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Parents' perceptions about the shifting language of primary and secondary school students in the Maldivian community

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ABSTRACT *English has become widely used as a second language in the Maldivian community, leading to a noticeable language shift. This qualitative research focuses on exploring this language shift. A descriptive phenomenological methodology was employed to collect data, with a central aim of understanding the problem of language shift of primary and secondary school students through the perceptions of Maldivian parents. The study also sought to identify the main factors driving this shift and the role parents play in the process. Using purposive (criterion) sampling, 10 participants were selected, and semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted. The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis, which revealed four major themes contributing to language shift: 1) the promotion of English over Dhivehi, 2) globalization and the rise of English as a global language, 3) the role of the parents, and 4) language attitudes and beliefs. The results indicate that while most parents expressed concern about the language shift, their unstated beliefs were interfering with the development of language practices necessary for language maintenance. A minority were attempting to halt language shift within the family domain and an older individual was forced to recognize the value of English language, despite contrary beliefs. The results indicate that while most parents express concern about the language shift, their beliefs were interfering with the development of language practices necessary for language maintenance. A minority of parents are actively attempting to prevent the language shift within the family domain, and an older individual was compelled to acknowledge the value of the English language, despite holding contrary views.*

Key Words: English as a second language, Parental perceptions, Bilingualism in Maldives, Language maintenance

Introduction

English language spread globally through the early colonial expansion of the British Empire, but the subsequent maintenance of said language was facilitated through the birth of America as a global economic force, spurred by rapid technological advancements and globalisation in the 20th century, cementing the supremacy of native English-speaking countries (Crystal, 2003). This has also positively influenced the use of English as a lingua franca, where even countries involved in political conflicts often adopt English as a mediating language, leading to questions about global dominance, especially in terms of recognition of one language above all others. This has brought to the fore, the status of English and its subsequent impact in countries where English is spoken or almost spoken as a second language.

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The widespread use of English as a medium of communication has also prompted its adoption as the language of instruction in many contexts. The continual use of English in scientific and academic scholarship, national/international businesses, social media platforms, and broader internet, which allows access to essential and critical knowledge, aiding better global relations etc., all facilitate a better standard of living and success through the learning of said language. This has, in turn, led to the perception that learning English is vital to prosper in life. In the Maldives, English is spoken, or almost spoken, as a second language (Meierkord, 2018) and is also the medium of instruction in both primary and secondary schools, alongside Dhivehi (National Institute of Education, 2015).

Significance of the Study

Mohamed (2020) asserts that this dual language policy has created a power imbalance between Dhivehi and English. The educational policy of Maldives, which allocates specific time periods for instruction in both Dhivehi and English, is disproportionately skewed towards English, leading to its greater use and practice. More detrimentally, this has affected the perception among students creating a power imbalance in terms of language status, where Dhivehi is perceived to be inferior to English, especially when it comes to future success. Language in education policies, globaliation, technology and supremacy of English language has created radical changes in the collective consciousness of Maldivians in terms of the perceived inferiority of Dhivehi language compared to English. This perception plays a major role in the gradual decline of Dhivehi language competency, especially among the younger generation of children due to the on-going process of language shift. This creates a pressing need to identify the exact mechanisms working to exacerbate language shift within the Maldivian society. More significantly, while the concept of language shift has been well-established globally, its manifestation within the Maldivian context has only just begun to be properly explored. Notably, the perspectives of one key group of stakeholders—parents—are rarely discussed in detail when addressing this issue. Therefore, this study aimed to fill that gap in the literature by focusing on parents' perceptions of the shifting language use among their children. The main purpose of this research was to explore the phenomenon of language shift within the Maldivian context through parents' perceptions of their children's language use in primary and secondary schools. The study was guided by the following key questions:

1. What role do Maldivian parents play in the language shift of their children, particularly those in primary and secondary school?
2. What are the main reasons for the predominant use of English among these students?

