

Mother Tongue, Mother's Influence: Exploring Language Choices in Pakistani Families in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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ABSTRACT

The paper objectively investigates how mothers' influence affects their children's exposure to their mother tongue. In the contemporary period, societies are multilingual, where languages interact and influence each other. However, the role, status and functions of domains—education, family, friendship, work, and religion— influence the mother tongue. However, this study examines a case and finds that Pakistani Punjabi mothers prefer their children to speak English and Urdu in KSA, which influences mothers' role as primary caregivers of their mother tongue. This research employs exploratory qualitative research by applying Matras and Fishman's Domain Theory to analyse Punjabi speakers' attitudes and language use in Saudi Arabia. Data was collected using snowball sampling from three Pakistani families residing in Saudi Arabia for over six years. Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that mothers continue to serve as primary caregivers and engage in regular, meaningful interactions with their young children. Mothers can effectively transmit their mother tongue through their speech patterns and vocabulary, supporting their children's language acquisition during these critical early years.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is not only a means of communication; it also influences how individuals define themselves, as it is a recognised crucial component of social integration and an element of cultural identity (Mykhailyuk & Pohlod, 2015). The conversation on cultural preservation gains momentum when it considers parents' perspectives and accounts of their active involvement in transmitting their mother tongue to their children (Burns & Radford, 2008). Language barriers can make it challenging for immigrants to communicate, as the expectations and norms of the host society may conflict with their cultural and linguistic identity. Balancing assimilation into the new culture with maintaining one's cultural roots can be difficult.

Language is a defining element of a civilisation, and its significance cannot be overstated (Mykhailyuk & Pohlod, 2015). For immigrants, acquiring the language of their new nation becomes necessary (Kristen et al., 2015). Alyami (2023) explains that "the process of language shift occurs when one language is gradually replaced by another language, and it happens when a community does not maintain its language but rather 'gradually' adopts another one." Similarly, Heinrich (2015) defines language shift as the change in vernacular language choices due to the instability of these languages, often resulting from shifts in the social, political, and financial conditions of their communities.

Mothers play a crucial role in maintaining the mother tongue, serving as the primary source of language exposure and transmission for their young children. Existing studies show that the responses and influence of mothers on their young children are essential for their language choice (Boulton et al., 2022). By consistently using the mother tongue at home, mothers model its importance and encourage its value, even in multilingual settings where dominant languages may influence children, and there is a significant and positive effect of communication patterns carried out by mothers in the children's early language development (Pasaribu, 2021). Moreover, they also help children navigate challenges like language blending by gently reinforcing correct usage. Despite societal pressures and limited external exposure, mothers can preserve the mother tongue by integrating it into family routines and collaborating with communities, ensuring their children retain their linguistic heritage in the foreign state.

This research illuminates that language affects people's feelings of belonging and identity in their linguistic and cultural communities. Understanding how mothers feel about their mother tongue helps one better understand how language is used in families for expression and communication. Therefore, the current study would be significant as it examines parental attitudes and their

involvement in passing down their mother tongue. It aims to enlighten whether Urdu and Punjabi are preserved or shifted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, it looks at possible strategies Pakistani mothers could use to preserve their native tongue.

Research Objectives

Purposively, the study investigates whether Pakistani families have transmitted Punjabi and Urdu to their children in the KSA. The objectives of the study are:

- To explore the mother's influence in transmitting her mother tongue in the KSA community
- To find out the mothers' strategies towards maintaining their mother tongue in their children

Research Questions

The current study's research questions include:

- I. How does a mother's influence affect the transmission of her mother tongue to her children?
- II. Being a mother, what strategies a woman should develop toward the transmission of their mother tongue?

Novelty of the Study

Various studies share academic opinions on language shift and maintenance, but this study intrinsically explores whether Pakistani women maintained their mother tongue in the KSA. Generally, women are more conscious about their native language because it indicates their social status in the community (Balamurali et al., 2023). A woman can develop various strategies for the transmission of their mother tongue. So, this study explores some strategies that Pakistani women ought to devise in the hope of preserving their mother tongue.

Delimitations of the Study

The current study is delimited in various ways.

