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**Factors Affecting Dual Language Development: A Case Study of
Somali Immigrants in the United States**

by

Ali Bulhan

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

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Thesis Committee:
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Abstract

Thousands of Somalis call Minnesota home and it is near and dear to their hearts since their country was destroyed by a civil war in 1991, but they definitely have some language and other challenges here too. The primary aim of this study is to find out the factors that affect dual language development among young Somali immigrants. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample size of 8 Somali parents to take part in the study. The participants comprised of Somali parents who have continually resided in the United States for a period of more than 10 years and this helped in obtaining reliable information. Ethnographic interviews were used to collect data from these participants where notes were taken down to record the responses with the help of a tape-recorder that was used to capture the responses that note-writing may have missed out. The data collected was transcribed and analyzed thematically where a total of ten themes were drawn from the study. The in-depth analysis of the data indicated that Somali parents value bilingualism and put efforts to ensure that their children learn both their native language and the English language. The study also identified challenges such as the school system which hinder these parents from ensuring that their children master their native language. From the findings, recommendations were drawn for the different education stakeholders comprising of parents and educators.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There is definitely growing importance that is placed on the English language literacy for access to opportunities in the U.S. These opportunities include employment opportunities, social integration, and gaining access to facilities and services for the immigrants in the American community (Zhen, 2013, p. 28). The system of U.S. highly emphasizes the use of the English language, which makes those who are less knowledgeable of the language disadvantaged. This is the main reason for the loss of heritage for many Somali families and is also the reason why many parents are frustrated with the system and take their kids back home when they fail to fit into this system that highly upholds the use of the English language.

Somali parents also face challenges in the parenting of their children in the United States. This is because of the cultural diversities in the U.S. Parents encounter new cultural norms where they have to adapt to these new cultures, and their children lose their cultural identity due to interactions with the White children (Bowie et al., 2017, p. 12). Somali parents also feel that their children lose respect for them, and they adopt behaviors of talking back to their parents. As a result of these frustrations, some Somali parents opt to take back their children to Somalia to learn respect (Bowie et al., 2017, p. 8).

There are so many difficulties that are faced by Somali families who work so hard to gain access to English while at the same time trying to maintain their L1 and culture. These challenges are as a result of the change in the schooling of the children, who struggle to fit into the new system (Roxas, 2011, p. 2). These children often require a substantial amount of time to gain sufficient mastery of the English language. The system emphasizes the use of English language, and hence the children are highly likely to lose their native language.

Immigrants who have a high proficiency in the English language usually have better jobs since the employers prefer these kinds of immigrants because they relate better with clients and colleagues, can easily report problems, and suggest possible sound solutions (Duval-Couetil & Mikulecky, 2011, p. 210). These factors make highly proficient immigrants gain access to more opportunities as compared to the less proficient immigrants.

There are strict government policies and programs, one of which is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which focuses on the English language proficiency of the students (Sharp, 2016, p. 12). The English learners are subjected to tests in which their proficiency in the English language is evaluated (Plans, 2015, p. 3). The policy has no specific focus on the development of L1 but highly emphasizes on the mastery of the English language. The program is highly funded to ensure its success. The ability of the native language of a learner to influence the acquisition of English language is not taken into consideration in this policy. Therefore, the community and families are limited in their ability to support their own members and maintain their L1. There is inconsistency in the public school system because the policies rolled out by the national government aim at promoting English language, whereas there are no policies that would help promote the other literacy programs which foster the learning of other languages.

According to a report of Somali student achievement by the Minnesota Education Equity Partnership, MnEEP (2018), the percentage of Somali immigrants who did not have a high school diploma was at 34%, while the Whites who did not have the high school certification consisted of 3% (p. 19). Furthermore, the report showed that the proportion of the population that had a Bachelor's degree was comprised of 37% Whites, 17% African-Americans, and only 9% were the Somali immigrants (MnEEP, 2018, p. 29).

The share of the population that does not speak English fluently above the age of 5 showed that the Somali community was amongst the ones with the highest compositions of 18%, 4% were Koreans, 3% Ukrainians, and only a percentage of less than 1 for the Whites (MnEEP, 2018, p. 30). The data shows that Somali immigrants lag behind in education, and this study will seek to determine the reasons as to why this is so.

Research Question

The aim of this study is to shed some light the challenges young Somali immigrants face in learning the English language and how to balance their primary and secondary languages. The parents are apparently frustrated, and they are left with no choice but to put more emphasis on the heritage language because they believe that will give their children more opportunities to learn their culture and religion in their native language. This study will try to find answers to the following research question:

1. What are the perceptions of Somali parents about their children's inability to attain native-like mastery of English language while upholding the Somali language?

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study will be useful to different community and education stakeholders. The parents will get to share the various recommendations that they would want to see implemented in schools to enhance the dual language development of their children. This will provide insight to the educators concerning the needs of parents so that they may act accordingly to cater for these needs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Section one of the literature review will outline the role of age in the acquisition of the second language and why so many young Somali immigrants are not in a position of attaining near-native mastery of English as their L2. This section will review the different ways in which adults and children use and learn a second language and what researchers in the field have learned in relation to age and the acquisition of L2. The reasons why learners who are post-puberty ages may not be successful in the mastery of the second language will also be reviewed under this section. The second section of this study will focus on the main concerns of Somali parents and the reasons why they take their children back to their native country or put them in Somali Charter Schools because they are worried about the loss of first language and culture. This section will shed some light on what the experts in the field have found on the issue of the loss of the first language and whether there are possibilities of reactivating a language that had been forgotten. The possible recommendations for the public school system to help bilingual Somali students to maintain their home language will also be explored.

