to learn Arabic in kindergarten before moving on to learning English in the later stages, because they believe in the importance of children acquiring vocabulary and concepts in Arabic and the correct pronunciation of Arabic words.

Results of many prior studies emphasize the importance of children mastering their mother tongue before learning a foreign language. Gallagher (2001) indicated that the placement of young children in early childhood programs by international schools without mother tongue support has negative effects on the children. Dolson (1985) indicated that learning the mother tongue would help children build an academic foundation that would contribute to their academic and professional success in the future. The results of a study conducted by Wagner (1998) with 186 children whose mother tongue is Berber and whose second language is Arabic, showed that the ability to read in the mother tongue constitutes the important base on which the child builds his reading skills in the second language. The results of a study conducted by Durgunoglu (1998) with 46 first grade children showed that good ability to read in Spanish (the mother tongue) had an effect on and helped develop their ability to read in English (the second language). Hancock (2002) found that Spanish-speaking kindergartners who were exposed to Spanish-language books scored higher on a test of readiness-to-reading skills than their Spanish-speaking peers who were exposed to books written in English. There were no statistically significant differences between them and their English-speaking peers who were exposed to books written in English.

Another line of research has proven that children who face difficulties in the mother tongue or in reading in the mother tongue suffer from difficulties in learning the second language such as Sparks and Ganschow (1991) who reviewed studies that revolved around learning styles and emotional factors to identify the relationship between the mother tongue and the difficulties faced by students in learning a foreign language. They proposed the hypothesis of using linguistic coding, which states that students who suffer from difficulties in learning a foreign language may be caused by a deficiency in the use of linguistic coding, which interferes with their ability to learn a foreign language. Another study Dufva and Voeten (1999) with 160 Finnish students who were in the first grade (age 7 years) showed that diagnosing the students' reading skills in the mother tongue would improve their ability to learn a second language. and that the important role played by phonemic memory in the foreign language indicates that training pupils in the phonetics of the foreign language would develop students' proficiency in the foreign language.

#### **4.1.5 Misconceptions about the positive effect of learning a foreign language on achievement**

Results of the current study show that a large percentage of mothers believe that learning English by young children has a positive effect on their academic achievement in the later stages of study and would make them more aware of cultural issues than their peers who did not learn English at an early age. Here, too, research studies in the literature did not reach conclusive results on the

effect of learning English at an early age on students' achievement in later stages of foreign language learning in particular and other courses in general. In Saudi Arabia, Al-Hazmi (2001) investigated the degree of effectiveness of learning English in the elementary grades on the achievement level of junior high school female students who studied English in the elementary school and their attitudes towards learning English. Results of an achievement English language test administered to 558 students in the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade in public and private schools in Jeddah indicated that private school students scored higher in English than those who went to public schools and their attitudes towards studying English were more positive than those of government school students.

Similarly, Eichmann and Ford (1977) conducted a study with two groups of children in kindergarten, where the first group studied French as a second language for half an hour a day three times a week, and the second group studied French for only 15 minutes a week. Teaching aids were used to enhance the linguistic stimuli and the children learned words first and then sentences. The researchers found that the foreign language experience improved their non-tangible (abstract) concepts and their general vocabulary acquisition skills, and that it strengthened the elements of the curriculum.

In a study by Goncz and Kodzopeljic (1991) with two groups of children to find out if learning a foreign language by the first group in pre-school, whether by means of traditional methods or immersion programs, was linked to the knowledge of the relationship between the linguistic system, metalinguistic development and other behavioral systems in society. The study also aimed to find out whether there is a relationship between knowing the Hungarian and Serbo-Croatian languages by the second group and the linguistic system, metalinguistic development and other behavioral systems in the society. The children acquired the language from a program that uses the mother tongue as a medium of instruction inside the kindergarten and from uncontrolled situations outside the kindergarten. The second study aimed to identify the differences in learning to read in the foreign language among groups of children with different backgrounds. The results of the two studies showed that learning two languages at an early age may affect the children's metalinguistic awareness. Children who learned two languages in kindergarten also showed more developed reading skills such as concentration, synthesis and abstraction than children who learned one language only. The results emphasize the importance of the environment and analytical approaches to linguistic phenomena.

A similar study in China found that three years of English immersion instruction was more effective in developing Chinese kindergarten children's English sociopragmatic awareness in terms of tasks that involve request strategies as opposed to reply strategies. The results suggested that, apart from immersion teaching, speech acts are another important variable affecting second language sociopragmatic competence in early childhood (Zhang, & Yan, 2012).

