
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

How Parents Promote English and Arabic Language Proficiency in Elementary School Children in Saudi Arabia

Reima Al-Jarf

Full Professor of English and Translation Studies, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Corresponding Author: Reima Al-Jarf, **E-mail:** reima.aljarf@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

In Saudi Arabia, English is taught starting from kindergarten at National Public and Private Schools. At International schools, English is the medium of instruction. This study aims to explore how parents promote children's language development, their evaluation of their children's proficiency level, which language the children use in communicating with family members and on WhatsApp. Surveys with parents revealed that English is stronger and preferred by children in International Schools and many children in Private Schools. More parents worry about their children's proficiency level in English than Arabic and promote English more than Arabic. Watching English cartoons and movies, using English educational and entertainment apps/programs, playing English games, and enrolling the children in English courses during holidays are common home-based activities. To promote Arabic, some parents hire a tutor. Others encourage their children to read Arabic stories and watch Arabic cartoons. Results and recommendations are given in detail.

| KEYWORDS

Elementary school children, Saudi children, learning English, learning Arabic, family support

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 28 August 2022

PUBLISHED: 30 August 2021

DOI: 10.32996/jpbs.2022.2.4

1. Introduction

Students of all grade levels in almost every country study English as a second or foreign language at Public and/or Private Schools with a varying number of hours allocated to the study of English per week. Due to the importance of learning English, many parents play a role at home in fostering children's language learning. Tamis-LeMonda and Rodriguez (2008) reported that children's experiences at home are critical to early language learning. They emphasized three aspects of the learning environment that promote children's language learning: Learning activities (e.g., daily book reading), parenting quality (e.g., responsiveness) and learning materials (e.g., age-appropriate books and toys). Parents with a better income and education are better able to provide more effective learning experiences for their young children. The nourishing parental involvement style is associated with and significantly predicts higher scores on elementary school children's language and mathematics tests in Chile (Gubbins & Otero, 2016). Home language use was also significantly associated with dual language gains as was maternal Spanish vocabulary knowledge (Collins, 2014).

In addition, Kalayci & Öz (2018) indicated that parents get involved in their children's English language education directly and indirectly through a variety of activities that can be used at home to nurture children's language development. For example, Van Houten, Sadok, Burr, Lapid, Packham, Larson, Parker and Scardina (2020) prepared a guide for parents and caregivers with simple, fun activities to use with children in elementary and middle school to enhance their language and literacy in English. The guide includes practices such as asking and answering questions about a story, a topic or informational text, and/or an experience; supporting young children's learning of English with word play as in guessing an object and becoming a word detective; and supporting children while making a meal together, writing notebooks or interviewing a special person.

Copyright: © 2022 the Author(s). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). Published by Al-Kindi Centre for Research and Development, London, United Kingdom.

The language learning activities used for language development at home differ from country to country. In Tanzania, teacher-parent communication and parental involvement in homework and reading at home promoted elementary school children's literacy. The children made significantly more progress in decoding skills, reading comprehension, and reading fluency as a result of a teacher and parent training program for reading development for a year (Kigobe, Van den Noortgate, Ligembe, Ogondiek, Ghesquière and Van Leeuwen (2021).

In Kenya, Knauer, Jakiela, Ozier, Aboud and Fernald (2020) reported that parents enhance young children's language acquisition through parent-child book sharing. The intervention was a modified dialogic reading training program that used books that are linguistically and culturally appropriate for low-literacy children. Both parental training and the availability of culturally appropriate children's books increased the reading frequency and improved the quality of reading interactions between parents and children. The training improved the specific expressive vocabulary in storybooks as well. Similarly, there was a significant connection between families' shared reading habits, children's socioemotional competencies and children's linguistic abilities. Shared reading with children is a beneficial habit that can support children's linguistic and socioemotional learning (Wirth, Ehmgig, Drescher, Guffler and Niklas (2020). Unlike Western practices, parents in Honk Kong do not read aloud to their children (Forey, Besser & Sampson, 2016).

