Saudi Parents and Teachers' Attitudes towards the New Implementation of English from Grade One in Primary Schools: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the new policy of introducing English alongside Arabic from grade one in Saudi primary schools. This qualitative descriptive study aims to understand the parents' attitudes and teachers' perspectives towards implementing English in grade one. The present study used two methods to collect data: A questionnaire to gather the data from parents, and semi-interviews to collect data from teachers. The samples of the study were 160 parents and 20 teachers. The results revealed that both parents and teachers have positive attitudes towards the new policy. They assured that English will not have a negative impact on Saudi pupils' performance in Arabic. However, the findings also indicated that designing a suitable curriculum, stimulating environment, and having more lessons per week are essential.

Keywords: bilingual education, EFL teachers, EFL students, primary school, education system

1. Introduction

Learning English as a foreign language is indispensable, and therefore, it has been a prominent emphasis of many educational systems across the globe (Hussien, 2014; Kizildag, 2009; Salahuddin, Khan, & Rahman, 2013). In this vein, Saudi Arabia has made several efforts on that purpose to achieve objectives related to science, tourism, sports, medicine, etc. Moreover, several studies have focused on the L2 influence on L1 (Aldosari & Alsultan, 2017; Hussien, 2014). Other studies have emphasized on challenges teachers face in teaching English (Anyiendah, 2017; Aristiawan & Herman, 2021). Furthermore, English has been a topic of heated debate in Saudi Arabia. In this respect, the Saudi Ministry of Education has announced that English language must be introduced from grade one alongside Arabic in Saudi primary schools. Therefore, in this study, the purpose was to have an idea about the Saudi parents' perceptions of English in general, and the new policy of English in particular. Moreover, the researchers seek to understand the challenges and barriers that may occur due to the new policy from teachers' perspectives.

1.1 Research Significance

The current research will be valuable to those who are interested in teaching and learning English in Saudi Arabia. This paper aims to demonstrate the attitudes and perceptions of parents and teachers in Saudi Arabia towards the new policy. Furthermore, the researchers tend to understand the challenges and obstacles of the English new policy from teachers' perspectives. This paper proves that despite the rumors that the Saudi community cannot accept English due to the cultural and religious aspects, the researchers proved that both parents and teachers demonstrated positive attitudes towards English in general and the new policy in particular.

1.2 Research Objectives

The present study's major objectives are as follows:

1. To find out whether the Saudi community, including parents and instructors, has positive attitudes regarding English in general and the new policy in particular.

2. To determine if the new English policy would have a detrimental impact on students' performance in Arabic.

3. To draw attention to the problems and obstacles that Saudi students may face as a result of this new policy.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi parents towards English in general and the new policy in particular?

2. What are Saudi parents' perspectives toward the idea that English will have a detrimental impact on Saudi pupils' performance in Arabic?

3. What are the teachers' perceptions and perspectives towards the challenges that students would face in implementing English from the first grade in Saudi primary schools?

2. Literature Review

This study aims to provide a comprehensive review of the English language in Saudi Arabia, EFL policy implementation, challenges for teachers and students in Saudi Primary Schools. This research will deal with the positives, negatives, and challenges of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabian schools in from neutral point of view. This study will also provide a general overview of the history of English in Saudi Arabia.

2.1 General Overview

Teaching English in Saudi schools has been a topic of heated debate due to the various perspectives of introducing English to the Saudi schools. According to Elyas (2008), English has been introduced in Saudi schools since 1970 onwards, and it was implemented to Saudi students from grade 7 in intermediate schools. Therefore, students study English for six years: three years in intermediate schools and three years in secondary schools. Additionally, English is now playing a crucial part in science, education, sports, technology, trade, etc. Therefore, English has become more important in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the Saudi Ministry of Education has decided to introduce English in primary schools (Elyas, 2008). Alshahrani (2016) assured that English was initially implemented in grade 7 in intermediate schools in 2003, and then in grades five and six, and grade four in primary schools in 2012. Furthermore, from 2000 to 2014, there has been a great shift in the implementation of English policy in Saudi schools since the Saudi Ministry of Education declared the new policy of teaching EFL in Saudi schools. The new policy indicated that English has to be introduced in all primary schools as a compulsory subject (Elyas, 2008). On the other hand, according to Nouraldeen and Elyas (2014), culture is one of the important factors that plays an essential role in the process of implementing any foreign language. They explained that Saudi Arabia has never been controlled nor affected by any colonization therefore; Saudi Arabia has not been influenced by any foreign cultures. Consequently, they claimed that Saudi society did not accept English in the beginning and it faced widespread rejection. They endorsed that "there are strong influences of culture on learning English since Saudi culture has not been affected by foreign cultures" (Nouraldeen & Elyas, 2014, p. 57).

2.2 The Importance of Teaching English in Saudi Arabia

English language is considered as a bridge that transfers the person from one situation to another in terms of education, knowledge, and development. Nowadays, English language is regarded as the *lingua franca* of the world that is utilized for sciences, business, tourism, and economy which raises the value of teaching and learning English in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, in recognition of the value of English, the Saudi Government has been focusing on the development of teaching English to Saudi learners as a passport to communicate with the world (Moskovsky & Picard, 2018). Currently, English is not only for politics but sciences and technology. It is not only important to be used in US or UK, but it is the link that gathers people together (Ahmad, 2016). The only foreign language that is taught in Saudi schools is English, and it is implemented as an essential subject at all the Saudi schools levels. Additionally, English has become a requirement in higher education and other fields such as engineering and medicine. English is seen in Saudi Arabia as an advantage for companies' jobs (Alfahadi, 2012). Consequently, Saudi Ministry of Education has announced to introduce English to Saudi primary schools from grade one alongside Arabic. This decision shows how the SME is determined to improve the Saudi learners' performance and competence in English.

2.3 EFL Policy Implementation in Primary Schools

In Saudi context, the research by Alotaibi (2014) was quite interesting because it reviewed the studies about teaching English in the early grades with different beliefs. The research has a strong sequence perspective about teaching EFL at an early age. Alotaibi (2014) insisted that the demand for English in Saudi Arabia is high due to Saudi Arabia's interests in the world. Thus, the study suggested a proposal of teaching EFL to early grades in Saudi schools based on strong recommendations. The research focused on three factors that should be considered to have convincing

outcomes in teaching EFL: age, cultural, and linguistic concerns. In age factor, various thoughts about introducing EFL to early grades are given. Alotaibi (2014) seems to support with teaching English in lower levels in elementary schools because of the positive consequences for long-term learning. In cultural factor, he agreed with the well-known principle that language should not be separated from culture. However, the study aimed that the specialists who are responsible for the materials need to be aware of what is appropriate to the Saudi children and what is acceptable to the Saudi culture. In linguistic factor, the research reveals the suspicions about the negative impacts of teaching EFL on the mother tongue (Arabic) to early grades in Saudi elementary schools. Nevertheless, the study suggests the opposite. Alotaibi (2014) believes that bilingual education for early grades will enhance the students' performance not only in the mother tongue but also in the target language. The research is rich in recommendations to the Saudi Ministry of Education to improve the policy of teaching EFL including macro and micro plans, materials, teachers, evaluation, etc. However, the research lacks methodology or any experimental study, which reduces the objectivity of this research.