I will discuss the circumstances under which the loss of the first language may happen, alongside the negative implications that the loss may have on an individual and the society as a whole. There will also be some recommendations for first language protection and what families and parents can do about it. The third section of this study will be the data gathered in interviewing Somali parents of 8 young Somali immigrants who have lost both the English and Somali languages.

The learning of a second language is a time-intensive process, out of which not all learners of the language achieve high proficiency levels of the language. It is also quite rare to find a learner of a second language who can use the second language in a highly proficient

manner as the primary language. It is important to have a research on the L2 so as to understand the factors which enhance or hinder L2 acquisition. Age has a higher impact on the speech production of an English learner as compared to the learner's grammar (Huang, 2014, p. 414). Older students do better in the pronunciation of words as compared to their younger counterparts, but age does not affect the mastery of grammar use for English language learners. The disparity in pronunciation is partially due to the difference in phonological awareness of learners.

Phonological awareness is an oral language skill that impacts the structure of spoken words through pronunciation. Children under the age of 4 usually do not demonstrate phonological awareness but progressively develop the same after the age of four (ILA, 2020, p. 2). In order to enhance their phonological awareness, teachers should integrate the detection tasks, synthesis tasks, and analysis tasks into their language teaching. Detection tasks help the learners detect similar sounds, while synthesis tasks help the learners to blend the small linguistic units into syllables, and the analysis tasks manipulate the syllables to produce sound. Some children often find the phonological tasks challenging because the phonemes are represented by 26 letters, which the children are not accustomed to since their native languages do not have the same. Phonological awareness plays an important role in enhancing literacy development (ILA, 2020, p. 3).

The effects of age on learners' level of mastery of the second language have been the point of contention in various research studies. These effects have been examined on the basis of the ages of the immigrant learners at the time of arrival at the community of the second language. Birdsong (2006, p. 12) outlined that the most errors in pronunciation increase with an increase in the age of acquisition of the second language. However, this only holds for pronunciation and

morphosyntax areas of the second language. The acquisition of grammar of a second language is not affected by age, but rather the acquisition of the pronunciation is determined by age where younger learners may achieve higher proficiency in the pronunciation of second language vocabulary (Nejadansari & Nasrollazadeh, 2011, p. 23). Huang (2014, p. 414) also argues that there exists no major difference between proficiency of the English language grammar by both older and younger students and that the older students are better at the pronunciation of English language words as compared to the younger learners. DeKeyser and Larson-Hall (2005, p. 103) argued that older learners can sometimes learn L2 more efficiently due to cognitive abilities. This is because the cognitive development of older students is high and can, therefore, grasp concepts at a faster rate.

Most studies pertaining to age of acquisition show that the period of exposure in the learning of language is highly associated with the periods of stay in the community of the target language during the acquisition age (Birdsong, 2006, p. 2). Stevens (2006, p. 671), argues that given that language learning takes a long time, it is important to consider the immigrants' periods of stay in the destination country so as to map out the effects of age at the initial stages of L2 learning. Stevens (p. 672) also suggests that there is a possibility that age at testing has an effect on proficiency in L2 learning. He argues that the factors such as "age during immigration," "periods of stay," and "age at testing" have a linear relationship (Stevens, 2006, p. 672). The immigrants who have stayed for longer periods in the U.S. and started learning the English language earlier do better than those who arrived later into the country after age 12 (Collier, 1987, p. 637). The length of stay, therefore, is an important factor in the mastery of English as L2 for the immigrants. Age plays a role in L2 acquisition, given that learners are exposed to social experiences that enhance their acquisition of the second language. All immigrant children

of all ages should be provided with a period of continued cognitive academic development of their primary language in order to enhance the acquisition of the second language (Collier, 1987, p. 638).

History of Immigrants in the U.S.

The United States has become home to many immigrant communities from various parts of the world. The Amish society is a group of immigrants who have strict cultural customs that they strictly adhered to. Initially, they resisted education, but the pressures of civilization have influenced the Amish society members to adopt the American way of life and advance in education (Hostetler, 1993, p. 4). This has led to the Amish society's development and resulted in their presence in entrepreneurship and tourism industries in the U.S. (Hostetler, 1993, p. 4). The Hutterites in North America did not support education above the elementary levels of schooling. They only emphasized learning basic arithmetic and literacy skills and would cease learning upon acquiring these skills. However, the western civilization influences made this community embrace education and have since developed impressive education systems where children pursue education to higher levels (Janzen & Stanton, 2010, pp. 180-181).

The immigrant children face various challenges when they first enroll in school. These challenges could either be lasting or short-term, which disappear as they interact with language majority learners in school. Some language minority students become highly fluent in the English language, while others remain limited in the mastery of the English language (Gibson, 1988, p. 5). Gibson (1988, p. 8) pointed out that the ethnic minority learners who immigrate to the U.S. at an early age and receive schooling in the U.S. tend to perform better than those who immigrate later.