- This study is limited to only three languages, i.e. English, Urdu & Punjabi.
- It is limited to three KSA-based Pakistani families residing in KSA for more than six years.
- In this study, the interviewees are limited to the female gender.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The principle of language maintenance plays a crucial role in understanding linguistic dynamics across societies (Aldoukhi et al., 2024). Language shift refers to the process by which a community gradually or completely abandons its native language in favour of another. Alyami (2023) explains that "language shift occurs when one language is gradually replaced by another language, and it happens when a community does not maintain its language but rather 'gradually' adopts another one." Similarly, Tawalbeh et al. (2013) note that language transmission may involve the partial or complete abandonment of a group's native language in favour of another. While language shift reflects a collective move away from traditional language use, language maintenance is the opposite, occurring when a society actively chooses to preserve its linguistic heritage. Since most speech communities worldwide are multilingual, language interaction significantly influences daily life. Therefore, research on language contact is integral to theoretical, social, and historical linguistic studies (Tsitsipis, 2023). Languages are inherently diverse, evolving across time and space (Kandler & Unger, 2023). Language shift is a widespread issue among immigrant communities globally. For instance, Jung (2023) examined language shift and maintenance in the Korean community using the 2021 Census. Findings revealed an increased shift toward English, particularly among second and third-generation Korean immigrants, compared to the 2016 Census. The study attributes this trend to restricted Korean immigration during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasising the growing dominance of English in the host society.

Parental language choice is a crucial element of the Family Language Policy in bilingual families (Houwer & Bornstein, 2019). Mothers play a crucial role in shaping their children's language choices and development (Boulton et al., 2022). By consistently using the mother tongue at home, mothers instill its importance, even in multilingual settings where dominant languages exert influence. Communication patterns employed by mothers significantly and positively impact early language development (Pasaribu, 2021). In immigrant families, children from endogamous households (where both parents share the same linguistic background) are more likely to preserve their heritage language than those from exogamous families. Among Pakistani-American families, linguistic shifts are evident, with first- and second-generation individuals adapting to dominant languages for social and professional reasons, while third-generation children rarely choose to use Punjabi or Urdu (Sarwat et al., 2020). Family language policies often facilitate code-switching between languages (Chimbutane & Goncalves, 2023).

Wani and Nisa (2024) explored language maintenance and shifted in the Poguli speech community of Jammu and Kashmir's Chinab Valley. The

study examined linguistic practices, identity, and the influence of neighboring languages. It found that language maintenance requires conscious recognition of linguistic diversity, which should be valued (Heinrich, 2015). In Japan, however, efforts to preserve native languages like Ryukyuan face challenges due to sociocultural norms that prioritize homogeneity. Budiono et al. (2023) emphasize the need to clarify the relationship between nationality and language to support revitalisation efforts. Gautam and Adhikari (2023) studied language shift among the Chhantyal community in Nepal, identifying factors such as multilingualism, globalisation, and migration that drive shifts toward Hindi, English, and Nepali. Similarly, Gomashie (2023) noted that Nahuatl transmission in Mexico depends on household and community use, speakers' beliefs, and external influences. Nath (2011) found that Tiwa, a native language, is no longer transmitted to younger generations, reflecting a broader trend where 50–90% of the world's languages exist in "shift ecologies" (Grenoble & Osipov, 2023). In South Africa, Anthonissen (2009) observed that younger generations of Afrikaans speakers often prefer English due to social and educational changes, highlighting the role of family dynamics in language preferences.

In Pakistan, Punjabi, spoken by approximately 80.5 million people (33.33% of the population), is increasingly devalued. Many Punjabi speakers view their language as inappropriate for official contexts, often abandoning it in favour of languages associated with higher social status (Abbas et al., 2016). This study focuses on the attitudes of Pakistani mothers in Saudi Arabia toward maintaining their native language, Punjabi, within a multiethnic community amidst pressures from dominant regional and global languages.