Hussien (2014) discovered the impacts of learning English on Arabic literacy. The study focused on whether implementing English alongside Arabic will cause negative or positive consequences on Arabic reading and writing skills. The study's findings revealed that learning English in primary schools enhanced students' performance in Arabic reading and writing skills. However, the researcher ignored the factor of gender because all the bilingual students were female, whereas monolingual ones were male. Therefore, gender is an important aspect since multiple studies indicate that there are differences in achievement, motivation, and styles between male and female students (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006; Mori & Gobel, 2006).

Aljohani (2016) conducted the study to answer the question of whether implementing the policy of teaching English at primary schools is negative or positive especially in the students' achievements of Arabic subjects in grammar, writing, and reading. The research focused on four types of schools: Male public school, female public school, male private school, and female private school. English is taught in private schools from the first grade, whereas in public schools it is taught from grade four. The research's outcomes indicated no reference to a negative or positive influence of implementing English in primary schools on learning the Arabic language. Nevertheless, the researcher noticed that those students who were in private schools had better achievements in Arabic grammar, writing, and reading. This research seems to be interesting because it focused on both male and female students which offered a comprehension of learning English at primary schools. However, the results of the study were not convincing because the policy of teaching English at primary schools has been changing over the years in Saudi Arabia due to the impacts on students' competence and performance in the mother tongue and second language. Therefore, there has to be an influence whether negative or positive on the first language or second language acquisition based on how early children are exposed to L2 instruction during their school years.

Another study by Aldosari and Alsultan (2017) is one of the most recent notable studies in the field of bilingual education. Despite the objectivity of the writers, the research focuses on the fears and suspicions of the community towards the policy of teaching EFL in primary schools in Saudi Arabia. The goal of the research was to investigate the impacts of bilingual education on the literacy skills of the Arabic language in the areas of writing and reading. In other words, the researchers want to discover whether learning English in an early elementary school will negatively affect the Saudi students' mother tongue or not. Moreover, Aldosari and Alsultan (2017) conducted a comparison study with a sample consisting of 46 students (only female) from 2 primary schools: 30 in a public school and 16 in a private school to discover whether teaching EFL will affect students' literacy skills in Arabic. The comparison is based on the old policy that public schools introduce English in grade four in primary schools onwards. The private schools introduce English alongside Arabic from grade one onwards. The research sample examined students at age two. The study included a diagnostic test that was enhanced and organized by specialists and experts from the Ministry of Education. The test measured students' literacy skills in reading and writing Arabic. The study's findings indicated that students learning English in elementary schools had no negative effects on their Arabic literacy skills. Instead of that, the outcomes showed that both groups had achieved literacy skills in the Arabic language. However, despite the great results that the researchers have achieved through this research, the study ignored the male students, which is considered a very crucial factor that should be taken into consideration.

In the foreign context, Owu-Ewie (2006)'s research is considered one of the interesting earlier studies about the issues of bilingual education. The study was about the history and the development of Ghana's education which had changed over the years. The research focused on the negative impacts of exclusion of the mother tongue (Ghanaian language) as a solution to improve the Ghanaian students' performance in English. The study has criticized the new policy of the Ghana Ministry of Education introduced in 2002, which required the replacement of the Ghanaian language for the first three years of elementary school with English as a medium of instruction as well as a solution

to overcome the difficulties and obstacles that Ghanaian students face in learning English. Owu-Ewie explained that the poor performance of Ghanaian students in English was not because of the L1, but it was because of the lack of qualified teachers and lack of materials in both Ghanaian and English languages. Owu-Ewie (2006) strongly endorsed the value of teaching the Ghanaian language to help the students to gain the knowledge of the basic skills in learning any other second language. Owu-Ewie (2006) points out that "transferring from L1 to L2 is theoretically and empirically more probable" (Owu-Ewie, 2006, p. 79). He proposed an alternative model which is called the late-exit transitional bilingual education model. This model will allow the Ghanaian learners to learn their native language, get the cultural aspects and principles of Ghana, and achieve the basic skills and knowledge in their mother tongue during the first fourth grades in their learning, then the English language can be introduced to the students in grade five onwards. He believes that this policy of education will have positive consequences for both L1 and L2.

According to Hu (2007), one of the permanent difficulties of teaching English in China is the teachers' shortage problem. Therefore, the introduction of English in primary schools was an unplanned strategy. He argues that China's Ministry of Education should not have announced the new policy of teaching English in primary schools because of the shortage of teachers and the lack of qualified teachers. The research by Hu (2008) is considered as one noteworthy research of EFL implementation, which explored the effects of applying the new policy of teaching EFL to primary schools in China between 2004-5. The study explored that the Ministry of Education in China has announced that students must start learning EFL in grade three in primary schools instead of first grade in secondary school. Hu (2008) conducted an interesting comparison between 4 public schools. The schools are different in terms of locations, size, administration, number of students and teachers, and funding. All the schools are rural schools except one which is considered as an urban school. The results indicate that the implementation of EFL for elementary schools in China in 2004-5 had unsatisfactory outcomes due to the lack of qualified teachers, the funding issues, the macro and micro policy were not clear for schools' principals, and the temporary teachers. The research concluded that only one school should be able to implement the new policy of teaching EFL because the school has the advantage in terms of location, size, funding, and the background of the students' families about English. The study shows a clear picture of the difficulties and limitations of the new policy which sends a message that before applying any new policy, there should be an awareness of English and the importance of learning English to raise the community's interests towards the new implementation. Nevertheless, the research has not focused on the number of population in China, which is one of the permanent factors that is always considered as an issue and challenge for this country.