The Somali immigrants migrated into the U.S. during the massive involuntary migratory displacement from 1991 following chaos and civil wars that remained unsolved for close to 20 years (Bigelow, 2010, p. 3). A majority of them settled in Minnesota and started acquiring the way of life of the American people, but still value their culture. The Somali immigrants have high preferences in the development of oral language and spoken genres and, hence, value the second language's development while upholding their native Somali language (Bigelow, 2010, p. 53).

An approximate population of 1 million Somalis was displaced by the civil wars, who then resettled in the U.S. between 1990 and 2000. They first settled in Minneapolis and later moved to other cities including Columbus, and Nashville (Weine et al., 2019, p. 10). Minnesota has the highest population of Somali immigrants of approximately 60,000 in number, while Columbus has around 45,000 Somalis (Weine et al., 2019, p. 10).

Minority Language Loss: Reasons, Policies, and History

The Somali community and parents understand the benefits of being bilingual, and they want their children to be bilingual who can speak both English and Somali, but their biggest concern is the loss of the native language and culture. This becomes a disappointment for the Somali parents who highly value their culture and want to instill the cultural values in their children (Hussein, 2012, p. 160). The children get their L1 input from their parents, grandparents, and some contacts outside of the home. The nature of encouragement and motivation which parents give their children in a bid to help them speak their L1 can have a long-lasting effect on them. These parents who commit themselves to ensure the maintenance of the primary language need to instill a positive attitude about the language in their children, given that school emphasizes English language use.

Parents in Somali families strive to ensure that they provide basic needs for their children, but the younger generation loses their primary language heritage as well as the family relationships alongside their identity in the process of adapting to the new society (Drake & Mutua-Kombo, 2009, pp. 110-111). This may be due to the schools which these children attend and also the people they interact with in the American community where the English language is the dominant language.

Many Somali immigrants come to America, where their L1 is not the primary language (Kruizenga, 2010, p. 2). They then get into an environment where their children start learning the L1 before even attaining the school-going age, and when they get into the school system, they start to learn English because it is the dominant language and, therefore, start losing their L1. The main focus in the school system in America is placed on English as the dominant language, where English language proficiency among learners is tested annually (Plans, 2015, p. 3). Sometimes there is confusion between parents and children because they can't agree on what language to speak at home. The children want to speak English, and the parents want to speak Somali for so many reasons. Also, many Somali parents overlook the issue of heritage language loss, while considering it as a normal challenge that becomes an addition to already-existing problems that they encounter in America, including adopting English as their L2.

Literacy in the first language is also a major issue in English learning. According to ILA (2019, p. 5), students who do well and attain grade level in their native languages test above the grade level mark in the second language too after an average period of 6 years in bilingual learning. This is because the first language enhances the cognitive development of learners and therefore, positively impacts the second language acquisition.

Acquisition of English as a Second Language (ESL)

Acquisition of English as a Second language (ESL) is a process that does not require explicit instructions at all times but rather is acquired by doing the interesting things that connect to what one already knows (Collier & Thomas, 2012, p. 158). The ancient ways of teaching the language by making learners memorize vocabulary and teaching grammar are not effective and do not help the learner to acquire proficiency in the language. Instead, relating the language with exciting academic content with situations that connects with the learners' outside the classroom has a positive impact on the acquisition of ESL (Collier & Thomas, 2012, p. 158). The primary language is vital to the mastery of the second language since the primary language is associated with cognitive development (Collier, 1995a, p. 4). Learners who are well-versed with their first language do better in their second language as compared to those whose primary language development is disconnected.

Various measures are used to assess the mastery of the English language by immigrant learners in US schools. One such measure is the tests that are made by the teacher, which test the on-going progress of the learners, and give a grade upon which comparison can be made (Thomas & Collier, 2000, p. 17). It takes a long time for the average test scores of native English speakers and the learners of English language to be equal on average levels. Every year of school helps school children to experience academic, linguistic, cognitive, and physical development.

English language learners are normally not subjected to norm-referenced school tests during their first 2 years of admission in school but are given the tests during the periods after around 2 to 3 years. This is meant to test what the learners will have acquired after learning the language for these outlined periods of time. The most gifted bilingual students usually take a

period of at least 4 years to gain remarkable proficiency in the English language (Thomas & Collier, 2000, p. 20).

The prism model is useful in predicting academic success in the acquisition of English as L2. In order for learners to achieve success in L2, the students who have not yet achieved proficiency in the language require school contexts that provide similar basic conditions to those which English-speaking students experience (Collier, & Thomas, 2007, p. 334). The components of the prism model include cognitive development, development of language, enhancement of academic dimensions, and socio-cultural processes, which influence the learning process. Providing learning conditions that allow the learners to fully experience the components of the prism model for sustained periods of time enhances the full acquisition of ESL by the learners (Collier, & Thomas, 2007, p. 348).