In northern Canada, rural and indigenous families tell stories about the writing materials and spaces they make available to children for writing. Parents provide valuable information about the self-initiated writing tasks that their 2-to-9-year-old children work on at home. They support their children's writing formally through direct teaching of sound-letter relationships and letter forms. They also support their children's writing informally by showing the children that writing is important. They encourage the children to write in order to express their feelings and to inform family members (Stagg Peterson, Grimes & Sky, 2021). In Hong Kong, third-grade children engaged in a school-based English language writing using a digital learning platform called 'Seesaw'. The platform became a space for the parents to be involved in their children's school-based writing program, to view, like and comment on their children's English work (Moorhouse & Beaumont, 2020).

In Greece, Korosidou, Griva and Pavlenko (2021) found that parents spend quality time with their children at home doing activities and utilize digital educational materials to support preschool children's learning and improve their early foreign language literacy development.

Foreign language learning gamification (gaming strategies) using virtual reality is used to support foreign language learning (Pinto, Peixoto, Melo, Cabral & Bessa, 2021). Playing online educational games at home with some parental input was effective in promoting elementary school children's literacy development (Eisenclas, Schalley & Moyes, 2016).

A study by Butler (2014) found that providing direct assistance for children in learning English, the home literacy environment and indirect modelling provided to the children were significant. Although the parents' socio-economic status (SES) did not show much effect on their children's listening, reading, and writing performance during their elementary school years, SES did affect children's speaking abilities when they were in fourth grade.

In Japan, the family language policy can affect children's language learning. Danjo, Chisato (2021) reported that the One Parent One Language policy (OPOL) practiced with Japanese-English bilingual children is a commonly practiced family language policy.

In Saudi Arabia, results of a survey with a sample of parents showed that half of the children in the sample have their own iPad. The iPad was found to be more effective in helping young children under the age of 6 in language learning, than children in grades 1-3, and children in grades 4-6 respectively. More children under the age of 6 use the iPad to learn English than Arabic; 21.88% use Arabic Alphabet apps. On the contrary, children in grades 4-6 mainly use the iPad to play English games and watch movies. Parents pointed out some negative effects of the iPad on language learning such as bad handwriting and lack of interest in reading print books. Most parents in the study supervise young children but not older ones while using the iPad (Al-Jarf (2021a; Al-Jarf, 2021b).

Furthermore, there is lack of comprehensive studies that report activities that students engage in at home under their parents' supervision to develop their English and Arabic language learning. Therefore, this study aims to explore how parents promote English (L2) and Arabic (L1) language proficiency in elementary school children in Saudi Arabia, who study at National Public and Quranic Schools, Private Schools that use Arabic as a medium of instruction in most courses and teach English 1-2 hours a week across the elementary school grades and International Elementary Schools where English is the medium of instruction and Arabic and the Quran are taught 1 hour a day in all grade levels.

To find out whether the activities and strategies that parents use in promoting their children's proficiency level in English and Arabic are adequate and appropriate, the current study will shed some light on the status of learning English at elementary schools in Saudi Arabia in the following aspects: (i) parents' evaluation of their children's proficiency level in both English and Arabic; (ii) which language (English or Arabic) is stronger, easier and preferred by elementary school children in Saudi Arabia; (iii) which language children use when they converse with siblings, parents, and relatives; (iv) whether children insert English words in Arabic and/or English speech; (v) which language they use for communicating and messages on WhatsApp and other social media; and (vi) whether there is a correlation between the parents' level of involvement and their gender, educational level, English proficiency level and working status.

The impact of parents' SES and parental involvement on elementary school children's mathematics, reading, writing and vocabulary test scores are not the focus of the current study. No tests were given to the children to assess their English/Arabic language proficiency level. Differences in parental involvement according to the children's gender and grade level are not the focus of the current study either.

Findings of the current study are significant as they will show parents, caregivers, and educators the quality of parental involvement in children's English and Arabic language development, the types of activities and strategies they utilize, whether they emphasize English, Arabic or both, and language learning weakness in the different types of elementary schools in Saudi Arabia.

2. Methodology

2.1 Subjects

The subjects consisted of 82 parents and their 132 children. 95% of the parents were mothers and 5% were fathers. Analysis of the demographic data showed that 7% of the parents in the sample have a Ph.D., 31% have an M.A. and 62% have a B.A. degree. Mothers in the sample are specialized in English literature, linguistics, translation, education, IT, Islamic studies, social work, biology, law, business, library science, home economics, physical therapy, and pharmacy. 77% are working mothers and 23% are not working. 34% of the household in the sample have one child, 53% have two children and 13% have three children with a median of two children in different elementary grades (grades 1 to 6). All the parents in the sample are native speakers of Arabic with a proficiency level in English between elementary and advanced. 12% of the mothers have a low proficiency level in English and those specialized in English, linguistics, translation, business, physical therapy and pharmacy have a high proficiency level.