Literature Review

The Maldives archipelago is an ever-expanding tourism industry fostering close contact with speakers of various languages and dialects. Huvadhu, Mulaku, Addu, and Male' are the major dialects of the Maldives, with diglossic varieties of Standard Dhivehi considered as the High-variety, used in formal occasions, writing, schools, and religious books. Low-variety is a more colloquial form of Dhivehi used in social situations. resulting in a complex and multifaceted linguistic setting (Fahmee & Mei-Fung, 2016). Dhivehi also contains three distinct speech levels; two honorific and

one common, with the former having a sub-category of the highest class attributed to Allah and the Prophet ﷺ, to show reverence and respect according to the Islamic faith of the Maldivian people (Gnanadesikan, 2016). Dhivehi and English are equally utilised in different domains of Maldivian society (Maumoon, 2002). While Dhivehi is directly linked to identity, history, and tradition, English is seen as essential for communication on the world stage and for future success, particularly in education. However, since the decision to implement English as a medium of instruction alongside Dhivehi in 1961 (Meierkord, 2018), the influence of English on the habitual language use of Maldivians has increased, particularly in terms of bilingualism (Fishman, 2007). Mohamed (2020) asserts the colonial past as a reason for this change, while other scholars (Bromham et al., 2022; Crystal, 2003) also suggest globalisation and its subsequent effects as a reason for the acceleration in language shift.

Language shift is defined as the shifting of language within the same speech community, from a native/minority language to a more dominant, perhaps a global language; it is also identified as the abandonment/replacement of one language for another by a group of people (Aldoukhi et al., 2024; Hatoss, 2013; Sallabank, 2013). It is the replacement of first language/languages with a second language, possibly in all domains (Pauwels, 2016). There are generally two types of shifts, intra-generational and inter-generational, the former is identified as loss or reduction in terms of capacity to utilise the language within the same generation, while the latter describes the same situation but from one generation to the next (Hatoss, 2013). Language shift is also known as a process, as shifting from one language to another takes time, hence domains and functions of language use tend to diminish gradually (Hatoss, 2013; Pauwels, 2016).

Globalisation, defined as the interaction and homogenisation of peoples, nations, and ideas transnationally, resulting in acculturation (Gvelesiani, 2012; Hjarvard, 2004). Researchers have documented the impact of globalisation and the subsequent affirmation of the status of English as a global language and its connection to the manifestation of language shift within a community (Crystal, 2012; King, Schilling, Fogle, Lou & Soukup, 2008; Philipson, 2009; Sallabank & Austin, 2011). This has increased concerns about the threats to linguistic and cultural diversity, with some fearing the danger of linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013). The rapid advancement of technology, especially the internet, has accelerated the effects of globalisation within the various spheres of a community, creating a need for a distinct and common code which has the nuanced capacity to allow communication between people or groups of people of different linguistic backgrounds, such as a lingua franca (Ostler, 2008). This has led to English becoming the predominantly used language on the internet, accounting for more than 30 percent of global mail, scientific publications and online content (Gvelesiani, 2012). This dominance threatens minority languages such as Dhivehi (Maumoon, 2002), although the outcome depends on factors such as language policy, domain, and attitudes.

Language Policy

Language policy is defined as laws or interventions that are explicitly or implicitly implemented by governmental or authoritative figures to regulate linguistic and non-linguistic factors in a community (Sallabank, 2013; Spolsky, 2004). Spolsky (2004) identified three main components of language policy: 1) language practice, i.e., habitual use of language, 2) language attitudes, i.e., beliefs about the appropriate language use, and 3) language maintenance, i.e., efforts exerted to manage the shifting of language within a speech community. Fishman (2007) posited that in contact situations, the more dominant language is always more frequently used than the minority language (as cited in Garcia, Schiffman, & Zakharia, 2006). Proficiency in a dominant language is often higher than in a non-dominant language (Gathercole & Thomas, 2009; Kohnert, 2008, as cited in Sheng & Gollan, 2013). Neoliberalism connects capitalism, free markets, and profit maximisation to language policies, with governments and corporations adopting languages that facilitate economic growth and cross-border communication (Kedzierski, 2016).