Furthermore, the viewpoint of mothers in this study on the effect of learning English at an early age on academic achievement contradicts the results of two studies in the literature. In the first study, evaluation of second grade children who attended kindergartners in Switzerland, started learning German as a second language from age four or five and continued throughout the elementary school grades, demonstrated that teaching children two languages did not have decisive effects on children's learning of their mother tongue, nor their academic achievement (Bregy, Brohi and Fuchs, 2000). Similarly, findings of the second study demonstrated that programs that teach English and French to English-speaking children in Canada had no effect on the children's mental development, nor academic achievement in the various courses (Swain, 1974). Although children in immersion programs lagging behind in their language proficiency, they were able to catch up with their peers when they started studying language arts courses. Nevertheless, secondary school students' English language skills were not affected. Elementary and secondary school students' French language skills were better than those enrolled in regular classes. The students' reading skills were better because they started to read in French first. Immersion programs developed and reinforced the French accent that the children learn in class.

#### ***4.2 Factors affecting success in learning English***

Results of the current study showed that many mothers believe that the weakness of middle or high school students in English is due to the fact that they did not start learning English in kindergarten or first grade. They did not address other factors affecting foreign language learning at all. In fact, success in learning a foreign language does not depend on age only, but rather on a set of interrelated and overlapping factors, which can be summarized as follows:

##### ***4.2.1 Intelligence***

A study on 52 children aged 6-7 years speaking both French and Breton and 38 children aged 6-7 years speaking only French took the Kaufman Children's Progressive Matrix Test and the Wechsler Intelligence Test. Results of bilingual children were higher than the average score of monolingual children in all mental tests (Planche, 2002).

#### **4.2.2 Mental readiness**

A study with 855 people at the age of thirty-nine who received intensive training in a range of language skills at the US State Department showed a high correlation between mental readiness and the ability to speak and read. Motivation and anxiety showed associations pointing to the importance of the role played by the individual in language learning. Among the factors revealed by the study are the individuals' ability to self-learn and be an autonomous learner, the adoption of training programs that are based on the students' characteristics, and getting to know the characteristics that would affect the training of students in the language until they reach higher levels of proficiency (Ehrman and Oxford, 1995).

#### **4.2.3 Mental Maturity**

Research results showed that older students were superior to younger children in a foreign language due to their mental maturity. The theory of mental maturity states that learning a foreign language is an ongoing process. The study findings emphasized the importance of tutored learning in the classroom to obtain better results (Vogel, 1991).

#### **4.2.4 The ability to use linguistic coding**

Sparks and Ganschow (1991) reviewed studies on learning styles and emotional factors to identify the relationship between the mother tongue and the difficulties faced by students in learning a foreign language. They proposed the hypothesis of using linguistic symbols, which says that difficulties that students have in learning a foreign language may be caused by a lack of ability to use linguistic symbols that which their ability to learn a foreign language.

#### **4.2.5 The Role of Parents and Teachers**

Mushi (2002) conducted a study to identify the role of parents of 42 immigrant children in the United States, between the ages of 18 months and five years, in language learning and language development, and how parents help their children learn English and preserve their mother tongue. The children were living at home with parents who did not know English, and at school they learned English from teachers whose mother tongue was English. Results of a questionnaire applied to parents and the evidence of home visit notes, recordings and schedule of activities showed that parents included several factors that supported children's learning of two languages: Parents' attitudes towards language in general, interest in the mother and second languages, activities that bring together parents and children, and direct language exchange between parents and the child. Other factors are teacher flexibility, communication between the teachers and parents, school support for English lessons for parents, and parents' sensitivity to school support. One of the problems is the parents' lack of proficiency in English to be able to communicate effectively with the teachers about the children's progress in school, and the lack of a linguistic link between what the child learns at home and at school. Another study by Raillard (1996) found that the mother's relationship with the child and the child's relationship with the teacher affect his/her desire to acquire fluency in the language he/she learns.

#### **4.2.6 The need for communication in and outside the classroom**

The foreign language teachers can succeed in their mission if their instruction is based on the perception that children learn the foreign language in the nursery and from the street, where the infant uses meaning to learn the language and not language to learn the meaning. The need of the street child to communicate with children who speak another language constitutes a more effective learning situation than teaching that takes place in the ordinary classroom (Andersson, 1973). Chesterfield and Others (1982) followed up 4 four-year-olds whose main language was Spanish and who attended a bilingual school for a year. Those children who used English more with their peers in the classroom and use it as time goes on are the ones who had a higher proficiency level in English.