However, the current study has significant implications for understanding how language choices among Pakistani expatriate families in Saudi Arabia impact cultural preservation, identity, and social integration. It can inform educational practices by encouraging bilingual curricula and fostering awareness of the cognitive and emotional benefits of maintaining the mother tongue, i.e., Punjabi. Additionally, it offers valuable insights for policymakers to support heritage language programs and/or community initiatives that promote cultural diversity while aiding adaptation to the host country. By emphasising the mother's pivotal role in language transmission, this study can guide parenting strategies and empower families to balance linguistic preservation with multilingual adaptability, contributing to sociolinguistic research and broader migration studies.

METHODOLOGY

This study applies Matras' theory and Fishman's theory of language shift and maintenance. Matras' theory asserts that most modern societies are multilingual, with many individuals speaking two or more languages, and the process of language contact refers to sociolinguistic situations where speakers of different languages interact and influence each other (Matras, 2009). Fishman identifies five key domains—education, family, friendship, work, and religion—to highlight the significance of the question, "Who speaks what language to whom and when?" He explains the roles, status, and functions of these domains in shaping language use (Rydenvald, 2018). According to Fishman's theoretical model, these domains serve as community-wide mechanisms for socially patterned speech diversity within large and complex speech communities at the macro level. Fishman also observed the tendency for one language to dominate in multilingual contexts, providing evidence that the dominant language is typically the one most frequently used in everyday interactions.

An exploratory descriptive-qualitative method is employed to analyse the influence of mothers in transmitting and maintaining their mother tongue (Punjabi) to their children within the KSA community. The snowball sampling technique is used to identify participants, beginning with my first cousin in KSA, who recommended her friends for participation in this study. All participants belong to families for whom Punjabi is the mother tongue. Data was collected from three Pakistani families who have been living in KSA for over six years. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the mothers and structured interviews with their children. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure no significant information was lost. Interview questions were modified to suit the requirements of this study and thematically developed, with additional questions also incorporated. The average duration of the interviews conducted via Facebook Messenger was two hours with the mothers and one hour with their children.

Before taking interviews from the mothers, the study has been explained to them in detail and they have agreed and signed the Informed Consent Form. Demographic information has been taken from mothers, and they have been given the choice to skip any of the questions if necessary.

DATA ANALYSIS

Using the chain-referral technique, three Pakistani families who have spoken Punjabi and residing in Saudi Arabia for more than six years are involved in this primary data study. This approach has proven very helpful in identifying families in which both parents speak Punjabi as their mother tongue. Since disclosing

participants' identities is a major concern, everyone's consent is obtained, and it is not acceptable to mention the participants' real names. For this reason, three code words - Ms. A, Ms. B, and Ms. C - are used.

INTRODUCTION TO FAMILIES

Ms. A, aged 41, has been residing in KSA for 11 years. She holds an MSc in Chemistry from Pakistan and moved to KSA following her marriage. She has three children, aged 8, 13, and 16. Her native region is Punjab, and Punjabi is her mother tongue. She is proficient in three languages: English, Urdu, and Punjabi. Ms. B, aged 35, has lived in KSA for 8 years. She holds an MBA in Human Resources from Pakistan and also relocated to KSA after marriage. She has two children, aged 2 and 4. Her native region is Punjab, and her mother tongue is Punjabi. She speaks four languages: English, Urdu, Punjabi, and French. The third participant prefers to remain anonymous, and her identity will be kept confidential under the code name "Ms. C."

Figure 1: Participants' Demographic Information

Table 1.

| Parti- cipant | Age | Years in KSA | Education | Chil- dren (Ages) | Native Region | Mother Tongue | Languages Spoken |
|------------------|--------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Ms. A | 41 | 11 | MSc in Chemistry | 3 (8, 13, 16) | Punjab | Punjabi | English, Urdu, Punjabi |
| Ms. B | 35 | 8 | MBA in Human Resources | 2 (2, 4) | Punjab | Punjabi | English, Urdu, Punjabi, French |
| Ms. C | Confidential | | | | | | |

Languages Spoken by these Families

The in-depth semi-structured detailed interviews have been taken from three mothers about the maintenance of Urdu and Punjabi in their home domain. When asked about the first language of their children, Ms. A argues that although English is the first language of her children, but Urdu is the most preferred language. She has introduced Urdu to their children but she argues that Urdu cannot be maintained outside the home. In a similar way, Ms. B argues that English is the first language of her children, but they use Urdu at home. And she also wants her children to be expert in Punjabi language. She argues that;

Ms. B: "We speak Urdu at home. And there is no strict policy for language."