2.3.1 Issues and Challenges of EFL Teachers

Several studies have focused on the EFL teachers' weak performance in Saudi schools, but a few of them have emphasized the challenges and barriers that the Saudi teachers face. For instance, Al-Qahtani (2016) specifically conducted research to answer the question whether or not Saudi EFL teachers promote 'creativity' in their classrooms. The research outcomes indicated that the Saudi EFL teachers do not promote creativity in their classes. Al-Qahtani (2016) endorsed that teachers do not help the students to be involved in discussions and have different thoughts. He insisted that the Saudi EFL teachers rarely encourage their pupils in problem-solving tasks. In another example**,** Alrasheed (2012) stated that teachers who have some cultural and religious beliefs have negative impacts on teaching English in Saudi schools. He argued that their process of teaching was only restricted to completing the required topics, focusing on particular subjects for exams (Alresheed 2012, as cited in Alrabai, 2015). However, it is important to mention that teachers are the norm of any educational process. Without qualified teachers, there will be barriers and obstacles to the implementation of English in primary schools. Therefore, teachers remain the permanent challenge in bilingual education. Thus, in this part of the literature review, a focus is given on the difficulties and challenges that EFL teachers face in teaching English in primary schools.

Zhetpisbayeva and Shelestova (2015)'s study argued about the Kazakhstan's school experience of Teaching EFL early on that the changes and renovation of the curriculum affected teachers' performance because of the lack of experience and materials. Consequently, teachers lose their motivation for self-learning and training. They argued that if teachers do not have enough funding for their salary and training, they will face difficulties to improve their proficiency. Additionally, they explained that not all teachers have methodological aids, which make the process of teaching complicated.

Salahuddin et al. (2013) found in their study that teachers do not receive any assistance to use various materials or aids to improve the way of teaching. Their research revealed that the majority of teachers do not have any knowledge about the teaching English curriculum. They explained that teachers cannot use some techniques in teaching because of the environment of the class and a large number of students. They added that teachers face barriers to

understanding the concept of learning objectives, as a result, they cannot discover whether the learning objectives have been achieved or not. Moreover, they argued that teachers lack training and experience in the field of modern methods of teaching. Consequently, the expected outcomes of teaching English will not be acquired. They claimed that the majority of schools require their teachers to teach eight classes per day, which is unacceptable because teachers need plans and preparations for their classes (Salahuddin et al., 2013).

Rafique, Sultan, Ahmad, and Imran (2018) revealed in their research that teachers face numerous challenges and difficulties to implement the policy of teaching English in primary schools. For instance, teachers confront a difficult understanding of the background of students' families towards English whether positive or negative, inadequate funding to the schools, and aids' teaching. In their research, they insisted that teachers have to be trained to deal with and overcome those challenges. In the study, they explained that teachers face obstacles to help their students to be involved in English activities due to the multi-grade teaching; therefore, teachers are in a hard situation because of the limited time. They argued that despite the teachers' weakness in teaching English in primary schools, it is not fair to consider them as the main reason for the failure of English implementation in primary schools (Rafique et al., 2018).

Kizildag (2009) found in her research that teachers encountered a lack of proficiency in institutional planning. She insisted that teachers have to be skillful enough to be in charge of teaching in primary schools. Besides, teachers face difficulty in conducting an appropriate atmosphere to motivate their students because of external factors that are beyond their control. Consequently, the expected outcomes and objectives will not be achieved. Additionally, teachers need to have good materials that provide various activities to expand the students' understanding of English and to maximize the learning opportunities. She stated that one of the challenges that teachers face is to increase the awareness of the students' families about the importance of learning the English language. Another problem that teachers encountered is that some classes are designed without access to the internet and the crowded classrooms make the process of teaching and learning complicated (Kizildag, 2009).

2.3.2 Issues and Challenges of EFL Students

Teachers are obliged to teach and educate students. As a result, students should be taught in a way that is appropriate, motivating, and relevant to their interests as possible. On the other hand, from teachers' perspective, students finish secondary schools without having the opportunity for having conversations in English (Alshumaimeri 2003, as cited in ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). Therefore, it is critical to emphasize that if teachers are not qualified enough or face some difficulties in teaching English, there will be negative impacts on the students' performance. In other words, the relationship between teachers and students is synchronous, which means when teachers fail to teach English in an appropriate manner, students will encounter difficulties in learning English as a result.

According to ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013, Saudi Arabia has seen unprecedented development in the field of education. However, they stated that "despite all the efforts made by the various bodies, the situation of teaching English in Saudi Arabia has always been in a constant state of flux" (p. 112). They argued that "the situation in Saudi Arabia is very pathetic" (p. 116). The authors made it clear that Saudi students use English only in classrooms. Therefore, Aristiawan and Herman (2021) stated that teachers should be aware of effective teaching strategies because teachers play an essential role in both education and guiding students towards systematic procedures. They explained that the competence of teachers is associated with the success of the students based on strategies used in classrooms (Aristiawan & Herman, 2021).

The research by Ahmed (2013) was about the obstacles of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. The research findings indicated that students have problems with productive and receptive skills. The study suggested that teachers should be flexible with students' mistakes and try to help them with using modern methods in teaching to overcome students' difficulties. Furthermore, the challenges and difficulties of learning and teaching English would be understood and solved when it is studied from students' perspectives (Elibariki, 2017).

Alrabai (2016) reported that the lack of exposure to English is because of the usage of Arabic as the language of instruction. He claimed that due to the dominance of the Arabic language in Saudi schools, Saudi students' exposure to English has been limited, therefore, they neither practice nor communicate in English as a result.

Alqahtani (2011) as cited in Alrabai (2016) argued that Saudi EFL students have a perspective that English is useless for their academic future and social lives, which caused a weak performance in learning English. In addition to that, Alharbi (2015) asserted strongly with Alqahtani that Saudi EFL students did not comprehend the value and relevance of English not only in the field of education but also as a scientific and communication language. Therefore, Saudi EFL students lack the motivation to learn English due to misconceptions about the significance of English as a

foreign language. Thus, to overcome those difficulties and obstacles that Saudi students encounter, pupils should be exposed to English as often as possible (Alharbi, 2015).

3. Methodology

This section presents the methodology and the procedures used to address the research questions. This study was conducted to understand the challenges of the new policy to introduce English from first the grade alongside Arabic in Saudi primary schools. It is an attempt to discover the difficulties that Saudi students may face from both teachers' and parents' perspectives. The main aim of this research is to find whether the new policy will achieve the expected outcomes or not. For achieving that goal, this research used a qualitative approach to collect and analyze data. In this section, the research approach, research questions, research data collection strategies, research population, sample and randomization, research questionnaire and interviews, and research ethical rules are described.

3.1 Research Approach

This research used a qualitative descriptive approach to understand challenges and difficulties that Saudi pupils would face regarding the new policy of implementing English from first grade in Saudi primary schools. This research used two tools: questionnaire, and semi-interviews. The reason for using two tools is that the use of two tools help to reduce the limitation of one tool through the addition of another tool, therefore, strengthening the outcomes of the research.

3.2 Research Questions

By collecting the data using qualitative methods, the goal was to answer the three following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi parents toward English in general and the new policy in particular?