Time allocation within curricula, specifically time given to instructing in a particular language, reflects language policies in place (Gorter & Cenoz, 2016). In the Maldives, the number of contact-hours for Dhivehi is significantly fewer than for English (National Institute of Education, 2015). Mohamed (2020) argues that this imbalance fosters more English practice, shaping the perception of students and parents, who often view English as superior, particularly in terms of education and social mobility. Although curricula that include minority languages are intended to produce graduates who can effectively integrate into society, the increasing perception of English as a prerequisite for success has led parents and students to demand higher-quality, English-dominant education (Kedzierski, 2016). This pressure may in turn compel governments and institutions to accommodate these demands. As a result, individual language practices and government policies influence and reinforce one another in a continuous cycle (Sallabank, 2013).

Language Domain

The use of one's mother tongue for early instruction can lead to better performance, confidence, and motivation in children (Awopetu, 2016). Children spend approximately 86 percent of their lives at home until the age of 18 (Wherry, 2004). This subsequently highlights the importance of the family domain in determining the language choice and the maintenance of minority languages. Domains are defined as the contexts within which language is used, encompassing 1) the place, 2) interlocutors and 3) topics, and how they use language within a given domain (Fishman, 1991).

While language choice and the corresponding domains are dependent upon the sociocultural norms of a society, Lane (2023) further identified that, "when parents stop speaking the mother tongue to their children, the children are unlikely to acquire the language though they may gain passive competence" (p. 242). Pauwels (2016) emphasizes that, in bilingual or multilingual communities, consistent use of the minority language in the family domain is crucial to prevent the intrusion of a dominant language, such as English. The rise of the smartphone and tablet usage among Maldivian children has allowed dominant languages to encroach upon said domain (Hatoss, 2013), traditionally a space where minority languages flourished.

This shift is significant as the family domain plays a fundamental role in identity-building through language socialisation (Boxer, 2002). It is worth noting that Mohamed (2020) identified a decline in the proficiency of Dhivehi among Maldivian youths, and Dr. Joanne Jalkanen further cautioned that a generation of Maldivian children may eventually be unable to speak Dhivehi (Islanders Education, 2022). The reduction in native language use and the widening generational gap in language choice are indicators of language shift (Fishman, 1991). Given that Dhivehi is primarily an oral language, with much of its history undocumented (Maumoon, 2002), there is a high risk of cultural and linguistic loss.

Language Attitudes

While attitude is considered to be a psychological construct and is therefore problematic when it comes to observation or assessment, it can still be observed in relation to language (Ginting, 2018). Language attitudes can also aid in understanding the way people view each other's use of language and how aware they are of these views, but more significantly, how they react to these views, assimilate, and reorient their language use to fit into the acceptable moulds (Garrett, 2010). Hence, in unequal social relationships, it is more common for the interlocutors to correct bad speech of others (Spolsky, 2004). Gardner and Lambert (1972) identified two main motivations for learning language: integrative orientation as an interest induced by a desire to integrate into the culture and community of the target language; and instrumental orientation where language is learned for functional purposes, such as status or external reward served by learning the language (as cited in Hong & Ganapathy, 2017). While attitudes are learned from our social environment and our personal experiences (Garrett, 2010), the concept of attitude is also related to areas such as, identity construction, language maintenance, bi/multilingualism, language planning and policy (Garrett, 2010; Salmon & Menjivar, 2019).

Parents play a significant role in shaping children's language attitudes during their formative years (Zunich, 2012) and just like habits, attitudes are also learned and enduring (Garrett, Coupland, & Williams, 2003). This also emphasises the role played by the parents in inculcating certain attitudes in their children. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) also postulated that in some cases while the stated beliefs (overt) of individuals were in support of revitalising the minority language, unstated beliefs (covert) were creating a barrier against changing their language practices. Sallabank (2013) further suggests that while covert beliefs are difficult to identify through direct questioning, they can be observed through behaviour and practices.