As for the children's sample, 56% are boys and 44% are girls. Children in the sample go to 4 types of elementary schools as follows: (i) 39% go to National Public (Government) Schools and study all the subjects in Arabic, i.e., Arabic is the medium of instruction with only one English subject, 1 to 2 hours a week in each grade level; (ii) 29% of the children go to a Private School where Arabic is the medium of instruction in all subjects except English. They study intensive English between 5 and 10 hours a week in each grade level starting from kindergarten, depending on the school's facilities, budget and staffing status; (iii) 14% go to International Schools where English is the medium of instruction, and 1 hour a day is allocated to Arabic and Islamic studies; (iv) 18% go to Quranic Schools where they study all the subjects in Arabic and one subject, 1 hour a week for English, similar to National Public Schools but Quranic Schools allocate more hours a week to Quran learning and fewer hours to the rest of the subjects.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

A survey with open-ended questions was used. The survey contained questions that asked for demographic information such as educational level, area of specialty, working status, proficiency level in English, number of children in the elementary grades, children's gender, children's grade levels, whether they go to a National Public School, Quranic School, Private School or an International school, and number of hours allocated to English per week. In addition, the survey asked parents the following questions:

- 1) How do you promote your children's Arabic and English learning?
- 2) How do you evaluate your child's proficiency level in English and Arabic? Which language is stronger (Arabic or English)?
- 3) What is the preferred language by your child (Arabic or English)?
- 4) Does your child insert English words while speaking Arabic or Arabic words while speaking English?
- 5) Which language does your child use in talking to siblings, parents, and relatives?
- 6) Which language does your child use in communicating and writing messages on WhatsApp and other social media (Arabic only, English only, or Latinized Arabic, i.e., Arabic written in foreign letters)?

Parents' responses were compiled and classified according to the questions asked and demographic variables collected. Parents were grouped according to the school type where their children study. Percentages of parents falling into each demographic variable and giving the same responses were computed. Parents' points of view are reported qualitatively as well.

As a reliability check, the author tallied, classified, and quantified parents' responses twice with a 2-week interval between them. Variations in analysis and quantification were corrected.

3. Results

3.1 How Parents Promote English and Arabic Acquisition in Children

Results of the parent surveys showed that 39% encourage their children to watch English cartoons and movies without Arabic translation, i.e., without Arabic subtitles. 33% use English educational and entertainment apps/programs. 22% encourage their children to read. They buy books suitable for the children's grade level. In 17% of the households, fathers speak with the children in English while the mothers speak to them in Arabic, or the mother speaks English with the children because she is English major, or the father has studied abroad (e.g., in the UK). In 5% of the households, the mother insists that the children converse with the foreign housemaid from the Philippines in English. 17% enrol their children in English language courses at language institutes during the holiday. 5% chat with English native speakers online. 5% play English games on PlayStation PS5. 5% do extra studying and assignments with their children related to what they study at school. Some mothers wrote:

- *My daughter reads Harry Potter.*
- *Every weekend, I print worksheets that I use with my daughters.*
- *I encourage my children to read English and Arabic road signs.*
- *I compare Arabic and English words so that they understand their meaning in both languages and do not memorize the word in English and think that it is used in Arabic in the same way.*
- *Mobile and iPad apps help my kids develop their English-speaking skills.*
- *My son learns English from playing games on YouTube and PlayStation PS5 Digital Edition.*

On the other hand, to promote Arabic language acquisition, some parents with children at International Schools hire an Arabic language tutor to teach the children Arabic and the Holy Quran (20%). Others demand that their children read the Quran and stories in Standard Arabic and watch Arabic cartoons and videos. They read Arabic material with their children on the "I Read Arabic" Platform and "Iqra eLibrary" daily (50%). Some parents do not allow their children to speak English at home at all or allow them to speak English in certain situations, not all the time. They converse with them in Arabic especially about Islamic issues and allow them to express themselves in Arabic (30%). Some mothers noted:

- *I do not allow my children to speak English at home and demand that they read children's stories in Arabic and focus of spelling, write paragraphs in Arabic from memory, and make sure they produce Arabic sounds correctly.*
- *I support Arabic language acquisition through studying all the courses in Arabic, and by giving them a chance to express themselves in Arabic.*

A correlation was found between the parents' degree of involvement and the enrichment activities used and the parents' educational level, area of specialization, and proficiency level in English. There is a moderate correlation between the level of involvement and working status. Mothers with a high proficiency level in English provide more activities and help to their children. They converse with their children in English, prepare worksheets, hold review sessions over the weekend, select books suitable to the child's grade level, answer their children's questions about word meaning and usage, explain meanings of words, provide help with pronunciation, decoding, spelling, vocabulary, sentence construction and read with their children Arabic material on the I Read Arabic Platform. Mothers with a low proficiency level, or those who do not have the time because of long working hours hire an Arabic language tutor or send their children to a language institute for extra English lessons.

3.1.1 Parents' Assessment of their children's achievement level in English

In the case of children who go to National Public Schools, mothers' responses to the survey indicated that their children's achievement level in English is as follows: 12.5% excellent, 62.5% average; and 25% poor. For children who go to Private Schools, their English achievement level is: 39% excellent; 22% very good; 28% good; and 11% poor. For those who go to Quranic Schools, most parents in this category rated their children's achievement level as poor and for children who go to International Schools, all the parents in this category rated their children's achievement level in English as excellent and most rated their children's Arabic proficiency level as weaker than that in English. Some mothers whose children go to National Public Schools declared:

- *My son is weak in English. He feels nervous and afraid of it although the school curriculum is very easy. Unfortunately, he is not benefiting from it at all.*
- *My son's level is excellent because I follow him up over holidays and enrol him in English language courses.*
- *My son's level is average because of the curriculum and because we do not use English at home, only at school.*
- *No improvement at all because the English teacher does not care much. The school and family care more about other courses than about English.*

- *My daughter's level is good because the teacher does not teach efficiently. She reduces the curriculum, and her teaching is boring.*
- *My daughter is not benefitting much in reading, speaking and composition. She can only memorize what is written and what she hears repeatedly.*

Some mothers whose children go to Private Schools stated:

- *At the beginning, her level was not good. I did not pay much attention to the subject (English), but later, I tried to focus more on reading and started buying English stories for her. After that we moved to Korea, and she was supposed to take an English language test to be accepted in school. She was in fifth grade, and we put a lot of time and effort in teaching her English grammar, writing and pronunciation.*
- *When my daughter entered school, her interest in English decreased, and her level in general was low in reading, writing, handwriting and dictation, but I consider her understanding, speaking and listening skills very good.*

A mother whose children go to an International School noted:

- *My sons' proficiency level in English is excellent because English is the first language at school. The level of the school is weak in Arabic. We find what my sons learn at school in English sufficient. So, we do not do anything extra at home. But we have hired an Arabic language tutor to focus on the Arabic language, speaking, listening, pronunciation, reading, handwriting and dictation in Arabic.*

3.2 The Stronger and Preferred Language by School Type

Surveys with parents revealed that for all children who go to International Schools, English is the stronger language, although about half the students in the sample speak Colloquial Arabic as it is the language of the community but are poor in Standard Arabic. Arabic has two forms: a Colloquial spoken form and a Standard Arabic written form used in school textbooks, printed material, the media and formal lectures. For children who go to Private Schools, Arabic is stronger in 62.5% of the children, whereas English is stronger in 37.5%. For those who go to National Public Schools and Quranic schools, Arabic is stronger and is the preferred language by all children.

As for the language that children in the current sample prefer, English is the preferred language for all International School students. Children who go to Public and Quranic Schools prefer Arabic. But 40% of the children who go to Private Schools prefer English compared to 51% who prefer Arabic and 9% who have no preference.