2. What are Saudi parents' perspectives toward the idea that English will have a detrimental impact on Saudi pupils' performance in Arabic?

3. What are the teachers' perceptions and perspectives towards the challenges that students would face in implementing English from the first grade in Saudi primary schools?

The first and second research questions had targeted Saudi parents. As a result, a questionnaire was conducted to answer and understand the two research questions. On the other hand, the third research question had targeted the Saudi EFL teachers around Saudi Arabia. Therefore, semi-interviews had been conducted to answer the third research question.

3.3 Research Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

1. There is no encouragement towards English in Saudi society.

2. The Saudi parents are not satisfied with the new policy.

3. Saudi pupils are not having enough exposure to the Arabic language, therefore, introducing English alongside Arabic will have detrimental consequences.

4. Saudi pupils use one dialect of Arabic, but not standard Arabic. Therefore, this will slow down their progress in Arabic because they would have very little or no exposure to standard Arabic.

5. Introducing English alongside Arabic from first grade will negatively affect the Saudi pupils' performance in Arabic.

3.4 Research Data Collection Strategies

The data was collected by using two qualitative methods: questionnaire and semi-interviews. A questionnaire was conducted to understand Saudi parents' perspectives on the new policy on the English language in Saudi primary schools. On the other hand, semi-interviews were conducted to understand the challenges and difficulties that Saudi pupils will face from the teachers' perspective. The time spent to collect the data is one month for both tools. The process of collecting the data started immediately after receiving IRB approval from the Deanship of Scientific Research at Sattam bin Abdulaziz University.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

A reliable and valid questionnaire that was used in this study was adopted from Alzubaidi, (2018). Some small modifications were added to serve the research questions. Moreover, some items of the questionnaire were deleted because they were not appropriate for the research questions. This questionnaire was used to understand the Saudi

parents' perspective towards the new policy of teaching the English language from first grade and to find out whether introducing English alongside Arabic will cause positive or negative outcomes. Therefore, the questionnaire was distributed through Google's form around Saudi Arabia to represent the whole population. The total number of questions is 11: The first three items were general items for gender, region, and scientific degree, and the other items were structured responses. The total number of participants is 160 parents.

3.4.2 Semi-Interviews

The interviews were conducted with Saudi teachers to understand the challenges and difficulties that may exist regarding the new policy of teaching English in Saudi primary schools. In this tool, the goal was to listen to the heart of teaching which is teachers. From the teachers' perspective, the problems and challenges can be discovered and overcome. Therefore, the interviews with teachers consisted of 7 questions. The semi-interviews were conducted in an unstructured way. In other words, the researcher has interviewed the participants based on their preferred way to have interviews such as verbal interviews by using the ZOOM platform, written interviews by using e-mail and other platforms for texting, and face-to-face interviews. The participants understood their rights before the interviews. The number of participants was 20 teachers: 10 male and 10 female teachers to have valid and reliable outcomes. The majority of teachers are EFL teachers in primary schools; however, some of the participants were EFL teachers in intermediate and secondary schools. Thus, the researchers assured that those who were not primary school teachers have experience in teaching English in primary schools. Moreover, all the participants are aware of the new policy of teaching English from grade one in Saudi primary schools.

3.5 Research Population, Sample, and Randomization

In linguistics studies, a sample is several participants that should be presenting the whole community. The use of a sample in academic studies is an essential element that researchers use to represent the whole population. Therefore, the population of Saudi Arabia is 35 million according to the last statistics. Thus, it is clear that any researcher cannot have the ability to have interviews and questionnaires data from the whole population. However, in this study, the sample used in both tools interviews and questionnaire have represented the whole community. To prove that claim, 160 parents have represented the whole population in Saudi Arabia because they were from different regions: center, north, south, east, and west Saudi Arabia which can be found in figure 1. In addition to that, the researchers made sure that the questionnaire has to be distributed online by Google Form to have quick responses and to reach the largest possible number of participants around Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, since randomization is well known and used in qualitative studies, this study ensured to achieve randomization by using two techniques. First, the participants in the questionnaire and interviews were from different regions around Saudi Arabia. The purpose of that was to make sure that the study at least included a sample from each region in Saudi Arabia. Second, the sample of questionnaire and interviews were chosen randomly in this research. To prove this claim, the study only has chosen the region that the samples should be from, but the samples were chosen randomly by mediators who facilitated the distribution of the questionnaire by sending the link to different people who live in different regions, and other mediators who also facilitated interviews with teachers who live in various regions in Saudi Arabia. In other words, there was a huge effort made in this study to avoid bias and have impartial outcomes.
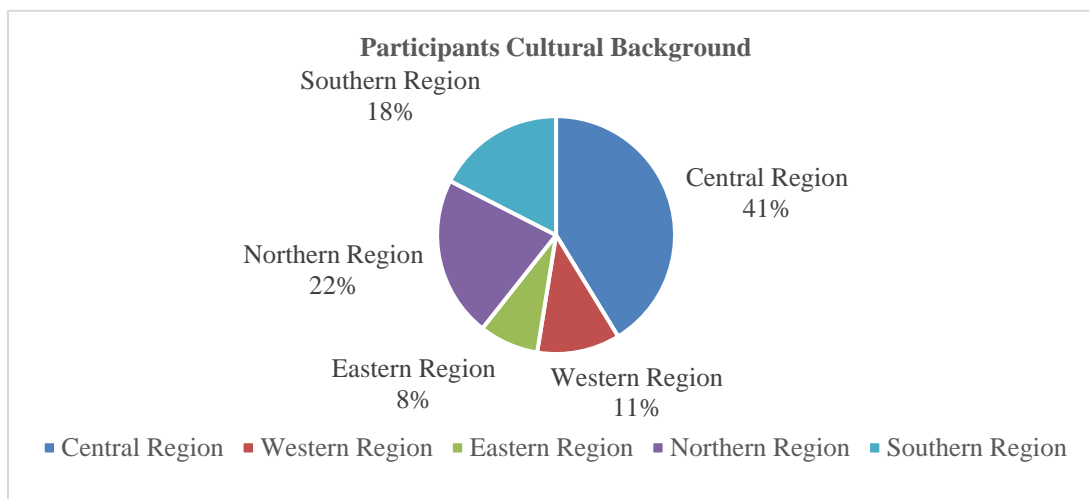