#### **4.2.7 The personality of the teacher**

Dragos (1996) indicated that the teacher's personality is the most important factor in teaching and learning foreign languages in terms of the way the students and the teacher get to know each other in the early stages, such as using open dialogue, the teaching technique he uses, and his/her ability to motivate the students and encourage them to ask questions, think independently, search and explore. Masgoret (2003) found that the teacher's attitudes, motivation, students' achievement in foreign language, attitudes towards some teaching strategies, grammar, students' motivation and achievement are important factors in successful foreign language teaching.

#### **4.2.8 Challenges facing Kindergarten teachers**

Alenezi, Ihmeideh & Alshaboul (2022) reported that kindergarten teachers face challenges in teaching English as a foreign language to children such as lack of teacher preparation and training, English curriculum weaknesses and deficiencies, and teachers' proficiency level in English are key challenges that kindergarten teachers face. Likewise, Hegde, Hewett & Terrell (2018) reported lack of preparedness to work with kindergarten children, challenges to meet the children's needs, and the need for more professional training opportunities in teaching English language to children in kindergarten.

In Kuwait, Al-Darwish, S. (2013) conducted a study with kindergarten schoolteachers who speak Arabic as their first language but have no experience or knowledge of teaching or speaking the target language (English), in addition to surveying the parents and analyzing the English curriculum to identify areas that need to be improved in the kindergarten teachers' program at College of Basic Education. The study found that teachers lack educational training, needs to know English language curriculum, real communication skills and innovation in the classroom, and competence in teaching English to kindergarten children.

#### **4.2.9 Use of successful instructional programs**

According to a report published by the Center for Applied Linguistics in the United States, after reviewing comparative studies on language instruction and conducting interviews with language teaching specialists in 19 countries, successful foreign language teaching programs are characterized by the following: (1) starting language teaching at a young age (age 6 in 4 countries); (2) a coherent and well-formulated framework based on national standards and curriculum objectives; (3) well-trained teachers with pre-service and in-service training; (4) innovative teaching methods such as integrating language and content and integrating language teaching strategies; (5) strong national and educational regional policies; and (6) preserving the heritage and the regional language and the languages of indigenous people (Pufahl & Christian 2001).

#### **4.2.10 Intentional instruction in the classroom**

A study on 50 children between the ages of 3-5 years whose mother tongue was Spanish found that children enrolled in programs that teach two languages learnt English faster than children who stayed home during day time hours. The children also maintained the same level of Spanish proficiency (Rodriguez, Diaz, Duran & Espinos, 1995).

#### **4.2.11 Teaching methods**

Breitenstein (1973) indicated the need to use foreign language teaching methods suitable to the age of the children. The younger the students, the more direct the teaching method should be. The teaching method should rely on concrete situations and meet the child's need for play and imitation. Whether a child learns a foreign language at home or abroad, training and reinforcement should go hand in hand at all times. If education takes place in the child's country and a small number of classes are given, instruction should be conducted by a teacher who speaks the foreign and mother languages and should be more quality instruction.

In Turkey, preservice English teacher candidates practiced teaching English to very young children under their instructor's supervision. Findings suggested that preservice teachers' attitudes changed substantially after their practiced teaching. A colorful atmosphere in the classroom and a variety of activities attract children's attention, raise their interest in learning and help create a more successful learning environment (Bekleyen, 2011).

Among the factors that affect the degree of effectiveness of foreign language learning programs are the distribution of students into groups, the design of the curriculum, the hierarchical grouping of language teaching experiences, the emotional aspect of the learning process, and educational materials and resources (Szymanski, 1979).

#### **4.2.12 Visual learning**

In order for teaching English to students at an early age to be successful, focus should be placed on visual learning because it is familiar to the children, and they use it automatically. Drawing and designing visual activities based on problem-solving can be used (Tomasevic Dancevic, 1999).