3.3 The Language of Communication with Siblings, Parents, Relatives and on WhatsApp

There were variations in parents' views regarding the language of communication and strategies/activities used for promoting Arabic and English. Children who go to International Schools communicate with their siblings in English, but they mostly speak Colloquial Arabic with their relatives, especially older ones, such as uncles, aunts and grandparents and people who do not know English. Some mothers said:

- *My daughters Noura and Maryam speak to each other in English, and this does not prevent them from inserting Arabic words into the conversation. The effect very often appears in family meetings when peers or even adults don't know English, so sometimes they ask me: Mama what does so and so mean in Arabic.*
- *Maryam is stronger in English, never prefers Arabic, and speaks Colloquial Arabic if she has to (e.g., when she talks to someone who doesn't know English or with her father because he refuses to speak English). When I talk to her in Arabic she answers in English. All programs and applications that she watches are in English, and if she watches an Arabic cartoon, she will ask me to convert it to English. She says my favorite teacher is the Arabic teacher, but Arabic is not my favorite subject.*
- *My daughter Noura can communicate in both languages, but recently she prefers English. Her use of classical Arabic is limited to school, homework, and daily stories. She also prefers to watch English scientific programs, cartoons and reality vlogs. She watches very few Arabic vlogs.*

Many mothers reported that sometimes their children insert English words in Arabic conversations and those who speak English, insert Arabic words in their conversations (i.e., they codeswitch). Some mothers said:

- *When my children are conversing in Arabic, sometimes they insert English sentences or speak in English for a while before switching back to Arabic to finish their conversation.*
- *When my daughters converse with each other in English, this does not prevent them from inserting Arabic words into the conversation.*

On social media, all International School students find it easy to communicate in English. Those who go to National Public Schools communicate in Arabic, whereas 72% of students who go to Private Schools communicate in Arabic, and 28% use both English or Arabic messages depending on the messages received from relatives, friends and acquaintances. A mother asserted:

- *Sometimes my children write WhatsApp messages in English and sometimes in Arabic. It depends on the messages they get. They never use Latinized Arabic (Arabizi), however they are faster in English.*

4. Discussion

Results of the current study showed that more parents worry about their children's proficiency level in English than Arabic. These results are consistent with results of a study with a sample of mothers in Saudi Arabia about their views of the status of and preferences for teaching and learning English by children under the age of 6 (Al-Jarf, 2020b). In addition, parents in the current study promote English language learning more than Arabic using more diverse activities and resources in English than Arabic to nurture Saudi elementary school children's English language learning. The children watch English cartoons and movies without English subtitles, use English educational and entertainment apps/programs, play English games online, chat with English native speakers, enrol the children in English courses during holidays. Some fathers speak with their children in English while mothers speak to them in Arabic. To promote Arabic language learning, some parents hire an Arabic language tutor to teach their children Arabic and the Quran, in addition to encouraging the children to read Arabic stories and books. These activities are similar to those used with children in other prior studies such as parent-child book-sharing using culturally and linguistically appropriate books adapted for low-literacy children (Knauer, Jakiela, Ozier, Aboud & Fernald, 2020; Wirth, Ehlig, Drescher, Guffler & Niklas, 2020); utilizing digital educational materials (Korosidou, Griva & Pavlenko, 2021); foreign language learning gamification, i.e., playing online educational games at home (Pinto, Peixoto, Melo, Cabral & Bessa, 2021; Eisenclas, Schalley & Moyes, 2016); keeping contact with native speakers of the foreign language (Troesch, Segerer, Claus-Pröstler & Grob, 2021); parental involvement in homework and reading at home (Kigobe, Van den Noortgate, Ligembe, Ogondiek, Ghesquière and Van Leeuwen (2021); and providing direct assistance to children in learning English (Butler, 2014). The same family One Parent One Language policy (OPOL) practiced with Japanese-English bilingual children in Danjo, Chisato's (2021) study is practiced by 17% of the parents in the current study. Unlike the child-parent shared reading in prior studies, most parents in the current study leave their children play, read, or watch cartoons and movies on their own with little supervision or guidance from the parents probably because they are busy and have many responsibilities or because of inadequate skills.

On the other hand, there is little focus in the current study on enhancing children's written expression as it is the case in prior studies such as telling stories about writing materials and spaces they make available to children and encouraging children to write in order to express their feelings and inform family members (Stagg Peterson, Grimes & Sky, 2021). Saudi parents did not report being engaged in a school-based English language writing using a digital learning platform as in Moorhouse and Beaumont's (2020) study. Parents in the current study did not mention the extensive use of mobile and iPad Apps in language learning as it was the case during the COVID-19 Pandemic lockdown as reported by Al-Jarf (2021a) and Al-Jarf (2021b)

Furthermore, more mothers in the present study responded to the survey and more mothers are involved in promoting their children's language development than fathers. Mothers were significantly more involved than fathers in Fleischmann and de Haas's (2016) study as well. Parents' skills, household resources, parenting goals, parents' levels of education, and language proficiency were important factors in parental motivation to become involved in children's language development. Lower levels of parental involvement were found in several domains among ethnic groups in the Netherlands compared to Dutch majority parents. In the current study, ethnicity was not the focus of the study. Parental L2 proficiency was emphasized by Troesch, Segerer, Claus-Pröstler and Grob (2021) as a factor in parental involvement.