It takes an average period of at least 6 years for English learners who begin from Kindergarten and get the access to quality bilingual education in both the primary language and the second language for them to acquire grade level in the English language and also stay above that level all through their schooling years (Collier & Thomas, 2017, p. 4). For the students who have not had the schooling in their L1, it takes them a period of 7 to 10 years on average to achieve the grade level and are usually dubbed “long-term English learners”. The amount of schooling that immigrant learners had acquired in their home countries also impacts the pace of acquisition of the English language (Collier & Thomas, 2017, p. 5). Learners who had been exposed to learning prior to the immigration easily adopt English as their L2 as compared to those who had no prior exposure to schooling. English language is also taught as a second language in various non-native speaking countries across the world (Muruli, 2016, p. 1). Such English learning programs help learners in developing the second language, and when they move

to the United States, they have a foundation upon which more knowledge in the English language will be built.

Maintenance Bilingual Education (MBE)

The maintenance bilingual education (MBE) is an effective education model for language teaching (Tellez, 2018, p. 1). It allows for the simultaneous teaching of the first native language and a second language. Educators promote bilingualism through sensitizing learners on the importance of the same while integrating cultural contexts into the learning of languages (Colon & Heineke, 2015, p. 228). The MBE approach ensures that the learner acquires the best of both languages while ensuring that none of them lags behind. This is achieved by giving the learner an opportunity to simultaneously learn the native language and the second language. English language and the child's native language are regularly used for instruction (Lopez & Frick, 2010, p. 34).

Bilingual education strengthens the cognitive functions of the brain as it enhances the memory of learners, and can as well equip learners for beneficial exchange programs. Maintaining the native language enhances the socio-cultural development of the students. The native language has been depicted to be important since it forms the cognitive development of the learner because it is the language with which the learner interacts from a young age. Using the language for instruction purposes during the teaching of the second language, therefore, enhances the learner's acquisition of L2. The MBE approach emphasizes on the need to teach learners both languages. This approach is considered to be more effective as compared to the monolingual approach (Zumani, 2019, p. 10).

Minority Language History in the U.S.

There are many issues that affect immigrants as they attempt to integrate into the American society and the purposes that language serves in the integration process exhibit many underlying social and political biases that occur in the American society. For instance, in the employment sector, the immigrants' lack of English fluency makes them lose substantial earnings from their jobs while the earnings of the white native English speakers are higher than those of the immigrants (Kim, 2003, p. 18). When someone speaks English with a foreign accent in the U.S., they are frequently seen with prejudiced sentiments, and many people degrade or belittle their efforts to speak the language in many cases. Also, when someone speaks a language other than English in public, they are seen as a possible threat to the inherent nature of being citizens of America.

For a long time, English has been the most dominant language in the United States and will continue to be dominant since no other language is any close to being dominant (White, 2012, p. 3). In order to fit into this English-dominant society, non-English residents in the U.S. attempt to learn and gain mastery of the English language. The immigrant communities, therefore, promote English language since they believe that it helps them fit into the American society.

The recent census of 2016 shows that the proportion of the U.S. population ranging from the age of 5 years and above who speak another language apart from English was at 21.6% in 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Spanish was the most spoken non-English language, where 40.5 million people spoke the language, Chinese language followed with speakers of about 3.4 million, and lastly, Tagalog being spoken by 1.7 million people at home. This data shows that the prominence of English language in the U.S. is not in danger in any way, shape, or form. The

majority of the population speaks English very well, with only a small proportion of the population speaking English less fluently. Therefore, English still remains to be the highly dominant language, and no minority language is likely to overtake it.

The direct and indirect government policies targeting minority communities have led to an increase in the spreading of the English language. Minority languages in America faced problems and policies that impacted their existence and the minority groups couldn't do anything about their languages or heritages because they were powerless, and there were even legislation and court decisions that negatively impacted the language minority learners in public schools in America. According to Santa Ana (2004, p. 104), English-only teaching was highly utilized for a period of about 250 years, and English was forced on many minority groups such as Indian-Americans, African-Americans, and Latino-Americans.

The first group of people that were forced to adapt to the different educational systems and a different way of life were the Indian-Americans. They were the objects of racial discrimination and were perceived to be a threat to the white racial community and their economic welfare (Inman et al., 2015, p. 220). They were forced to adopt the Anglo-American culture, and the federal government mapped out boarding schools in which the Indian children were placed in a bid to separate them from the culture of their parents, which was perceived as primitive. From the Indian perspective, these policies of linguistic decimation and cultural domestication were aimed at eradication of the initial Indian-Americans.

The African students were also part of the minority students who were forced to adapt to a new system of education. For a long time, African-Americans were treated differently, and as subhuman commodities, and they were even granted less dignity than animals and regarded as people who deserved no kindness at all (Mellen, 2016, p. 142). The schools in which these

African-American students learned received less funding as compared to the well-structured schools of the whites, and therefore African-Americans struggled to get education as individuals and lost their original language, and they had to go through 100 years of court battles for equal schooling and opportunities. Gaining access to quality education was hence a big challenge for the African-Americans during the period of slavery.

The Latino group constitutes the largest language minority students in the U.S. (Mantero, & McVicker, 2006, p. 1). This was the other group that was forced to adopt the American system of life. Mexicans were denied to vote in Texas, California, and in other states. The legal system of the U.S. passed laws that served to marginalize the Mexicans who ended up becoming foreigners since their states were stolen by the U.S. These legal restrictions passed by the legal system promoted racial discrimination in public education and the civil rights of the Mexicans were also violated (Santa Ana, 2004, p. 88).