#### **4.2.13 Use of technology**

Results of studies by Al-Jarf (2021b) and Al-Jarf (2021c) indicated that 75% of the parents believe that the iPad has a positive effect on children's language learning (6% believe the iPad has a positive effect on learning Arabic only; 13% think it has a positive effect on learning English only; 56% reported that it has a positive effect on learning both languages); 2% indicated that the iPad has some effect on their children's language learning; and 23% pointed out that the iPad has no effect on language learning in children at all. The iPad was more effective in helping young children in language learning (1-6 years old) than older children in grades 1-3 grades 4-6 respectively. Older children mainly use the iPad to play games and watch movies. More children under the age of 6 use the iPad to learn English than Arabic. In English they use the iPad to 21.88% use Arabic Alphabet apps; 15.6% use apps to learn the Quran; 12.5% use animal apps; and 12.5% use apps to learn numeracy and arithmetic. The iPad helps kindergarten children to learn the alphabet, names of animals, fruits, colors, continents, and numbers. They learn from apps, nursery rhymes, stories, flash cards, games, cartoons, and movies. The iPad helps children focus on and engage in learning because the apps are interactive and use color, animation, audio, and video. Negative effects of the iPad on language learning include learning bad language, bad handwriting and some children no longer read print books.

#### **4.2.14 Playing language learning games**

Angelova and Lekova (1995) reported results of a study with 14 teachers and 183 kindergarten children aged 4-6 years. They found that the use of kinetic games in teaching a foreign language had a role in developing children's proficiency in the foreign language, acquiring broader and deeper information, and acquiring good language skills. The competitive nature of the games and the movements during the game helped the children to remember and use foreign language words and phrases on their own. In addition, play improves children's ability to practice the knowledge and skills they have acquired in other situations. Also, psychomotor games have helped children's steady growth and cultural information.

Other studies found that using educational and electronic games as a tool for teaching English vocabulary to young Arab children (5 and 6 years old) increased the children's engagement, improved their knowledge absorption and retention, and gave them the opportunity to see real word application) (Saleh & Althaqafi, 2022; AlNatour & Hijazi, 2018). Likewise, developing a user-friendly, free electronic device (digital toys) developed with Raspberry Pi and makes use of the RFID technology to teach English to pre-kindergarten children proved to be effective in learning English. Pre-kindergarten children were enthusiastic about playing with the digital toys, learning was enjoyable, and the toys were suitable for use as an educational toy for pre-kindergarten children (Abdi, & Cavus, 2019).

#### **4.2.15 Children's positive attitudes and motivation**

Children's attitudes towards the learning situation and their reactions towards foreign-speaking groups and foreigners, their confidence in using the foreign language, and their motivation towards learning the foreign language have an impact on their learning of the English language. (Masgoret, 2003). Gardner and Lalonde (1985) added that learning a foreign language depends on ability and motivation. Preferably, this motivation should be viewed from a socio-pedagogical perspective. Motivation is influenced by factors related to the individual's desire to accept foreign behavioral patterns. Language is the most important component of an individual's identity. The extent of his success in integrating another language is related to the child's attitude towards ethnic relations, ability, and linguistic factors. The cultural milieu in which one learns a language influences their attitudes that are the main support for this motivation. This social educational theory applies to older children in formal educational situations (i.e. in the classroom and at school).

Motivating the child to learn a foreign language depends on the teacher's and parents' attitudes. Young children learn a foreign language if it is associated with purposeful activities other than language learning (Perren, 1972).

#### **4.2.16 Time allotted to language learning**

A study with students in two schools in California and two in Canada to identify the time period that minority students need to learn English as a second language to develop their ability to speak the foreign language and other skills necessary to continue their studies successfully found that the students needed between 3-5 years to develop their ability to speak English, and between 4-7 years to develop language skills necessary to continue studying, despite the fact that the two schools that were chosen in California are considered among the most successful educational institutions for teaching English to minority students. The researchers obtained similar results with students studying in Canada. Results revealed a widening gap in academic performance between minority and English-speaking students, which was attributed to the insufficient hours allocated to the study of English during the regular school day. This means that they may need additional hours in the afternoon or during the summer holiday. The researchers concluded that foreign language teaching policies based on the belief in the speed of English acquisition, and allocating one-year for English language programs are unrealistic (Hakuta, Butler & Witt (2000).

A study by Carroll's (1967) on 2775 students in the fourth year of university studying French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish as a major in 203 universities, to identify the relationship between university students' proficiency level in English and the duration of their stay in the United States, reported that the students' achievement in listening and speaking skills was low, and there was a relationship between the duration of stay abroad and the students' language skills. Students who started learning French or Spanish in the primary stage and continued to learn it, as well as students who belong to families speaking a foreign language at home, outperformed other students with low readiness. They were also able to compensate for the deficiency through frequent study, training, and sometimes studying abroad. Male and female students showed similar abilities to learn a foreign language. Students who study in large universities outperform their peers who study in small universities and institutes, as well as students who study in private universities over those who study in public universities.