Contrary to a study by Luo and Gao (2022) which revealed that home-based parental involvement was stronger in multi-child than in one-child families. Parental involvement in children's language development in the present study did not show any differences according to the number of children in the household, child gender or child grade level. The difference was in the type of help provided such as helping first grade children with the alphabet, phoneme articulation, penmanship, teaching them names of animals, fruits and so on.

A strategy that 5% of the parents followed was insisting that children converse with the foreign housemaid in English. This does not seem to be a sound strategy and might have an adverse effect on the children's English language development. A survey with a sample of mothers in Saudi Arabia showed that the language of the housemaids is characterized by faulty pronunciation and grammatical forms and structures, and limited vocabulary (Al-Jarf, 2022d).

5. Recommendation

Although parents in the current study utilize a variety of activities to enhance their elementary school children's English and Arabic learning, the activities reported are from being comprehensive. To increase parents' involvement, this study recommends learning-focused, parent--teacher partnerships, purposeful home-based learning, effective parent-school communication, and shared home and school decision making (Averill, Metson & Bailey (2016). A guide for parents and caregiver can be prepared with simple, fun activities to use with children learning English in elementary and middle school to strengthen their language and literacy. The guide can include activities such as asking and answering questions about a story, a topic or informational text, and/or an experience, supporting young English children with word play as in guessing an object and becoming a word detective; and supporting young learners of English while making a meal together, interviewing a special person, and writing notebooks (Van Houten, Sadok, Burr, Lapid, Packham, Larson, Parker & Scardina, 2020).

Shared teacher and parent training in reading development can be offered to help children make more progress in decoding skills, reading comprehension, and reading fluency (Kigobe, Van den Noortgate, Ligembe, Ogondiek, Ghesquière & Van Leeuwen, 2021). Children can be encouraged to read children's multicultural short stories and fiction and use children's audiobooks to develop students' listening and reading comprehension skills, and enlarge their vocabulary knowledge and understanding of story elements (Al-Jarf, 2015; Al-Jarf, 2022a; Al-Jarf, 2021c).

Since some parents encourage their children to read English and Arabic road signs, they can also encourage their children to read different types of landscapes in the environment and practice reading comprehension and identification of word meaning (Al-Jarf, 2021d).

In order for parents to understand the reading process and the reading subskill that children need to acquire in English and Arabic, they can attend training courses that introduce them to word identifications, reading comprehension skills and knowledge of story elements, in addition to using specialized tests to diagnose children's decoding and reading weaknesses (Al-Jarf, 2018; Al-Jarf, 2007; Al-Jarf, 1995; Al-Jarf, 1992; Al-Jarf, 1989).

To develop elementary school children's writing ability in both languages, a school-based English language writing program using a digital learning platform can be created in order to engage children, involve parents in their children's school-based writing, and enable them to view, like and comment on their children's work (Moorhouse & Beaumont's, 2020).

Furthermore, parents can be introduced to and trained to use a variety of technologies that enhance their children's language skills such as using text-to-speech software to improve students' decoding, pronunciation, oral reading, listening and reading comprehension and vocabulary skills (Al-Jarf, 2022c), the extensive use of English and Arabic mobile apps and a variety of Internet websites for children to develop their listening, speaking, phonics, reading, and vocabulary skills (Al-Jarf, 2020a; Al-Jarf, 2004).

In all home-based activities, children should not be left alone without some input and supervision from the parents as it was the case in online learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic especially if the children are in the lower elementary grades, and to organize, facilitate, and monitor children's attention; to motivate, nurture, and support their learning and to make sure the children are benefiting from the activities (Al-Jarf, 2022b).