Methodology

This research was aimed to build a holistic understanding of a phenomenon with a particular focus on perceptions of Maldivian parents. This focus is important as it involves not only the individual's reality and experience but also underlying factors such as history, belief systems, and culture (Munhall, 2008). Using a descriptive phenomenological methodology, the study sought to understand language shift, by examining 10 carefully selected parents who had experienced this phenomenon. A

relativist ontology and emic epistemology were utilized as the philosophical basis for data collection. The sampling technique used was criterion sampling, a sub-type of purposive sampling, as participants were chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives (Palys, 2008). The sampling criteria was based on two factors: 1) participants' children were primary and/or secondary school students (grades 1 to 10); and 2) the children predominantly used the English language. Participants 01-02 and 06-07 were couples.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants

Participant	Gender of Participants	Age	Level of Education	Proficiency of Participants in English	Proficiency of Participants in Dhivehi	Class of Participants' Children
Participant 1	Female	33	O Level	Good	Good	Class 1
Participant 2	Male	38	O Level	Good	Good	Class 1
Participant 3	Female	50	O Level	Average	Good	Class 10
Participant 4	Female	37	ACCA Pt 2	Average	Average	Class 9 & 6
Participant 5	Female	36	Degree	Good	Poor	Class 5 & 3
Participant 6	Female	39	Diploma	Good	Good	Class 1, 5 & 8
Participant 7	Male	45	Diploma	Good	Excellent	Class 1, 5 & 8
Participant 8	Female	35	Diploma	Excellent	Excellent	Class 4
Participant 9	Female	44	O Level	Good	Excellent	Class 3
Participant 10	Female	39	MBA	Good	Average	Class 10

For data collection, a face-to-face semi-structured interview was employed, as it allowed for detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation (Marx, 2008). Participants with children in primary and secondary grades were contacted and provided with a standard information and consent form. Prior to each interview, background details were gathered to build rapport with the interlocutors. The interviews ranged from 14–20 minutes and were recorded using a mobile phone, with anonymity and confidentiality assured. Participants were informed they could speak in either language or code-switch based on their preference.

The interview process and semi-structured interview guide was developed using Nigel King and Christine Horrocks' manual, Interviews in Qualitative Research. Participants were informed that a numerical/alphabetical pseudonym would be used instead of their names. During the interview, numerous opportunities were presented for probing, for clarification and elaboration, either retrospectively or immediately. Member-checking was done for all interview transcripts, and data analysis was only finalised once the corresponding transcripts were approved. To reduce responder-bias, interview questions were not provided to participants beforehand.

Data Analysis

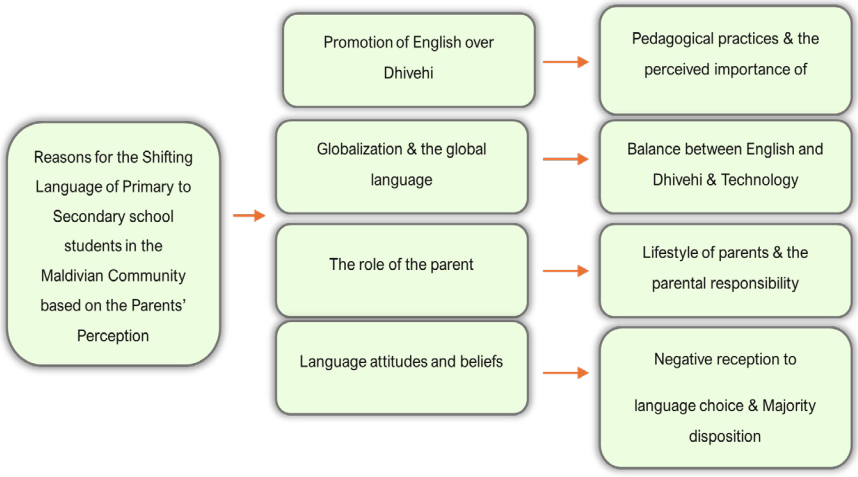
Thematic analysis, as outlined by Clarke and Braun (2016), was employed in this study as a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning, or "themes," within the qualitative data. The audio data was repeatedly listened to for familiarisation and gauge initial patterns and semantic themes, after which it was transcribed. During transcription, literal translation was primarily used .The study aimed for a balance between naturalized and denaturalized transcription, as the content was important, but time limitations were a factor (Nascimento & Steinbruch, 2019). Most fillers were excluded, except for relevant pauses, and an oral style of translation, i.e., text resembling the spoken speech form was used. However, where necessary, Dhivehi active voice was translated into passive voice in English, and pronouns were added to the English transcripts.

In the next phase, initial codes were generated, this process was done using Microsoft word and PDF. After all the data was coded and collated, they were analysed to understand emerging themes. Initially, 16 themes were identified, but further review led to the collapsing of some and the elimination of others. Ultimately, four major themes were finalised.