Figure 1. Participants Cultural Background

Details on figure 1 indicated that the participants have participated in the questionnaire from different regions. Therefore, it gave the study more objectivity towards the new policy of implementing English in Saudi primary schools from grade one. Moreover, in figure 1, the central region had the most participants because it has the capital city of KSA, therefore, it has more populations than other regions. In addition to that, the participants in the interviews were from various cities in Saudi Arabia which can be found in figure 2. The study ensured to have participants from both male and female teachers, and from various regions across Saudi Arabia to generalize the study and represent the whole population as possible.
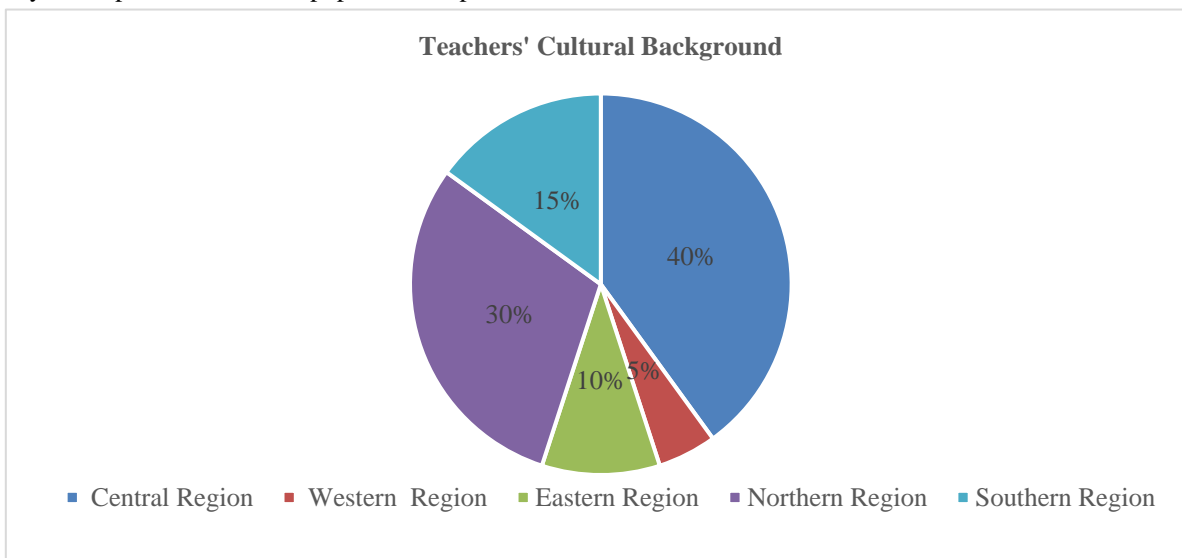

Figure 2. Teachers' Cultural Background

Information on figure 2 indicated that the participants were from different regions of Saudi Arabia which gave the study more objectivity and impartial views.

3.6 Research Ethical Rules

In this research, the researcher made sure to follow several guidelines to confirm that the study's ethics were achieved. For example, the researcher had permission to get the IRB's acceptance from Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University to collect data. All the participants have known their rights before the interviews and questionnaire took place. Moreover, the researcher ensured that all participants knew about the goal of this study. The participants were given a choice to announce their names or not in semi-interviews, but the participants in the questionnaire were not allowed to share their names to guarantee privacy and avoid any hesitation from the participants.

4. Data Results and Analysis

This study presents the results based on the data collected from the questionnaire and interviews. This research displays the outcomes that have been collected to answer research questions. In this paper, the questionnaire's items and the questions asked in semi-interviews are presented with their results.

4.1 Questionnaire Results and Data Analysis

The questionnaire was conducted to answer two of the research questions. This tool has been organized to understand Saudi parents' perspectives towards the new policy of introducing English from first grade alongside Arabic in Saudi primary schools. Therefore, the responses were reviewed numerous times to obtain a general understanding of the data. Moreover, a deductive descriptive approach was used with prior coding systems to facilitate the process of categorization and generalization. Thus, the responses were collected and categorized in the first phase and analyzed in the second phase.

4.1.1 Research Question 1

The first research question is: What are the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi parents toward English in general and the new policy in particular? To understand and answer that question, the following sub-questions have been answered by the parents.

Item 1: Which language do you most encourage your child/children to use?

The purpose of this study was to understand the extent to which Saudi parents accept English to be used by their

children. The majority of participants agreed that they encourage their children to use both Arabic and English which will be found in the figure 3.
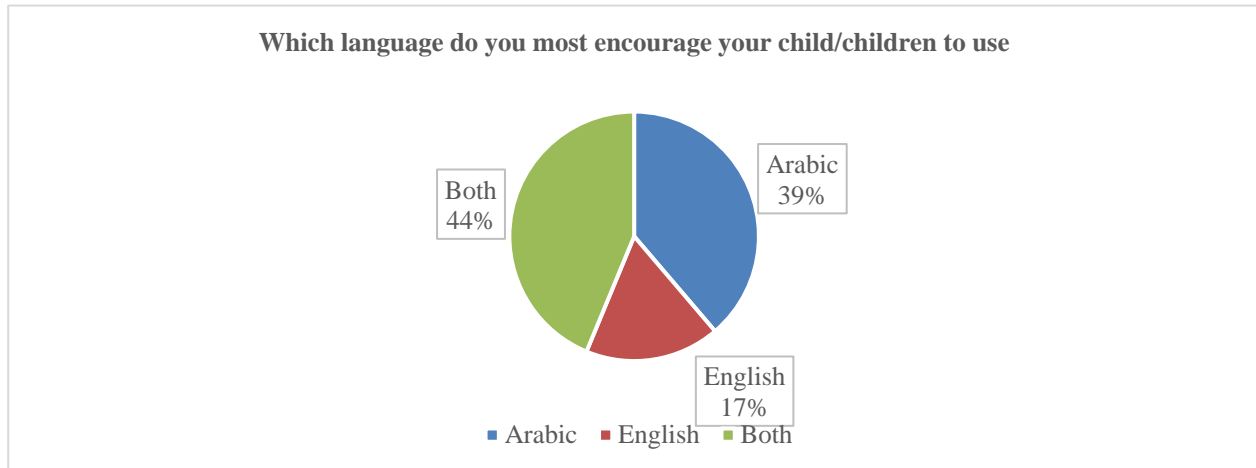

Figure 3. Which language do you most encourage your child/children to use?

Information on figure 3 showed that 44% percent of participants are encouraging their children to use both Arabic and English, while 17% percent of participants are willing that their children speak English. On the other hand, 39% percent of participants are encouraging their children to use only Arabic. Therefore, based on Saudi parents' responses in this question, the research rejected the first hypothesis in this study because it was obvious that the participants have interest in English although Arabic has 39% percent.

Item 2: Do you prefer your child/ children to be bilingual?

The goal of this question is to know the parents' position in the importance of English for their children's future and towards the new policy of implementing English in Saudi primary schools. Consequently, almost 92% of all participants agreed that they prefer their children to speak two languages, which in the Saudi context means Arabic and English.

Item 3: Do you agree with the Saudi Ministry of Education's decision to introduce English in the first grade of Saudi Primary school?