#### **4.2.17 Impact of Foreign Housemaids on children's language acquisition**

A sample of 300 mothers in Saudi Arabia (SA) with children under the age of six was surveyed. The mothers reported that upon arrival in the SA, 3% of the housemaids speak Arabic from previous work experience in the Kingdom, 10% speak English and 87% speak their native language only. Those who speak English, speak it with a non-native accent. All maids regardless of their nationality, educational level, and native language pick up the colloquial Arabic form spoken by family members among whom they live, i.e. they learn by immersion). They do not learn to read or write Arabic. A year after arrival, mothers added that 8% of the

housemaids have a very intelligible speech in Arabic; 44% have a somewhat intelligible speech; 32% have a little intelligible speech and 16% have an unintelligible speech. Two years after arrival, 14% of the housemaids have an excellent command of Arabic; 52% have a good command; 32% have a fair command; and 2% have a poor command of Arabic. The housemaids' spoken Arabic is characterized by incorrect pronunciation, faulty sentence structures and limited vocabulary. About half the children in the sample imitate the housemaid all the time and one third imitate her sometimes particularly when they first start to speak Arabic at age two and three. As a result, children cannot produce Arabic phonemes correctly. They make mistakes in plural formation and gender assignment, but this is only temporary in Arabic language acquisition even if the family does not have a housemaid. Some children speak two forms of Arabic: one with the housemaid and the other with their parents and siblings. Few more children learn to speak the housemaid's native language (Al-Jarf, 2022f).

### **5. Recommendations and Conclusion**

This study attempted to identify mothers' attitudes towards teaching English to kindergarten children. The results of the study showed great fascination with the wide spread of English language and dominance of the English language in all life domains. The majority of mothers in the sample feel the need to start teaching English to children in kindergarten. The results also revealed some misconceptions among the mothers about the methods of learning English in childhood and adulthood, and the impact of learning English on the mother tongue (Arabic) and academic achievement, and that success and failure in learning English is related to age. These are common stereotypes among many educated and the non-educated people, and even among the students themselves, ignoring other factors that affect language learning, such as the teacher's qualifications, competencies, characteristics, the curriculum, educational resources, teaching techniques, motivation, students' attitudes, mental readiness, and others.

The striking findings in the current study is the indifference of many mothers and intellectuals who call for teaching English at an early age ignoring the future of the Arabic language, and the dangers that the Arabic language is facing as a result of the invasion of the English language, and its penetration in all aspects of life. The current status quo in the Arab region which imposes on us the need to preserve and develop our language (Arabic). We fear that a day might come when parents and intellectuals will demand the teaching of science and mathematics in English in our schools (as it happened in Malaysia few years ago). We might reach a stage when Arab children demand the abolition of the teaching in Arabic and suffice with teaching one course of Arabic and Islamic Studies as long as English is the dominant language inside and outside the country, and as long as it is the dominant language in all fields.

If it is necessary to teach the English language, it should not be at the expense of the first language, vis Arabic. The language of conversation at home should be Arabic only, together with having children memorize surahs from the Holy Qur'an from early childhood, so that they acquire the correct pronunciation of Arabic words. Mastery of the mother tongue is not achieved by birth, nor genetically, but by learning and intensive practice. In addition, Arabic differs from other languages in the presence of two different forms: A spoken colloquial form, and the Classical Arabic form that we use in formal situations and in printed materials. Classical Arabic differs from the vernacular, and should be taught and learned, because it is not acquired automatically nor spontaneously.

Furthermore, language is the vessel of culture. When a child learns a language, he/she learns the language and its culture as well, and learns concepts, way of thinking, and the ability to express himself/herself orally and in writing, especially in the case of Arabic where the spoken form is different from written form. So, if the focus is on English from early childhood, it will become the language of daily use, the language of culture, and the children will be more attached to English, will be proud of English and have respect for English more than Arabic. If a child does not learn Arabic at a young age, he will not be able to use it even in reading the Holy Qur'an. Since many parents are too busy, it goes without saying that they do not have time to teach their children Arabic at home, and even if they wanted to, the children will evade the learning of Arabic because they feel that it is a burden, and because of the ease of English as it is the language they learn and communicate with at school and with each other. Some children who study in English-medium schools or kindergartens tend to use English when speaking to their parents at home. They listen to what the father and mother say in Arabic, but answer and talk to them in English. Some parents converse with their children in English only. For children to feel that they have a bond with their homeland, to the Arab nation, and the Arabic language, they should learn all the subjects in Arabic, regardless of all justifications, especially at a young age.