When it was asked from Ms. B that how she maintains Urdu at their home, she demonstrated that;

Ms. B: "We speak in Urdu with children but with the influence of TV/children content they have learnt English. They understand Urdu and Punjabi but prefer to answer in English. It is really hard to maintain Urdu as it is a complex and rich language in comparison to English. Therefore, children learnt English before Urdu."

Ms. C illustrates that Urdu is the first language of her children, but they prefer to speak the English language. They have introduced no language policy at their home. Also, she argues that Urdu cannot be maintained outside the home domain because

Ms. C: "No, there are not any opportunities in KSA outside one's home to maintain Urdu, apart from schools that offer Urdu as a language."

After taking a major interview, the mothers are requested to rate their children out of 10 for their proficiency in English, Urdu and Punjabi languages.

Figure 2: Children's Proficiency in English, Urdu and Punjabi languages

Table 2.

| | Proficiency in English (Out of 10) | Proficiency in Urdu (Out of 10) | Proficiency in Punjabi (Out of 10) |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Ms. A's children | 9 | 6 | 3 |
| Ms. B's children | 10 | 3 | 1 |
| Ms. C's children | 9 | 7 | 2 |

The result shows that Ms. A rated her children's proficiency levels as 9 out of 10 in English, 6 out of 10 in Urdu, and 3 out of 10 in Punjabi. Ms. B rated her children's proficiency levels as 10 out of 10 in English, 3 out of 10 in Urdu, and 1 out of 10 in Punjabi. Similarly, Ms. C rated her children's proficiency levels as 9 out of 10 in English, 7 out of 10 in Urdu, and 2 out of 10 in Punjabi. This implies that English appears to be the strongest language for the children across all families, and Punjabi proficiency is the lowest among the children, suggesting a gradual decline in the use of the mother tongue within these families. Besides, proficiency in Urdu is intermediate, reflecting its role as a secondary language, likely used for communication within the family or expatriate community but not prioritized as highly as English. However, the ratings highlight the potential influence of parental language preferences, the

household linguistic environment, and external factors like education systems and peer interaction on children's language development.

Analysis of Parental Attitudes: Use of English, Urdu, & Punjabi

Although Punjabi is the native language of these mothers but, they have very different views when asked about the usage of Punjabi language by their children. Ms. A doesn't like her children to be expert in Punjabi language. Also, she will criticise their children if they speak Punjabi language because

Ms. A: "The Punjabi accent will ruin their spoken English accent."

The above statement reflects a common parental concern rooted in the belief that speaking a native language with a strong accent might hinder a child's ability to speak a second language, like English, with a "standard" or "correct" accent. This attitude suggests that the parent may view the Punjabi accent as something that could interfere with the child's success in an English-dominated society, where clear pronunciation and fluency are often valued. It also points to a broader societal bias associating accents with language proficiency, where non-native accents may be perceived negatively. This mindset could lead parents to prioritise English pronunciation over the preservation of their children's mother tongue, potentially encouraging language shift and reducing the emphasis on cultural identity. She also highlights that most of the time children spent in the school, and they find hardly any spare time to communicate in Punjabi.

Ms. A: "There is no place and time to speak Punjabi. They spend all the time in school where they speak English. At home, they speak Urdu. There is no one else with whom they speak Punjabi."

By emphasizing the importance of mastering Urdu in reading, speaking, and understanding, the parent may be motivated by a desire for their children to succeed in a broader social and academic context. Also, she argues that;

Ms. A: "Urdu is a main language and everyone should know how to read, understand and speak. Punjabi is found to the extent of understanding." KSAEnglish language. Ms. A highlights that;

Ms. A: "Because it is an international language. Without English, there is no good opportunity to find jobs."