The purpose of this question was to make sure about the Saudi parents' attitude towards the new policy because there was a tremendous suspicion of this decision. However, the results of this question revealed that the majority of the participants are confident with success of the new policy with 78% percent. Therefore, this result rejected the second hypothesis of this study.

4.1.2 Research Question 2

The second research question is: 2. What are Saudi parents' perspectives toward the idea that English will have a detrimental impact on Saudi pupils' performance in Arabic? To answer this question, the following sub-questions have been answered by the parents.

Item 1: Which language do you use to communicate with your children at home?

The purpose of this question was to check the truth of the ubiquitous threats that people think may occur in the Arabic language if English is taught in first grade in Saudi primary schools. Subsequently, the results indicated that 82% percent of the parents use Arabic to communicate with their children at home. Therefore, these results substantiated that there are no detrimental effects on Saudi students' performance in Arabic because Arabic is already appropriately used at home. Thus, English will not affect negatively on Saudi students' performance in Arabic.

Item 2: Which language does your child speak most at home?

In this question, the purpose was to find out whether the children speak Arabic or English at home. Thus, the outcomes substantiated that the children are also using Arabic at home. Therefore, the results indicated that there are no detrimental consequences on children's performance in Arabic because the pupils are supposed to have enough exposure to Arabic. Therefore, these outcomes contradicted the third research hypothesis of this study.

Item 3: What form of Arabic do you use at home?

The purpose of this question was to check the fourth hypothesis which indicates that the real challenge of the Saudi students is the form of the Arabic language, which is standard Arabic. In other words, it was hypothesized that Saudi students speak one dialect of Arabic, so when they attend schools, they face challenges with the standard Arabic form. Therefore, the results of this question revealed that 94% percent of the parents use one dialect of Arabic with their children. Thus, this outcome confirmed the fourth hypothesis which was indicated that Saudi pupils use one dialect among Arabic dialects, but not standard Arabic.

Item 4: Do your children encounter difficulties in speaking Arabic with Saudi children?

The goal of this question was to make sure that the Saudi pupils do not have difficulties when they communicate with other children in Arabic because if they have some obstacles, the adopting of English as a new policy will not be appropriate. Therefore, the results of this question indicated that the majority of participants asserted that their children do not have any difficulties with other Saudi pupils in communication in Arabic which will be shown in figure 4.
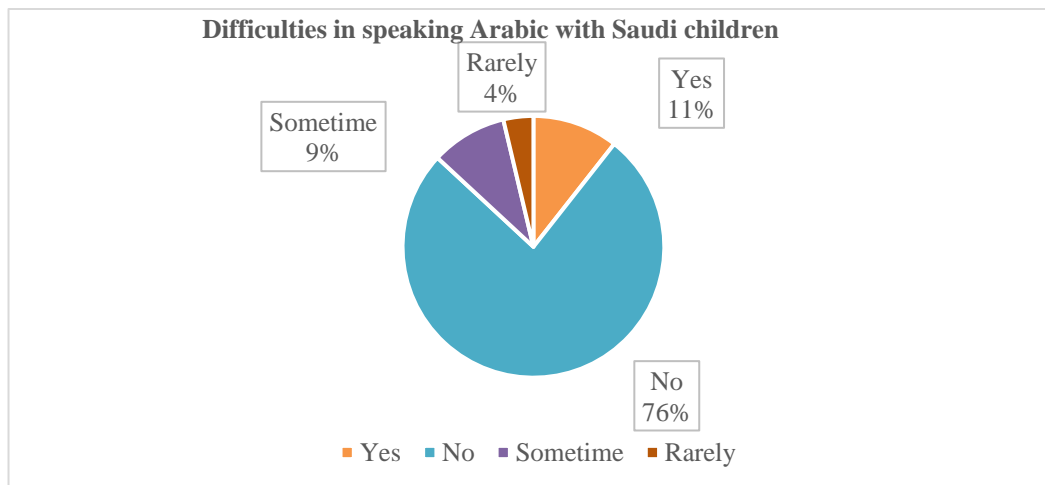

Figure 4. Difficulties in speaking Arabic with Saudi children

Numbers in figure 4 showed the majority of Saudi parents assured that their children do not have barriers when they communicate in Arabic. Therefore, there is a chance to learn English because they have at least mastered some of the Arabic's principles such as greetings, asking for help, and other language functions.

Item 5: Does adopting the English language alongside the Arabic language influence students' Arabic language proficiency?

The purpose of this question was to know the reaction of Saudi parents towards this new policy. The question was formed directly and with two options, yes or no. Thus, the results revealed that 63% percent of participants answered this question with no. Therefore, the outcomes of this question rejected the fifth hypothesis in this study.

Based on the participants' questionnaire responses, the study indicated that the Saudi parents understand the value of the English language in the current time. They encourage their children to learn English alongside Arabic from first grade. They are aware of the importance of the new policy and how it is necessary for their children's future. They endorse the new decision made by the Saudi Ministry of Education.

4.2 Semi-interviews Results and Data Analysis

The semi-interviews were conducted to answer the third research question. This tool has been used to understand Saudi EFL teachers' perspectives on the challenges and difficulties of the new policy of implementing English from first grade alongside Arabic in Saudi primary schools. Therefore, the transcripts were reviewed numerous times to obtain an overall sense of the data. A qualitative descriptive approach was used without prior coding systems. Thus, an inductive design analysis was used to provide themes. In this step, coding some important parts of participants' comments was the first phase, and providing themes to be analyzed was the second phase.

4.2.1 Research Question 3

The third research question is: What are the teachers' perceptions and perspectives towards the challenges that students would face in implementing English from first grade in Saudi primary schools.

Question 1: Do you think the new policy of teaching English from grade one to Saudi students is a well-studied step from the Saudi Ministry of Education? Explain

The purpose of this question was to discover whether the Saudi teachers endorse this new step in Saudi education or not. It was an attempt to understand the consequences of this new policy from teachers' perspectives. Therefore, the majority of the participants endorsed the new decision of the Saudi Ministry of Education. They agreed upon the new policy of introducing English from first grade in Saudi primary schools as an effective step to the Saudi students' future. In addition to that, one of the participants was highly supportive of the new policy, she explained that *"yes of course, especially in our environment where most students are barely exposed to the English language."* On the other hand, other participants were afraid that despite the effectiveness of this new policy, the curriculum was not prepared for the first grade, but the fourth grade. For instance, one of the participants stated that *"no, because it's designed for the 4th grade."* Therefore, based on the participants' responses, it was obvious that they have expected this decision because of its necessity. They understand the value of introducing English from grade one despite the challenges that may occur.