In the ESSA policy (Sharp, 2016, p. 12), Federal funds will continue to support English language learners (ELLs) and higher priority given to English teaching over the development of long-lasting bilingual skills. Public schools should also make regular evaluations of English Language learners in order to determine the percentage of students who are fluent in English since the failure to show academic progress will cause the federal authorities to cease funding the learning programs (Santa Ana, 2004, p. 104).

Reasons for Home Language Loss

Various research and studies on bilingualism show that language loss among members of the immigrant communities depends on the support from parents, community, and educators. Somali parents feel they do not get enough support, encouragement, or resources from the

government, and hence they strive to acquire the dominant language on their own for them to fit in the new culture and the new environment.

According to Drake and Mutua-Kombo (2009, p. 110), children of Somali immigrants lose their language in the process of getting assimilated into the American society. This forces parents to use the dominant English language when communicating with the children, who do not understand the native language. Somali parents often perceive English as the most dominant language of America and as a major determinant of success in education and in the professional careers of their children while living in America, and many young students learn English because of encouragement from family or friends so that they can establish themselves and have a bright future.

Another reason for home language loss is because children have a negative attitude towards their L1 maintenance since they perceive it to be useless because of the environment they live in, which upholds L2, and so the children feel that their parents initiate a boring task for them. This attitude is further heightened when there are no bilingual programs that cultivate learners' interests in gaining knowledge in their native languages (Hasbun, 2005, p. 108). It is something many parents see in their children since they prefer to communicate using English at home; and, when their parents try to tell them to speak Somali at home, the children get upset and even call their parents old-fashioned and uneducated.

It is also obvious that the children willingly choose to acquire high proficiency in the dominant language so that they may fit into the environment and society in which they live. They, therefore, forego mastering their native language. Negative attitude towards a language, whereby the older generation does not have desirability in transmitting the language to the children, is a contributory factor to language loss (Whaley, 2003, p. 966). This generation may

be reluctant to pass on their primary languages to the younger generation because of the environment in which they have been assimilated.

The major reason as to why many native languages in the U.S. are lost is because of the school system. These school systems place high importance on the English language, and initially, the boarding schools punished the English learners whenever they spoke their native languages (Gantt, 2016, p. 14). As a result, children developed a negative perception of their native language and hence dropped their languages and even cultural traditions. Many Somali parents are not happy with how the system works, and they do not get enough support for the home language because public schools do not provide opportunities to practice how language in school and there are no projects or programs that help develop the home language of Somali immigrants in Minnesota. As a result, they opt to enroll their children in charter schools (Hussein, 2012, p. 150).

A charter school refers to a public school that is developed by the parents, members of the teaching staff, or members of the community, and is independent of the school district, does not charge tuition fees, and is open to all members of the public (Hussein, 2012, p. 151). Most Somali parents take their children to charter schools because they want to preserve their culture since these schools help in upholding their culture (Hussein, 2012, p. 160).

During the year 1992, the first charter school was established in Minnesota to help the struggling students. Over time, the charter schools developed and were embraced by the Somali community due to the cultural values that the schools uphold through teaching children both the Somali and English languages. Statistics indicate that one in every three Somali families enroll their children in charter schools (MnEEP, 2018, p. 20). This indicates that charter schools are popular among Somali immigrants.

Immigrant parents find the charter schools convenient for cultural preservation since they prevent their children from interacting with the American youth who would influence them to adopt the western culture (Rimer, & Warsame, 2009, p. 1). They, therefore, enroll their children in these schools where they get Somali educators who help promote the Somali culture and language among the Somali immigrants. These schools however, face challenges that include misunderstandings among the stakeholders (Hussein, 2012, p.153). Poor performance is also among these challenges, and as shown by Hussein (2012, p. 154), the high schools that the Somali students attended were among the poor-performing schools in the Minnesota state (Hussein, 2012, p. 154).

The Role of First Language in Second Language Development

Learning of dual language equips the learner with diverse educational experiences that promote the learner's cognitive development. The primary language for English learners offers them cultural insights, which provides them with opportunities to interact and work with people from diverse cultures, unlike students who only have mastery of the English language (Thomas & Collier, 2003, p. 63). Dual-language learners gain experiences and insights of the two languages, which broadens their areas of language capabilities. Thomas and Collier (2003, p. 63) outlined that the children who learn the primary language and later enroll for second language learning have higher chances of performing better in their academics compared to mono language learners. All of the research indicates that you have to read well in L1 in order to read well in L2.

In the early 20th century, there were immersion programs in early childhood education that were meant to help students learn both their first and second languages (Thomas & Collier, 1997, pp. 23-24). The children's primary language was used for instruction until the point when

the learners were conversant with the second language, and at that point, the majority language would then be adopted to be used for instruction. These immersion programs emphasized learners' need to learn a second language through instruction from their first language. As the learners started acquiring the second language, the instruction in the first language was gradually dropped to allow for instruction in the second language (Thomas & Collier, 1997, pp. 23-24). The ability of learners to acquire the second language through instruction from their first language shows that the first language plays an important role in the acquisition of the second language. Given that the first language enhances the learners' mental development; it enables them to easily learn L2 when their primary language is used for instruction.