Finally, the comparison of the English language curriculum at National Public Schools and Private Schools in Saudi Arabia in terms of the suitability and effectiveness of the textbooks and materials used, hours allocated to English per week, language teaching techniques used and the problems that National Public Schools have in teaching English at the elementary school level is still open for further investigation in the future.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6255-1305>

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

- [1] Al-Jarf, R. (2022a). Mobile fiction apps for enhancing EFL college students' reading and appreciation skills. *International Journal of Linguistics Studies (IJLS)*, 2, 2, 15-23. DOI: 10.32996/ijls.2022.2.2.3. ERIC ED618966. [Google Scholar](#)
- [2] Al-Jarf, R. (2022b). *Parental attendance of children's online classes from the perspective of parents and teachers in Saudi Arabia*. The 18th International Scientific Conference eLearning and Software for Education (eLSE), Bucharest, Romania. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362734061>. [Google Scholar](#)

- [3] Al-Jarf, R. (2022c). Text-to-speech software for promoting efl freshman students' decoding skills and pronunciation accuracy. *Journal of Computer Science and Technology Studies (JCSTS)*, 4(2), 19-30. DOI: 10.32996/jcsts.2022.4.2.4. [Google Scholar](#)
- [4] Al-Jarf, R. (2022d). The influence of housemaids on Saudi young children's Arabic language acquisition from the perspective of mothers. *International Journal of Education and Social Science Research (IJESSR)*, 5(1), 282-294. Doi: 10.37500/IJESSR.2022.5123. ERIC ED618410. [Google Scholar](#)
- [5] Al-Jarf, R. (2021a). *Differential effects of the iPad on first and second language acquisition by saudi children during the Covid-19 pandemic*. 17th International Scientific Conference eLearning and Software for Education (eLSE). Bucharest, Romania. 1, 96-105. DOI: 10.12753/2066-026X-21-013. ERIC ED616919. [Google Scholar](#)
- [6] Al-Jarf, R. (2021b). Impact of the iPad on Saudi young children in the home environment as perceived by their mothers. *International Journal of Research in Engineering, IT and Social Sciences (IJREISS)*, 11(2), 26-35. ERIC ED613057. [Google Scholar](#)
- [7] Al-Jarf, R. (2021c). Mobile audiobooks, listening comprehension and EFL college students. *International Journal of Research – GRANTHAALAYAH*, 9(4), 410-423. DOI: 10.29121/granthaalayah.v9.i4.2021.3868. ERIC ED616740. [Google Scholar](#)
- [8] Al-Jarf, R. (2021d). Teaching English with linguistic landscapes to Saudi students studying abroad. *Asian Journal of Language, literature and Culture Studies (AJL2CS)*, 4 (3), 1-12. ERIC ED619894. [Google Scholar](#)
- [9] Al-Jarf, R. (2020a). Mobile apps in the EFL college classroom. *Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching (JRSP-ELT)*, 4(22), 1-5. ERIC ED613138. [Google Scholar](#)
- [10] Al-Jarf, R. (2020b). Should we teach English to children under the age of six? *Eurasian Arabic Studies*, 9, 65-97. [Google Scholar](#)
- [11] Al-Jarf, R. (2018). First, second and third grade students' word identification difficulties. *Eurasian Arabic Studies*, 8, 22-93. <https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=39181209>. [Google Scholar](#)
- [12] Al-Jarf, R. (2015). *Enhancing reading and speaking skills in EFL through multicultural children's short stories*. 7th International Conference, Building Cultural Bridges (ICBCB). SDU, Almaty, Kazakhstan. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3848464> **ERIC ED610158**. [Google Scholar](#)
- [13] Al-Jarf, R. (2007). *Developing reading and literacy skills in Saudi Arabia*. ERIC ED497944. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3849626>. [Google Scholar](#)
- [14] Al-Jarf, R. (2004). *Arabic websites for preschool children: Current status and future perspectives*. Saudi Educational and Psychological Association. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3883219>. [Google Scholar](#)
- [15] Al-Jarf, R. (1995). *An Arabic word identification diagnostic test for the first three grades*. Center for Educational Research. College of Education. King Saud University. [Google Scholar](#)
- [16] Al-Jarf, R. (1992). *Classification of word identification exercises in elementary school basal readers*. Third Yearbook of the Saudi Educational and Psychological Association. pp. 73-108. [Google Scholar](#)
- [17] Al-Jarf, R. (1989). *Classification of reading comprehension questions in elementary basal readers in Saudi Arabia*. Center for Educational Research, King Saud University. [Google Scholar](#)
- [18] Averill, R., Metson, A. & Bailey, S. (2016). Enhancing parental involvement in student learning. *Curriculum Matters*, 12, 109-131.
- [19] Butler, Y. (2014). Parental factors and early English education as a foreign language: A case study in mainland China. *Research Papers in Education*, 29(4), 410-437.
- [20] Collins, B. (2014). Dual language development of Latino children: Effect of instructional program type and the home and school language environment. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29(3), 389-397.
- [21] Danjo, C. (2021). Making sense of family language policy: Japanese-English bilingual children's creative and strategic translanguaging practices. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 24(2), 292-304.
- [22] Ee, J. (2017). Two dimensions of parental involvement: What affects parental involvement in dual language immersion? *Bilingual Research Journal*, 40(2), 131-153.
- [23] Eisenclas, S., Schalley, A. & Moyes, G. (2016). Play to learn: Self-directed home language literacy acquisition through online games. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 19(2), 136-152.
- [24] Fleischmann, F. & de Haas, A. (2016). Explaining parents' school involvement: The role of ethnicity and gender in the Netherlands. *Journal of Educational Research*, 109(5), 554-565.
- [25] Forey, G., Besser, S. & Sampson, N. (2016). Parental involvement in foreign language learning: The case of Hong Kong. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 16(3), 383-413.
- [26] Gubbins, V. & Otero, G. (2016). Effect of the parental involvement style perceived by elementary school students at home on language and mathematics performance in Chilean schools. *Educational Studies*, 42(2), 121-136.
- [27] Kalayci, G. & Öz, H. (2018). Parental involvement in English language education: Understanding parents' perceptions. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching*, 5(4), 832-847.
- [28] Kigobe, J., Van den Noortgate, W., Ligembe, N., Ogondiek, M., Ghesquière, P. & Van Leeuwen, K. (2021). Effects of a parental involvement intervention to promote child literacy in Tanzania: A cluster randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 14(4), 770-791.
- [29] Knauer, H., Jakiela, P., Ozier, O., Aboud, F., & Fernald, L. (2020). Enhancing young children's language acquisition through parent-child book-sharing: A randomized trial in rural Kenya. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 50, 179-190.
- [30] Korosidou, E., Griva, E. & Pavlenko, O. (2021). Parental involvement in a program for preschoolers learning a foreign language. *International Journal of Research in Education and Science*, 7(1), 112-124.
- [31] Luo, L. & Gao, M. (2022). Family SES and self-regulated learning in Chinese preschoolers: A mediation analysis of parental educational expectation and home-based involvement. *Early Education and Development*, 33(3), 452-468.
- [32] Moorhouse, B. & Beaumont, A. (2020). Involving parents in their children's school-based English language writing using digital learning. *RELC Journal: A Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 51(2), 259-267.