Question 2: Do you think the Saudi students are ready to learn English alongside Arabic from the first grade? Explain

In this question, the goal was to understand whether the students are ready for this new situation or not. It was to know how teachers think of the students' ability towards learning two languages at the same time. Thus, the results of this question revealed that the majority of the participants strongly showed an agreement that the Saudi pupils are ready for this new policy. For example, one of the participants stated an interesting statement that "*well, yes, nowadays children are exposed to more English than they were before. Children now enter school and they already know English numbers, letters, colors, and some songs. Why not push them to learn more from school?".* Moreover, another teacher said that *"yes, I do. They are ready to learn the English language due to the facilities we have in Saudi Arabia. They are the most qualified teachers. They use the newest methods of teaching. So, the students have a good opportunity to learn the English language".* Therefore, based on the participants' comments, Saudi children can learn two languages because of the highly advanced educational logistics in Saudi schools.

Question 3: Do you think Saudi students have motivation to learn English? Explain

The purpose of this question was to find whether the Saudi students have motivation towards learning English or not. The question has targeted the teachers because they can notice whether students have the motivation to learn English or not. Thus, the results of this question indicated that almost all the teachers believed that Saudi students have great motivation towards learning English. Moreover, the study found that teachers confirmed that the Saudi students' motivation came from the knowledge that their families have towards English and video games. For instance, one of those participants said that *"students now are more motivated than they were before. Parents nowadays understand that English is important and are more willing to have their children bilinguals. Also, English teachers are more creative now with their teaching which motivates them."* In addition to that, another teacher has shared a significant point that "*some students have a very strong motivation and I think that their families play an important role in building their desire to learn English. Kids learn and get things so fast so it's better to raise them with the importance of learning a second language."* Moreover, the majority of the participants also assured that video games play a crucial role because it is considered as a motivation for Saudi students to learn English. For example, one comment demonstrates the reason that children need English as one of the participants stated that "*of course, they have because they need the English language almost everywhere even in the entertainment side like video games for example".* Therefore, based on the participants' comments, the study revealed that students have motivation towards learning English and that because various reasons such as the video games and parents' attuite regarding the English language.

Question 4: Do you think Saudi students understand the value of learning English? Explain

In this question, the goal was to discover whether Saudi students in all grades understand the value of learning English or not. The purpose was if they do not recognize the importance of English then introducing English from an early age will help the students to value English as an essential step that has to be taken. Thus, the participants in the interviews showed different perspectives towards this question. In more details, 50% percent of the participants believed that students in all grades including children understand the value of learning English. For example, one of the participants indicated that *"yes especially nowadays where English is being used everywhere in the restaurants, malls, and coffee shops and with the wide exposure to the technology and the use of the smart devices which make it easier for them to learn and practice English and as a result, they get the value of learning English."* In contrast, 20% percent of the participants assured Saudi students do not realize the importance of English. For instance, one of the

participants shared an argumentative point by saying environment plays an important role in this particular point by saying that "*I think the answer of this question refers to the students' environment. This can be different from one environment to another. However, I believe the majority do not recognize the value of English'.* In addition to that, 30% percent of the participants answered this question from neutral view. For example, *"I am very neutral at this point; some students take the boundaries of religion something like an obstruction'.* Another participant added that *"well I can say it depends on the child's family, school, teacher, and environment in general".* Therefore, based on the participants' answers, the study revealed that some of the students understand the value of English because of their families and environment. However, others indicated that some of the students do not recognize the importance of English as a foreign language and the reasons behind that could be related to cultural and religious principles.

Question 5: Do you think teaching English alongside Arabic is something important for students' future? Explain

The purpose of this question was to discover how the participants will respond to this question based on two dimensions: Arabic language and English as an important step for students' future. Thus, the results indicated that the majority of participants agreed that English is a global language, essential for students' learning, and will not negatively affect the students' performance in the Arabic language. Moreover, the participants believed that the importance of learning English for children's future is not questionable. For example, one of the participants said that "*being bilingual is something that can help you in many aspects of life."* Another participant added that "*yes of course as we all see most of the careers in the job market now require English as the main qualification to get the position."* Therefore, there is consistency in the participants' answers to questions 1 and 5. They believe the new policy is a crucial and adequate step. They believe teaching English alongside Arabic from grade one is a decision that has to be taken earlier.

Question 6: Do you think the English curriculum is matching with students' interests?   Explain

In this question, the point that the researchers seek to understand was the curriculum's issues. In other words, one of the permanent challenges that the Saudi students encounter is the English curriculum's subjects. In addition to that, the curriculum's issues are assumed to be in all grades not only in primary schools. Therefore, the goal was to understand the curriculum's challenges from teachers' perspectives. Thus, the results revealed that 40% percent of the participants agreed that the curriculum is suitable to some extent. For instance, one of the participants explained that "*yes because we notice that our government is trying to make the curriculum more fun, enjoyable, and suitable for each age."* Another participant assured that *"the curriculum is much better than before because it is based on topics and students deal with the language better."* On the other hand, 60% of the participants argued that the curriculum is not suitable for the Saudi students because it is not matching with their interests and it focuses more on grammar than practice. For example, one of the participants assured that "*I do not think so. I see that the curriculum should focus more on students' interests such as pictures of things those Saudi students are interested in more."* Moreover, another participant assured that "*well, the curriculum is not suitable, at least not to great extent and that is one of the Inhibitors".* Therefore, in general, the results indicated that despite the great efforts made in the Saudi primary schools' English curriculum, the curriculum needs more modifications related to the students' interests. Moreover, the curriculum needs to focus more on communication and practicing more than grammar and instructions.

Question 7: What are the challenges that Saudi student will face on this new policy from your perspective? Explain

In this question, the purpose was to give the teachers a chance to mention any difficulties and challenges regarding the new policy of teaching English from grade one in Saudi primary schools. Thus, based on the participants' views on this question, the researchers end up with 4 themes that are considered as noticeable: (1) students should practice English in schools at least 4 times per week, (2) the parents are the real generator for children's motivation towards English, (3) and the need of qualified teachers, suitable curriculum, and enjoyable classes' atmosphere.

* Students should practice English in schools at least 4 times per week

The majority of the participants argued that having one English class per week in Saudi primary schools is not appropriate. They explained that the students should have an exposure to English more than one time per week to achieve positive outcomes. One of the participants indicated that *"heavy curriculum and they just have one period a week and Students need time to practice the language."* Moreover, another teacher assured that "*I believe the lack of practicing English is one of the main challenges. Some Saudi students will find this difficult because they are not familiar from the beginning with the English language."* Therefore, the results indicated the need for increasing English classes in Saudi primary schools to give the students a great chance to have enough exposure to English.