It is very important for children to know and learn different languages, reflecting a positive and supportive parental attitude toward preserving and learning the Punjabi language. The parents express pride in the language, associating it with cultural identity and national pride, as it is one of the official languages of Pakistan. This attitude demonstrates a strong sense of cultural attachment and an understanding of the value of the language as an integral part of the children's

heritage. Ms. B doesn't want to criticise her children if they speak the Punjabi language because

Ms. B: "We have no issues with Punjabi because it is one of the languages of Pakistan, and we feel proud when they try to copy any Punjabi word or phrase. It is very important for children to know and learn different languages."

Also, she has the same thoughts about Urdu and Punjabi languages wherever she goes.

Ms. B: "I think I have same thoughts about it where ever I go. It is not related to any specific area or region."

In KSA, there are many factors that hinder maintaining the native language and encourage the mothers to make their children proficient in the English language. Ms. B argues that;

Ms. B: "Since Arabs are not familiar with Urdu the preferred language is Arabic and then English. Therefore, we try to focus on Arabic and English."

The preference for focusing on one language at a time could indicate a belief that children may struggle to keep languages separate, especially in bilingual or multilingual environments. The concern about mixing languages suggests that the parent may fear that this could hinder their child's ability to master any of the languages fully. The use of Arabic in this context may reflect the parent's desire for their child to become fluent in one language first before moving on to others, possibly viewing this approach as a way to ensure solid foundational skills.

Ms. B: "The use of Arabic language. For children it is hard to learn multiple languages at a time. They end up mixing all languages together so we prefer to focus on one at a time."

Ms. C would not mind and criticize her children if they speak Punjabi language "but it is also not required of them." Moreover, she has the same thoughts about Urdu and Punjabi languages wherever she goes.

In KSA, there are many factors that motivate the mothers to make their child proficient in English language. Ms. C argues that;

Ms. C: "The fact that it enables them to communicate effectively with a wider percentage of world, outside of KSA as well as inside"

The parent's acknowledgment that extra effort or external resources, such as hiring a tutor, may be required indicates a proactive approach to language maintenance. It also suggests that the parent values the language enough to invest time and resources into its preservation, even when it is not supported by mainstream education systems. This could indicate an understanding of the

long-term benefits of bilingualism and the desire to ensure that children are connected to their heritage language and culture, even in an environment where the language is not widely taught. However, it also reflects the challenges many immigrant families face in balancing the preservation of their native language with the demands of the dominant language of the host country.

Ms. C: "The native language is not widely offered at every school, and so in these cases, parents have to put an extra effort or employ separate tutor to maintain and teach skills for Urdu"

Analysis of Children Attitudes

Structured interviews have been taken from the children. When asked about the favorite language, Ms. A's children explains that their favorite language is English, they know Punjabi language, they speak Urdu and English with the siblings and their mother use Urdu when angry at them. They used to speak in Urdu while talking to friends and family. Her elder child illustrates that;

Ms. A's child: "I can understand Punjabi well, but don't speak it."

Also, one of the children argues that;

Ms. A's child: "I like speaking Urdu but not studying it in school."

These statements reflect a common attitude among children toward language learning. It suggests that the child values the practical, social use of the language, speaking it in everyday settings or within the family, because it is a means of communication and connection. However, the child's reluctance to study it in school indicates that they may find formal language learning less engaging or relevant. This distinction highlights a preference for natural, conversational language use over academic or structured learning environments, which might be perceived as less enjoyable or more challenging. This attitude could point to a need for more interactive or culturally relevant teaching methods to make studying the language more appealing and connected to real-life experiences.

Ms. B's elder child explains that he likes Punjabi because "my baba speaks it". He speaks English fluently with his sibling but few phrases of Urdu. Their mother use Urdu when angry at them.

Ms. C's children hold that although they can speak Urdu and English but cannot speak Punjabi so fluently. They speak "a mixture of Urdu and English" with their siblings but Urdu with their friends. Their mother use Urdu when angry at them.

Strategies to Maintain Mother Tongue

Mother's role in maintaining their mother tongue in the multiethnic community is essential. Some mothers have used some sort of strategies to maintain their

native language in KSA. Ms. A provides various examples that how she maintains Urdu in their home.