-
- [33] Pinto, R., Peixoto, B., Melo, M., Cabral, L. & Bessa, M. (2021). Foreign language learning gamification using virtual reality--A systematic review of empirical research. *Education Sciences*, 11(Article 222).
- [34] Stagg Peterson, S., Grimes, A. & Sky, K. (2021). Rural and indigenous families' support of young children's writing. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, 9(1), 18-34.
- [35] Tamis-LeMonda, C. & Rodriguez, E. (2008). Parents' role in fostering young children's learning and language development. *Encyclopedia on early childhood development*, 1, 1-11.
- [36] Troesch, L., Segerer, R., Claus-Pröstler, N. & Grob, A. (2021). Parental acculturation attitudes: direct and indirect impacts on children's second language acquisition. *Early Education and Development*, 32(2), 272-290.
- [37] Van Houten, L., Sadok, K., Burr, E., Lapid, J., Packham, M., Larson, H., Parker, C. & Scardina, K. (2020). *Educator's guide for family and caregiver activities for "teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school practice guide"*. Regional Educational Laboratory West. ERIC ED610478.
- [38] Wirth, A, Ehmig, S., Drescher, N., Guffler, S. & Niklas, F. (2020). Facets of the early home literacy environment and children's linguistic and socioemotional competencies. *Early Education and Development*, 31(6), 892-909.