As for learning English, one can learn it at any age, if the appropriate conditions are available. Many of the students who studied in Turkey, Germany and Italy in the past were able to study medicine, engineering, and other disciplines after taking an intensive course in those languages for six months or a year only. Whoever visits countries such as Korea, Japan and China will find that many Koreans, Japanese and Chinese are poor in English, but this did not constitute an obstacle to their scientific and technological advancement. In a country like Greece, teaching English begins in the third grade, but all university courses are taught in Greek, not English as it is the case in many Arab countries. For the above reasons, the current study recommends the following:

- Emphasizing the importance of teaching Arabic to very young children as it is our mother tongue and our National Language and to emphasize the national, linguistic, and psychological entity of the children, so that they acquire basic language skills in Arabic, which is the basis on which the child's education is built in the later stages. Education at the pre-school and elementary school levels is originally a national education, so students should be able to learn their mother tongue and their national heritage before embarking on learning the English language and its culture.
- Raising the awareness of parents' and people in our society of the way children learn their mother tongue and the foreign language, the impact of foreign language learning on the first language and achievement, and the factors that lead to students' success in learning English and/or Arabic through seminars, panel discussions and television programs. What matters is not when learning English starts, but how it is taught. There is also a need to educate parents and others about the economic, political and historical consequences of foreign language teaching decisions.
- Developing effective methods for teaching Arabic to students in all grade levels, all school textbooks and Arabic curricula, to increase their attractiveness to students. Training courses for Arabic language teachers at all stages should be offered to raise their efficiency and level of performance.
- Restructuring Arabic language arts courses and textbooks for all grade levels starting from kindergarten by defining the language learning skills that Arabic language instruction and Arabic language school textbooks should focus on to produce better learning gains especially in reading. The curriculum should be based on identification of word identification skills, reading comprehension, advance organizers, text structure, context analysis, cohesion, and study skills and an attractive reading lesson design (Al-Jarf, 2022a; Al-Jarf, 2019; Al-Jarf, 2001a; Al-Jarf, 2001b; Al-Jarf, 2001c; Al-Jarf, 2001d; Al-Jarf, 2001e; Al-Jarf, 2007; Al-Jarf, 1994; Al-Jarf, 1992; Al-Jarf, 1989; Al-Jarf, 2003; Al-Jarf, 1995; Al-Jarf, 2004d; Al-Jarf, 2004).
- Writing attractive short stories and books for young children so that they will be attracted to read them in order to enhance and develop their language skills in Arabic (Al-Jarf, 2015).
- Students who go to international schools that teach all the courses in English or private schools that teach English between 5-10 hours should be encouraged to read to develop their reading and speaking skills in Arabic in a variety of subject fields including multicultural children's short stories (Al-Jarf, 2022a; Al-Jarf, 2015). The children can use Arabic mobile apps and Arabic language learning websites to learn the Arabic alphabet, numbers, names of animals, colors, fruits, seasons, continents, and so on. They can learn Arabic from games, cartoons, movies, nursery rhymes, stories, flashcards, and YouTube videos on their iPads, tablets, mobile, or laptop. They can also use mobile audiobooks to listen to simplified stories in both English and Arabic followed by listening comprehension questions. The students can engage in collaborative mobile ebook reading activities in and outside the classroom (Al-Jarf, 2021a; Al-Jarf, 2021b; Al-Jarf, 2021c; Al-Jarf, 2021d; Al-Jarf, 2020a; Al-Jarf, 2004).
- Since parents play a vital role of in enhancing English and Arabic proficiency among their children, they can read Arabic stories to their young children, encourage them to speak and express themselves freely and give them a chance to talk about pictures and toys in Arabic. They can also teach children Arabic songs as these will be easy to memorize and thus the child will memorize the vocabulary and structures in the songs. Parents should guide their children in accessing English and Arabic learning websites and should supervise their children, help them during distance learning language classes (Al-Jarf, 2022c; Al-Jarf, 2022d; Al-Jarf, 2022e; Al-Jarf, 2015; Al-Jarf, 2004a).
- Parents should follow up their children's linguistic development and note weaknesses, try to fix them and seek professional help when necessary.

Finally, trends in teaching foreign and native languages to students of all ages need to be investigated once every few years to find out the status of foreign and native language curricula, teaching strategies, instructional technologies, assessment and effect on students' achievement level and skill development in L1 and L2 are open for further research in the future.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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