Ms. A: "Personally, I have done this at home. When I came here, I first saw the atmosphere. My neighbor's children spoke English because there are people of multiple nationalities here. They have to go to school, they have no choice. I have never spoken English with Affan or any other child since his childhood that a child will learn on his own when he goes to school. Strict speaking is to be done. If the parents speak themselves, the child will learn. Of all the people who know me here, my children are the best in Urdu. Affan's Adil's Urdu is good because it has been spoken since childhood and another benefit was that their grandparents were also with them, there was an atmosphere of Urdu at home. Kids learn more funny things. When it comes to talking funny, Faisal used to speak Punjabi in Lahori style and their grandmother used to tell some stories. So, it makes a big difference."

A supportive environment for language maintenance is created when peers and family speak the same native tongue. This conversation gives people the chance to use language on a regular basis, which helps them keep up their proficiency. Companions and Television can play an important role in maintaining the languages. Ms. A explains that;

Ms. A: "Friends play an important role. There were all Arabic and some Egyptian British children in Affan's class, but there were some Urdu speakers in the other section. Obviously, we also became friends with their mothers. He still has a group of Pakistani children. Parents should keep in touch with Pakistani people. Having Urdu-speaking friends also encourage other children to speak that language. Parents should also keep family terms with these people so that children feel more connected, and parents should also try to speak Urdu to them."

Utilise television as a tool for language learning by encouraging children to watch programs in Urdu. This strategy exposes children to the language in an engaging and entertaining way, allowing them to learn vocabulary, sentence structures, and pronunciation quickly. Parents can support this learning by discussing the content with their children in Urdu and reinforcing the language in a fun and interactive context.

Ms. A: "In homes where, not our home, television is watched in Urdu, children learn quickly. Many of our acquaintances whose children watch these dramas in Urdu like *Bulbulay*, which my children do not know, so it makes a big difference that what is going on in your home television."

Ms. A gives an example of her friend how she maintains Punjabi at her home.

Ms. A: "A friend of mine name Ayesha, whom you have met at the wedding, they used to speak Punjabi at their home. And they speak Punjabi in such a sweet way, little children like Affan's age, they speak Punjabi with such a sweet way when I met my friend's son he spoke so good Punjabi that 'Ammi mein aa jawan, Ammi mein chala jawan' So, it seemed so cute that parents maintained Punjabi so well. The home's environment makes a big difference. Mothers who speak Urdu and Punjabi to their children, their children can speak those languages well."

Encourage parents to consistently use the target language (e.g., Urdu) in their daily interactions, even when speaking with each other, not just directly with the children. This strategy creates an immersive language environment where children subconsciously absorb the language through regular exposure. Over time, children will begin to understand the language and may eventually start speaking it as they grow older, fostering natural language acquisition. Ms. B argues that parents should speak their native language in the home if they want to transmit that language to their children.

Ms. B: "If parents frequently use the language, even between them and not directly with children, the children will eventually learn to understand it and maybe even speak it at a later stage."

Also, encourage children to take ownership of their mother tongue by emphasising its importance as an essential part of their identity. This can be achieved through consistent reinforcement at home, where parents model pride in their language and culture. Parents can also create positive associations with the language by incorporating it into daily conversations, cultural activities, and family traditions, helping children develop a strong connection and sense of pride in their linguistic heritage.

Ms. B: "The main stigma that is attached to a mother tongue is being deemed as backwards and uneducated enough; which should be highly discouraged. The children should be taught to own their mother tongue, as it is a part of their identity."

Parents can integrate the mother tongue into daily routines to promote consistent language exposure and learning. Engaging children in conversations during activities such as mealtime, bath time, or watching TV creates opportunities for natural language use. Additionally, these interactions provide a practical and immersive approach, helping children connect the language to their everyday experiences. Ms. C argues through parents, children can learn their mother tongue. She argues that;

Ms. C: "In my opinion, every child has a right to learn and use their mother tongue. We as parents should realise that their mother tongue is and will be a

part of their identity. As parents the best way to make children learn their mother tongue is to spend time with them, speak to them in their mother tongue when they are at home, talk to them in your mother tongue during their basic daily routine like when it's meal time, bath time or while watching TV together."