Results & Findings

The data revealed differing views among Maldivian parents of primary and secondary school students. Participants 01, 06, and 07 actively tried to correct the language shift by deliberately using Dhivehi in the family domain, while participants 02, 05, 08, and 09, when prompted, agreed that the shift towards English was concerning but also code-switched or used English more frequently. Participant 03 indicated that English was essential only for the workforce and younger generations, while participant 10 strongly believed that the shift in language was beneficial. The findings also revealed four major themes: promotion of English over Dhivehi, globalisation and the global language, the role of the parent, and language attitudes and beliefs. These further branched into two sub-themes, as noted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Thematic Framework



Promotion of English over Dhivehi

Almost all participants highlighted issues with the pedagogical practices of Dhivehi-medium subjects, particularly the lack of engaging content provided by schools and the boredom children experienced with traditional teaching approaches. For example, participant 05 proposed that schools needed to provide more substantial content to promote the appeal of Dhivehi language. Similarly, another participant stressed upon her child's increasing inability to disengage from English language, even at home. Participant 01 elaborated that the majority of the six hours her child spends in school were conducted in English, making it difficult for her to switch to Dhivehi, even when talking to parents who actively used the latter. More significantly, participants indicated that one of the main barriers to learning about Islam was Dhivehi, specifically the three speech levels in Dhivehi language. Switching between informal and formal speech styles was identified as a major source of frustration for children learning Dhivehi-medium subjects. Participant 06 also alluded to the rote learning approach, with most children basing their learning around language-based exam papers rather than the practical applicability of the language itself.

Regarding social mobility, participants emphasised the importance of English in higher education and career development over Dhivehi. Participant 01 asserted that "in Maldives opportunities are limited for kids to choose careers and prosper," and similar sentiments were voiced by participants 02, 03, 08, and 10. Remarkably, participant 10 noted that while the number of people pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Dhivehi language was on the rise, their accredited Level 9 were 'useless' as they did not meet job criteria. However, she also faced difficulties at work due to her inability to use different Dhivehi speech styles, saying "I was the secretary of a minister, and when I joined, I was horrible at talking in a formal style...." (Participant 10).

Globalisation and the Global Language

All children of the participants had access to tablets/iPads, while some also owned or had access to smartphones, computers, laptops, and TVs. Most children either played online games or watched Netflix/YouTube. While participants 04, 05, and 06-07 restricted screen time, other participants did not specify restrictions. Children of participants 01-02, 03, 08, 09, and 10 were allowed to use gadgets after school hours, during both weekdays and weekends. Participant 01 highlighted that her daughter (age 7) could play online games, and while not allowed to speak to other players, "during in-gaming she is able to see what others are typing." She further added that her child would spend approximately 3-4 hours on her tablet, which was later refuted by her husband, who claimed that it was close to 4-5 hours daily. Participant 02 elaborated that, "...she has her own tablet and access to kids' cartoons on Netflix, the majority of which are in English. All nursery rhymes were in English. Everything on TV channels is in English".

Participants 03 and 09 noted that their children (ages 16 and 9, respectively) had access to YouTube/TV during their early language acquisition periods, while the children (ages 16, 15, and 17) of participants 03, 04, and 10 also had access to social media. Consequently, participants observed a decrease in their children's

proficiency in Dhivehi compared to English, with many noting their inability to speak proper Dhivehi. Participant 09 mentioned that her daughter (age 9) struggled to form simple sentences, and her speech patterns resembled those of a foreigner. This also created difficulties in learning Quranic translations taught in Dhivehi, requiring the participant to first translate the verse into English for her daughter to understand. "…It's like an alien language for her…we have to explain what it means, the meaning of the verses in English" (Participant 09). This results in children having to learn two languages, Dhivehi and Arabic through the medium of English language. Another participant identified that to explain Islamic concepts to her daughter (age 16), her eldest child (age 22) had to act as a mediator/translator between them, as participant 03 barely spoke English and her daughter had difficulty in understanding Dhivehi.