Many aspects of the first language, such as formation of knowledge and concepts, skills in academics, and the strategies of learning, are often transferred to the second language (Collier, 1995b, p. 4). As the learners widen their knowledge, oral, and vocabulary skills in the second language, they exhibit the knowledge acquired from their first language. Therefore, students who do not reach a threshold in their first language and do not acquire literacy skills from their first language often encounter challenges in learning and acquisition of the second language. Collier (1995b, p. 4) outlined that when learners learn and communicate using their first language, which they understand best, their cognitive development is fostered and can easily learn the second language as a result of cognitive maturity. Collier and Thomas (1989, p. 32) argued that schooling in the first language is an important factor that enhances the academic performance of bilingual learners since it fosters the academic skills and mental development of the learners. As such, learning in the first language during the initial stages of schooling fosters academic proficiency and second language acquisition.

Other Factors Affecting Second Language Acquisition

External factors such as religion and racism also affect second language acquisition. Various religions use different languages for different purposes ranging from worship songs to reading of diverse religious books (Darquennes & Vandebussche, 2015, p. 3). The language used in these religious functions is developed and enhanced due to its continuous usage in religion. Religion hence influences language development. Religious minorities also use their minority language in religious events, hence fostering their language.

Native speakers of a certain language often perform well and attain proficiency in that particular language because of the continuous usage of the language in their daily lives. The white children who have grown up using English as their primary language will attain high proficiency in the English language at faster rates than English learners (Godley et al., 2015, p. 3). Graduation rates have been proven to be higher among the white students than the students of color (Banks & Dohy, 2019, p. 119). Racism in learning institutions and lack of mentorship for the students of color contribute to high dropout rates among students of color and hence the disparity in graduation rates (Banks & Dohy, 2019, p. 119).

Summary

The policies rolled out in the U.S. are aimed at fostering the role of English language, whereas there are no policies that would help allocate sufficient funding of the literacy programs that are highly needed. The U.S. government emphasizes the use of English only in nearly all areas of the economy, schools being required to teach English only, and these forces immigrants to learn the English language (Crawford, 2008, p. 1). In order to fix this situation, the community members and teachers should advocate for effective policies that will ensure that resources are directed to literacy programs that cater for language minorities. The public schools should also

have teachers who have the relevant experience and expertise to meet the diverse needs of the language minority learners while fostering the L1 proficiency of these learners.

There should also be organizations for literacy instruction that can provide services if they get funding from the government. Such organizations will serve diverse learners if they have the funding, and there should be organizations that have sufficient expertise with ESL alongside literacy and involve participation from members of the community. If teachers and communities advocate for measures that promote the enhancement of native languages through the use of these languages as an instrument for instruction in English classrooms, the outcome will be great, and it will be beneficial to everyone. Such policies include designing curriculum models that outline content for dual language learners, provision of resources to facilitate learning, and incorporation of strategies which help families in supporting the dual language learners in the enhancement of their primary language, to ensure the maintenance of the language as children learn the second language (Castro et al., 2011, p. 18). When families, communities, teachers, and schools work together, they can promote the development of English and the native languages as the means of the way of life in America.

There are many benefits of being bilingual, with the most important one being the capability of communicating effectively with all members of the family, and that is really important for young children to be able to communicate with their families so they can get the help and support of their parents. Bilingual learners also tend to have better academic performance. According to Fry and Lowell (2003, p. 128), bilingualism enhances the academic ability of learners and makes the learners perform better academically. Bilingualism also comes with economic opportunities and increased intelligence. Some specialized jobs also, such as international businesses, favor employees who can speak in more than one language (Fry &

Lowell, 2003, p. 128). For these reasons, parents should be sensitized on the importance of mastering L2 and also maintaining their native language alongside their cultural values and identities amidst the multicultural social environment that they live in.

Above all, L2 educators should embrace additive bilingualism and multiculturalism by providing a conducive learning environment for the multicultural learners. Additive bilingualism promotes proficiency in both L1 and L2, and at the same time, enhances positive beliefs towards one's culture and language, alongside the development of L2 (Dadamirzayeva, 2019, p. 222).

The world would be a better place if people took advantage of the literally global world to bring together the language and cultural diversities and identities for the common good of everyone. It is important to give the home language enough opportunity and resources so that families and generations can keep their native language as they continue learning and developing the dominant language. They also need to understand the importance of mastering the dominant language as long as they continue to reside in the country.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

The research question that the study seeks to answer is: What are the perceptions of Somali parents about their children's inability to attain native-like mastery of the English language while upholding the Somali language? The study will adopt an ethnographic qualitative research design. This design allows the collection of primary data where the phenomena of interest are studied in their natural setting without any manipulation (Astalin, 2013, p. 118). The ethnographic approach allows for the exploration of human societies in their natural setting (Astalin, 2013, p. 120). As such, the design will allow me to explicitly examine issues pertaining to language acquisition among the Somali immigrants.