As a strategy for promoting the mother tongue in bilingual or multilingual families, organising gatherings or encouraging visits with family members who speak the same language can be highly effective. Such interactions provide a natural and engaging environment for language use, boosting the children's confidence and accelerating their learning process.

Ms. C: "We can also organize get together or make them visit family members who share the same language as we have. This will make them more confident and will help them to learn more quickly. We can also develop their interests in our mother tongue by showing and introducing them with our culture and traditions."

DISCUSSION & FINDINGS

The first research question deals with the mother's influence in transmitting her mother tongue in the KSA community. The in-depth semi-structured interviews with mothers reveal their strong influence on language choices in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). According to the mothers, the English language is well-maintained in the region because Arabic speakers are not familiar with Urdu, making Arabic and then English the preferred languages. While they have no issues with Urdu and Punjabi, viewing them as important languages of Pakistan, they feel proud when their children attempt to speak Punjabi. These mothers emphasise the importance of children learning multiple languages, but they also express concerns when their children mix languages. As a result, they prefer to focus on one language at a time, believing that it is difficult for children to learn and maintain multiple languages simultaneously. Their approach highlights the significant role mothers play in guiding their children's language development, balancing pride in their heritage languages with a desire for practical language acquisition. Despite this, the mothers express no issues with their children's exposure to Urdu and Punjabi, considering them valuable languages of Pakistan. They feel a sense of pride when their children attempt to speak Punjabi, and they recognise the importance of preserving these languages within the family. At the same time, the mothers emphasise the necessity of children learning different languages for cognitive and cultural enrichment. However, they also express concerns about the challenges of managing multiple languages, particularly when children start mixing languages. This leads them to adopt a strategy of focusing on one language at a time, as they believe it helps children better grasp

and maintain language skills. These mothers' approach reflects their influence and protective nature in language choices, balancing cultural pride with practical considerations for their children's language development.

In addition to this, the structured interviews with the children indicate that, to some extent, they know Punjabi but prefer to speak Urdu and English with their siblings. When they are with friends and family, they use Urdu. All the children share the view that their mothers use Urdu when they are angry with them. When mothers are asked to rate their children's proficiency in these languages out of 10, the results show that the children are more proficient and fluent in English and have above-average Urdu speaking skills but are not proficient in Punjabi. This is likely because their parents use Urdu at home, and in school, they are required to use English.

Lastly, interview participants suggest various strategies that Pakistani mothers should adopt to preserve their mother tongue. Especially during the early years, mothers often take on the role of primary caregivers, spending the majority of their time with their young children. As a result, children are exposed to their mother's speech patterns, vocabulary, and linguistic structures, which aids in language transmission. Language is typically passed down through families, and the continuation and preservation of a language are ensured when parents and grandparents speak to younger generations in their mother tongue. Language maintenance can also be supported through television shows and other media that present a variety of linguistic and cultural experiences. Positive media representation of a language emphasises its importance and value. Television, especially language-specific channels and educational programs can be a very useful resource for language learning and enrichment.

CONCLUSION

Saudi Arabia, therefore, is a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic country where people from around the world migrate in search of better job opportunities and a brighter future. Using the snowball technique, data was collected from three Pakistani mothers who have lived in Saudi Arabia for more than six years, along with their husbands and children. Matras' theory and Fishman's domain theory of language shift and maintenance was used in this study. In-depth semi-structured interviews (with mothers) and structured interviews (with children) were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. This study is limited to three languages (English, Urdu, and Punjabi), three Pakistani families, and the interviewees were all housewives. The findings reveal that English and Urdu are well-maintained by the mothers in Saudi Arabia, but to some extent, their children know Punjabi. This study concludes that mothers typically take on the

role of primary caregiver, spending most of their time with their young children, particularly during their early years. Regular interaction enhances language transmission by exposing children to their mother's speech patterns, vocabulary, and linguistic structures. This method of communication facilitates language acquisition by making linguistic input more accessible to young children.

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