*** The Parents are the real generator for children's motivation towards English**

The majority of teachers believed that parents play an important role in this new policy. They admitted that without the assistance of pupils' parents towards learning English, the process of teaching English in schools will not be enough for the children to achieve positives consequences. In other words, one of the participants explained that *"some students may have some difficulties because they were not exposed to English and some were raised in a family where English was something not important to learn"*. Therefore, the results of participants' views indicated that parents should also take the responsibility towards learning English as well as the responsibility of teachers.

*** The need of qualified teachers, suitable curriculum, and enjoyable classes' atmosphere.**

The majority of the participants talked about this new policy needing qualified teachers, a suitable curriculum that matches with students' interests, and enjoyable classes. In other words, they explained that to achieve positives outcomes, the classes should be colorful to stimulate the children, the teachers should be patient with children's behavior in classes, and the English curriculum should include topics that match with students' interests and understanding. In more detail, one of the teachers argued that *"well, it's the teacher's role to motivate the students and make them feel that learning a second language is very important. For young learners, teachers should use fun, interactive and interesting techniques that help their students to acquire English easily."* Another teacher asked, *"a well-trained teacher, the curriculum must change, and increasing classes".* Therefore, based on teachers' perspectives, the new policy of teaching English from first grade needs qualified teachers, a suitable curriculum, and an enjoyable class atmosphere to have desired outcomes.

Based on the participants' semi-interviews responses, the study indicated that the majority of the participants endorsed the new decision of the Saudi Ministry of Education. They strongly showed an agreement that the Saudi pupils are ready for this new policy. They believe that Saudi students have great motivation towards learning English. Moreover, they agreed that English is a global language, essential for students' learning, and will not negatively affect the students' performance in the Arabic language. On the other hand, 60% of the participants argued that the curriculum is not suitable for the Saudi students because it is not matching with their interests and it focuses more on grammar than practice. In addition to that, students do not have enough exposure to English in schools. Therefore, to override those limitations, the participants advised that the parents are the real generator for children's motivation towards English, give the responsibility to qualified teachers in primary schools, provide a suitable curriculum, and attractive atmosphere for children's classes.

5. Discussion

The main concern of this study was the challenges and difficulties that the Saudi students would experience in primary schools as a result of the announcement that English will be introduced as a mandatory subject alongside Arabic from grade one. Thus, in this study, two tools were used to understand those difficulties and challenges from teachers' and parents' perspectives: A questionnaire was conducted to understand Saudi parents' perceptions of English and semi-interviews to understand teachers' perspectives. Therefore, teachers and parents were allowed to share their thoughts and concerns about this new policy.

Results demonstrated clearly that Saudi parents recognize the significance of the English language in the current time. They encourage their children to study English alongside Arabic from first grade. They understand the importance of the new policy and why it is essential for their children's future. They support the new decision made by the Saudi Ministry of Education. Moreover, teachers endorsed the new policy and expressed strong agreement that the Saudi students are prepared and motivated for this new policy. In addition to that, they agreed that English is a worldwide language that is necessary for students' learning and will not have a detrimental impact on students' performance in Arabic. Nevertheless, 60% of the teachers claimed that the curriculum is unsuitable for Saudi pupils since it does not correspond to their interests and concentrates on language' grammar rather than practice. Furthermore, pupils are not given an adequate English exposure in school.

The study's findings are relatively consistent with those of previous studies that indicated the great effectiveness of implementing English in primary schools in general and grade one in particular (Aldosari & Alsultan, 2017; Alotaibi, 2014; Hussien, 2014). For example, Alotaibi (2014) found that the implementation of English in primary schools will lead to positive consequences for long-term learning. Moreover, Hussien (2014) and Aldosari and Alsultan (2017) studies focused on whether implementing English alongside Arabic will cause negative or positive consequences on Arabic reading and writing skills. The study's findings revealed that learning English in primary schools enhanced students' performance in Arabic reading and writing skills.

On the other hand, the outcomes of some other research papers were inconsistent with the expectations, perceptions,

and findings of this research (Alharbi, 2015; Nouraldeen & Elyas, 2014). For instance, the study by Alharbi (2015) revealed that Saudi EFL students do not understand the value of English not only in the field of education but also as a scientific and communication language. She asserted that Saudi EFL students lack the motivation to learn English due to misconceptions about the significance of English as a foreign language. However, the inconsistency of results between this study and Alharbi (2015) study can be explained that the present study has used two tools to understand parents' perceptions of English and to discover the challenges that Saudi pupils would face in the new policy from teachers' perspectives. Therefore, teachers and parents have demonstrated that Saudi children have a positive attitude and a great perception of English. However, the research by Alharbi (2015) lacks methodology which means the results were not accurate. In addition to that, Nouraldeen and Elyas (2014) claimed that Saudi society did not accept English in the beginning and it faced widespread rejection. They endorsed that "there are strong influences of culture on learning English since Saudi culture has not been affected by foreign cultures" (Nouraldeen & Elyas, 2014, p. 57). However, the present study's results have revealed that children, parents, and teachers are aware of the value of English and how it is important to be taught from grade one. The present study has shown a great welcome to the new policy from teachers' and parents' perspectives.

6. Conclusion

The current study aimed to understand the challenges and difficulties of the new policy of implementing English alongside Arabic from first grade in Saudi primary schools. To understand that, the study adopted qualitative descriptive research that includes questionnaire and interviews: A questionnaire was used to listen to Saudi parents' perceptions and perspectives towards the new policy, and interviews were used as well to listen to Saudi EFL teachers about the barriers of the new policy. The findings of this study demonstrated that both parents and teachers strongly agreed on the efficacy of the new strategy of teaching English alongside Arabic beginning in first grade in Saudi primary schools. They displayed consistent perspectives regarding the importance of studying English for the Saudi students' future. However, the findings also indicated that the goals of the new policy can only be achieved by designing a suitable curriculum, stimulating environment, and having more lessons per-week. Therefore, the Saudi Ministry of Education's decision-making needs to bear in mind that at primary levels students should have enough exposure to the English language to achieve desired outcomes. The curriculum makers should provide suitable materials and exercises to help the Saudi pupils to communicate in English rather than giving attention to English grammar.

6.1 Limitations

The current paper has some limitations related to sampling and methodologies. In its current status, this research could not be able to cover all the factors determining the difficulties and the challenges that the new policy of introducing English from first grade in Saudi primary schools' encounters. Therefore, the study's limitations are presented in the following matter:

1. The research used only the qualitative method.

2. The sample of the interviews is not enough.

3. The study only understood the Saudi parents' and teachers' perspectives towards this new policy, but could not understand that from the Saudi pupils.

Consequently, further studies are crucial to understanding what other challenges may be encountered by Saudi pupils in primary schools regarding the new policy.

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