Participant 06, similarly noted that while her children (ages 14, 11, and 6) had proficient oral skills in Dhivehi, their reading and writing skills were lacking. It was also evident that fluency in English was increasing among primary and secondary school students. For instance, participant 01 observed that her child (age 7) had more advanced vocabulary and sentence formation in English than her peers. Participant 04 also mentioned that even when she tried to converse in Dhivehi, her children (ages 15 and 12) would always answer in English. Additionally, participant 06 emphasised that her eldest two children (ages 14 and 11) preferred listening to foreign orators for religious lectures, while her youngest child (age 6) "learned English mostly from watching TV...he picked it up on his own."

The Role of the Parent

The data revealed specific patterns of interaction between parents and children, reflecting a busy lifestyle. All participants except 05 were working parents, and all except 06 and 09 worked outside of their homes, spending approximately 6–8 hours at the office (participants 03 and 07 had 12-hour shifts). Participant 03 expressed that "even now the timing of my job is almost the same as before", expressing that her office hours were consistent throughout her daughter's childhood (age 16). Participants 02, 03, 08, and 10 emphasised that interaction with their children occurred after office hours, typically lasting around 5 hours. Participant 09 noted that many working parents gave their children gadgets such as tablets during the time they were home alone. Parental responsibility was sometimes delegated to domestic helpers. For instance, participant 03 described how her foreign maid influenced her child's (age 16) language use during early acquisition, leading to their speech patterns resembling each other. Participant 08 provided similar example, explaining that if a child grows up with a domestic helper who speaks broken Dhivehi, the former will likely develop the same speech mannerisms of the latter.

Language Attitudes and Beliefs

Language choices can evoke negative reactions based on the perceptions of appropriateness. Participant 02 mentioned an incident where a 20-year-old girl's code-switching was negatively received by their mutual colleagues. While participant 02 stated that, "I personally have no issue as long as the required communication takes place", he noted that this was not the case for their peers, with indirect bias

being common. Participant 03 also shared her experience of being criticised by younger peers for not being able to communicate in English, expressing regret for not improving her English earlier. Other participants highlighted negative attitudes towards code-switching. Participant 09, for example, criticised the use of phrases like " ދަރިފުޅާ sit" (meaning, sit child) or " ދަރިފުޅާ come" (meaning, come child). Participant 06 also agreed, describing such language use as "annoying."

Another, noteworthy reaction was highlighted by participant 10, who indicated that her child frequently found some words of Dhivehi to be disagreeable and stated "…if her father says something like ވަންޖަހު in Dhivehi when she is around, she would be like 'ew, ew, ew' she will keep on saying that. She doesn't like such words." Similar sentiments were conveyed by participant 10 herself regarding the attainment of higher education in Dhivehi language, and stated "…what they are doing is totally useless, isn't it? I think it is much better to attain Masters in the English medium." Moreover, she believed that even if the government made efforts to maintain the native language, it was already a "…hopeless case." Although participants 02, 05, 08, and 09 agreed that this language shift was worrying, they code-switched or spoke more in English than others. Participant 02 summed up the mixed dispositions by saying, "I don't want my child to be unable to speak Dhivehi, to become a fully English-speaking individual."

Discussion

This study offers insights into the ongoing and multifaceted dialogue surrounding language shift and its many stakeholders, specifically focusing on parents' perceptions of the shifting language of primary and secondary school students in the Maldives. Two additional sub-questions sought to determine the role of Maldivian parents in this language shift and to identify the reasons behind the predominant use of English among their children. The findings revealed that Maldivian parents fall along a continuum regarding language shift, with the majority leaning towards English and a minority attempting to maintain Dhivehi with mixed results. Outliers in the study feel compelled to accept the necessity of English, simultaneously desiring and resisting it, which illustrates how community language choices collectively influence the trajectory toward language shift or maintenance (Fishman, 1965).

The data show a consensus of discontent among parents regarding pedagogical practices and the medium of instruction in schools. The findings align with Mohamed's (2020) study, which highlights the disproportionate emphasis on English over Dhivehi in the Maldivian education system. The lack of engaging content for subjects taught in Dhivehi also indicates an underlying preference for a global language within the system, with the aim of furthering governmental agendas through various language policies (Kedzierski, 2016; Sallabank, 2013; Spolsky, 2004). This imbalance in the national curriculum leaves children frequently exposed to English, to the point that they cannot disengage from it, even in the family domain.