Research Strategy

The target population of this study is the Somali immigrants. The research is specifically targeting the young Somali children, first generation and the parents of these children will provide the information needed for the study. The participants chosen for the study are the Somali parents who are all in the Twin Cities area. Purposive sampling will be used to select the participants of the study. This is because purposive sampling allows a researcher to conveniently choose a sample that will provide the necessary information being sought (Acharya et al., 2013, p. 332). The inclusion criteria include: one should be from the Somali community, should fluently speak the Somali language, and should have resided in the United States for a period of more than 10 years. Qualitative research does not require large samples because they may hamper the quality of data analysis (Ranney et al., 2015, p. 1107). Therefore, the study will use a sample size of eight participants, which will be sufficient to answer the research question, and it is also suitable since purposive sampling is used, which provides the targeted information.

Data Collection and Analysis

Ethnographic interviews will be used to collect data. These interviews have three important elements. First, the purpose of the interview is clearly explained to the participants so that the interviewee has a clear understanding of its purpose. Second, the interviewer explains what the goal of the interview is and how it might be achieved by providing details about the project, recording process, native language explanations, and interview questions, which are then posed to the participants. The ethnographic design provides room for observation and further probing to acquire information from the target community (Braithwaite, 2016, pp. 1-2). The questions will be structured to meet the purpose and the study's research question.

Since I am a member of the Somali community of Minnesota, I am well aware of the challenges the young Somali immigrants face in America and the reason their parents are frustrated. I also came here 20 years ago as a young immigrant, and I know exactly what it feels like to be an immigrant who wants to achieve the American dream, go to the best schools, speak perfect English and also maintain my native language and cultural heritage because that is what most Somali parents want to see in their children. With that mindset and experience, I will be explaining and elaborating more of what the participants of this study shared with me because I am from the same culture, and I speak the same language. The interviews will be transcribed from the Somali language to the English language for purposes of clarity and understanding of the findings by different stakeholders.

The data collected will be analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis is employed in the analysis of qualitative data collected through means such as ethnographic interviews (Ngulube, 2015, p. 9). The steps in thematic analysis include transcribing data, taking note of key points of interest, coding of data, mapping out themes from the data set, defining the themes, and finally

completing the analysis (Ngulube, 2015, p. 10). The outlined steps will be followed to ensure a meaningful analysis of the data.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study will be openly voluntary, where respondents shall be required to give their consent through the signing of a consent form. The participants will also be assured of the utmost confidentiality of the information that will be obtained from them. Being from their community, I will communicate with them using the native Somali language and will clearly explain to them the purpose of the research in order to obtain reliable data. I will also seek their permission in case I need to make any tape recording of the interviews. Access to the participants will be guided by respected principals of the schools who will introduce me to the Somali parents and I will explain to them reason for the research study and that their participation is completely voluntary. For privacy reasons, the names of the participants will not be used in this study.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data and Presentation of Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis carried out. The results will be presented under different themes that are in sync with the research question. Tables will also be used to present the coding procedures for the collected data. The research question that the present research study sought to answer was as follows: What are the perceptions of Somali parents about their children's inability to attain native-like mastery of the English language while upholding the Somali language?

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

A total of eight participants were interviewed. All these participants were native speakers of the Somali language but had acquired English as their second language. Furthermore, they were parents who had school-going children and had experience teaching children their native language. All were residents of the United States but originated from Somalia. The demographic characteristics are presented in the table below. For confidentiality purposes, the participants will be labeled using numbers, as shown in the table.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

| Participant | Native (primary) language | Country of residence |
|-------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Somali | U.S. |
| 2 | Somali | U.S. |
| 3 | Somali | U.S. |
| 4 | Somali | U.S. |
| 5 | Somali | U.S. |
| 6 | Somali | U.S. |
| 7 | Somali | U.S. |
| 8 | Somali | U.S. |

Coding of Data

Color coding was used to code the data for easy categorization into different themes, as shown in the coding tables for each theme. The process of coding involves several steps, as outlined below.

Step 1: Reading through the data to get a sense and overview of what the data looks like.

Step 2: Reading through the data to get a deeper understanding

Step 3: Assigning codes to the data

Step 4: Categorizing the codes into themes

Step 5: Analyzing the themes and give a presentation of the results.

In qualitative analysis, coding involves identifying a passage within the qualitative text, searching, and identifying concepts related to one another. Passages with similar concepts are assigned similar codes, which will help in deriving a theme from the codes. For example, from the response “I want to make sure our children don’t lose their heritage language because the heritage language means everything to us,” participant 1, the code identified here is the phrase “lose heritage language,” which describes the aspect of losing the heritage language. The coding mark assigned to the above passage is A1.

From another response, “they lose their heritage language because they speak English most of the time,” participant 4, the code identified here is the phrase “speak English only,” which describes the aspect of the Somali children speaking only English, and so we assign the coding mark A2. The theme that best describes the above codes is language loss. Different colors were used for easy identification of similar codes, which then ease the derivation of themes. The coding process for each theme is as outlined below.

Themes

The themes identified from the coding process are discussed in detail, as shown below.