The study also highlights children's frustration with learning and applying the three speech levels in Dhivehi, especially in subjects like Islam, and points to the limited amount of time allocated for Dhivehi instructions compared to English (National Institute of Education, 2015). Hence, logically, time allocated for practicing speech styles of Dhivehi would also be less, which can negatively impact comprehension levels, as producing and practicing speech are critical components of language learning (Hopman & MacDonald, 2018).

This also highlights the flaws in rote learning as mentioned by participant 06.

Similarly, Mohamed (2020) stated that the emphasis placed on teaching a global language such as English, as opposed to the native language, can create an imbalance of power and perceived value of languages in the minds of parents/students. For example, participant 10 dismissed Dhivehi language certificates as 'useless' but paradoxically acknowledged the importance of Dhivehi speech levels in the workplace, illustrating the ramifications of such a skewed perspective on language status.

The study also identified a decline in Dhivehi language skills amongst primary and secondary school students, alongside increasing English proficiency, pointing to a broader language shift within the Maldivian community (Hatoss, 2013; Pauwels, 2016). All participants noted that their children's proficiency in Dhivehi was lower compared to their English skills, corroborating Mohamed's (2020) findings and supporting statements made by Dr. Joanne Jalkanen (Islanders Education, 2022).

Concurrently, the increasing English language proficiency in Maldivian children indicate that in bilingual settings the dominant language is more readily utilised and often overshadows the native minority language (Garcia, Schiffman, & Zakharia, 2006). Participant 03, for example, required a translator to communicate with her 16-year-old daughter about religion, highlighting the widening inter-generational language gap (Hatoss, 2013; Fishman, 1991). This gap could potentially erode cultural identity, as traditional Maldivian and Islamic values become harder to convey in the absence of fluency in Dhivehi, especially by the older generations (Islanders Education, 2022).

Furthermore, globalisation, facilitated by technology's reliance on a common linguistic code, has contributed to and facilitated the encroachment and dominance of English language into the family domains of the Maldivian community. The data suggest that Maldivian children increasingly depend on smart gadgets and TVs, for both entertainment and learning, further blurring the lines between private and public domains and fostering language shift (Hatoss, 2013). The separation of such domains is necessary for the survival of native languages, especially when a more dominant language is continuously used within other domains of a community (Pauwels, 2016). Therefore, through technology, globalisation has imbued itself into the family domain, whereby the assimilation of culture and language shift becomes a distinct possibility.

Participants in the study identified the busy lifestyles of Maldivians as a key factor in the community's gradual language shift. Most participants in this study have busy working schedules, particularly participant 03, who worked consistently for 12-hour shifts, noted that their working schedules limited their interaction time with their children. Consequently, technology filled the gap, providing entertainment for children but also contributing to speech delays and vocabulary issues (Zain et al., 2022). The study also posited that such children are slow to respond to questions, unable to vocalise in terms of expressive speech.

More remarkably, the authors have further identified that children over-exposed to these smart gadgets tend to learn words that are repetitively used, in the videos, cartoons, games etc., on such devices. Furthermore, participant 03 noted that her daughter's language development was hindered by a foreign maid who did not speak Dhivehi. The critical period for natural language acquisition may have been missed, leading to the daughter's greater fluency in English over Dhivehi. Friedmann and Rusou (2015) asserts that missing this window of critical period creates difficulties in the normal development of language for a child.

This combination of the parent's busy work schedule, limited interaction

time, the child's increasing reliance on technology, and the transfer of flawed Dhivehi speech patterns from the foreign employee during the critical language acquisition period ultimately hindered the child from developing fluency in Dhivehi, resulting in a shift where English became her dominant or first language.

The analysis revealed dichotomous views on acceptable language use. Some participants, such as 02 and 05, asserted that they do not mind code-switching, while others, such as 06 and 09, disapproved of mixing languages when addressing children. Participant 09 suggested that parents might code-switch with the hope of expanding their children's linguistic repertoire. However discriminatory behaviour towards such language use appear to be common, as was the case of participant 02's colleague. Particularly within bilingual settings, code-switching is often viewed as a sign of illiteracy or lack of proficiency or even attributed to lack of formal education (Montes-Alcala, 2000).

Similarly, the stratification of English and non-English speakers in participant 03's workplace and being subjected to bullying due to poor English language skills, and manifestation of regrets, reflects societal pressures to conform to acceptable language norms. More notably, participant 10's child developed an aversion to Dhivehi, likely influenced by negative parental attitudes during the formative years of the child's life (Zunich, 2012). Even in the interview excerpts, participant 10 identified higher education in Dhivehi language as secondary, deemed the efforts of the government to impede language shift as 'hopeless' and indicated a preference for English language. Thereby, suggesting the existence of an instrumental orientation.

Primarily, the data shows that participants 01, 06, and 07 are trying to maintain Dhivehi language within the family domain by limiting the use of English at home. While participant 03, due to her experiences, is compelled to accept the importance of English in the working environment despite contrary beliefs. Participants 02, 05, 08, and 09 were concerned about their children's language shift, but their covert beliefs undermined their stated commitment to preserving their mother tongue. (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, 1998). This indicates that while covert beliefs cannot be identified through direct questioning, they can be glimpsed from the individual's behaviour and practices (Sallabank, 2013).

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to understand the parent's perceptions of the phenomenon of language shift within the Maldivian context. Additionally, the study sought to explore parents' roles in the language shift of their children and the primary reasons behind children's predominant use of English. Micro factors, such as lifestyle, working hours, and language attitudes/beliefs, combined with macro factors, including pedagogical practices, language policies, globalisation, and its cyclic connection to technology, reinforce the dominance of the English language. This creates a system that is steadily shifting the use of Dhivehi to English within the Maldivian community. On the continuum of language shift, Maldivian parents are unevenly distributed, where many are concerned but hindered by covert beliefs, a minority are actively resisting the language shift with mixed results, while an older-generation individual exhibits ambivalence, feeling compelled to accept the importance of English despite holding contrary beliefs.

Limitations of the Study

As most participants live in the Greater Male' Area, the findings might not reflect the experiences of individuals living in the islands, whose lifestyles differ from those in the urban areas. Gender is another limiting factor, as only two participants were male, which could influence the results; a study considering both genders' perspectives may yield different insights. The researcher's selection criteria for participants also might have introduced bias, as results may differ if the participants' children were randomly chosen. In terms of the instrument used, a few interview questions might have appeared leading. For example, explaining concepts like 'speech patterns' and 'code-switching' may have triggered certain attitudes towards language use, but language is not something that people actively think about. Hence, concepts like code-switching were familiar, but participants' had no name for it. Additionally, responder-bias must be considered, as participants may have shaped their responses to deflect criticism of their own actions or behaviours (McKechnie, 2008). Results may vary if the participants' were parents of children from the same grade. Finally, it is also important to disclose that this research was done as part of a course requirement, hence time and resources were limited.

Recommendation and Future Research

To address the ongoing language shift in the Maldivian community, particularly amongst primary and secondary school students, the main recommendation is to strive for balance in all domains. Since the current medium of instruction favours English, increasing the practice of Dhivehi in primary and secondary schools could help equalise language exposure. The teaching methods for Dhivehi-taught subjects should also be more engaging. Rather than focusing on rote learning, students should have more opportunities to practice spoken Dhivehi, perhaps through collaborative teaching approaches and interactive strategies. In the family domain, while technology is essential for academic success, promoting a more balanced lifestyle with sensible limited screen time could support better child development. Raising awareness about the consequences of language shift and the social discriminations linked to language choice or preference is also crucial. As this research focused on one major stakeholder in the language shift process– parents, future studies could include teachers and students to provide a more comprehensive view. Finally, examining language shift through the scope of language maintenance or revitalisation could offer valuable insights.

Declaration

This paper was originally submitted to BAELC /INDEPENDENT PROJECT as part of a course requirement at The Maldives National University on 19th November 202]. As a result, it appears in the Turnitin, which has contributed to the current similarity index of 46%.

I confirm that I am the original author of this work, and the content is entirely my own. All external sources used have been properly cited according to the journal's required citation style. This work has not been previously published or submitted to any other journal.

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