Theme 1: Language Loss

Table 2

Coding Process for Theme 1

| Code | Evidence from the interview responses | Coding mark | Theme |
|------------------------|--|-------------|---------------|
| Lose heritage language | <i>"I want to make sure our children don't lose their heritage language because the heritage language means everything to us,"</i> participant 1 | A1 | Language loss |
| Speak English only | <i>"they lose their heritage language because they speak English most of the time,"</i> participant 4 | A2 | |
| Lost Somali language | <i>"Some of our children even lost the Somali we teach them at home,"</i> participant 7 | A3 | |

The table above depicts the coding process that led to the establishment of the theme of language loss. From the interview responses explored, the following findings pertaining to the theme of language loss among the Somali children were established. Children lose their native language because they only focus on speaking the second language, which is English, for this case, as stated by participant 4, who noted that *"they lose their heritage language because they speak English most of the time."* All the other participants were in agreement with the above sentiments as they outlined that the heavy focus on the English language was to the detriment of the Somali language. This is because the environment in which the children are brought up and live in only focuses on the English language, which is the commonly used language. This was outlined by participant 4, who pointed out the following, *"Our children struggle with the Somali language because of the country they live in and all they know and see is English everywhere."*

Participant 7 further outlined that the children lose the Somali language they have been taught at home: *“Some of our children even lost the Somali we teach them at home,”* participant 7.

Participant 3 also agreed with the above observation, noting that the environment in which the children grow heavily focuses on English language. The other five informants did not comment on that.

The informants of this study try to teach their children their primary language in a bid to ensure the continuity of their culture across generations and to avoid language loss. This was postulated by participants 1 and 3 who stated the following: *“I want to make sure our children don’t lose their heritage language because the heritage language means everything to us,”* participant 1. *“If they know their primary language, they will be able to learn more about their culture and their religion and transfer that to their children in the future,”* participant 3. Participant 4 was also in agreement by stating that *“I tell my whole family to speak to my children in Somali so they can learn from them and know who they really are”*. The other informants implied a similar aspect of the Somali language being a sign of cultural identity. From these sentiments, it can be inferred that the study informants try at all costs to ensure that their children do not lose their primary language.

Theme 2: Importance of the Native Language

Table 3

Coding Process for Theme 2

| Code | Evidence from the interview responses | Coding mark | Theme |
|------------------------------------|---|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Keep heritage and culture. | <i>“in order for us to keep our heritage and culture, we will make sure to teach our children Somali,”</i> participant 6 | B1 | Importance of the native language |
| Identity | <i>“teach your children the Somali language if you want them not to lose their identity,”</i> participant 5 | B2 | |
| Facilitate teaching several things | <i>“I can’t teach them everything I want to teach them if they don’t speak Somali because other languages I speak are not like my native language,”</i> participant 4 | B3 | |

This theme presents the perceptions of study informants towards the role and importance of the native language. From the interview responses, it was evident that the study informants highly value the Somali language, since all the participants were in agreement with the postulation that the native language is a sign of cultural heritage and identity. For instance, participant 6 outlined *“in order for us to keep our heritage and culture, we will make sure to teach our children Somali.”* This was further echoed by participant 5, who stated that *“it is very important to teach your children the Somali language if you want them not to lose their identity.”* In agreement with these sentiments, participant 8 argued that *“I am Somali and my children will not be Somalis if they don’t know their heritage language and culture.”* This indicates a sense of identity in the Somali community. All the other informants were in agreement that their native language is important to them and that they try their best to ensure that their children master the

language. These sentiments outline the importance that the Somali language has on the study informants.

Moreover, the informants outlined that the Somali language is used as a tool for teaching matters culture, tradition, and other things that the English language cannot teach. This was evident from the sentiments of participant 4, who argued that *“I can’t teach them everything I want to teach them if they don’t speak Somali because other languages I speak are not like my native language.”* Besides that, the language also facilitates the learning of religion and culture, as outlined by participant 1 as follows, *“if they lose that language, they lose everything and they won’t learn their religion, culture, and who they really are.”* The other six informants did not comment about the use of the Somali language to teach tradition and culture. Therefore, from these findings related to this theme, it is safe to say that the informants of this study perceive the Somali language as a language with high value and importance in their lives and those of the children.

Theme 3: Measures of Teaching Children the Native Language

Table 4

Coding Process for Theme 3

| Code | Evidence from the interview responses | Coding mark | Theme |
|----------------------------------|---|-------------|---|
| Tell stories | <i>“I tell my children stories about their culture and their original country and they are very curious to learn more about it,”</i> participant 4 | C1 | Measures of teaching children the native language |
| Watch Somali shows and concerts. | <i>“I sometimes watch Somali shows and concerts with them to learn the language and I explain to them when they ask me questions about what is being said,”</i> participant 2 | C2 | |
| Read Somali books | <i>“Sometimes we get Somali books and read for them,”</i> participant 6 | C3 | |

This theme outlines the various measures that the informants of this study use to teach their children their heritage language. From the interview responses gathered from the study informants, it is clear that the parents make efforts to ensure that their children learn the Somali language as outlined in the responses below. Some parents tell stories in the Somali language, as was affirmed by participant 4 as follows, *“I tell my children stories about their culture and their original country and they are very curious to learn more about it.”* Others watch Somali shows with the children as they explain to them the meaning of the jargon used. This was affirmed by participant 2, who stated, *“I sometimes watch Somali shows and concerts with them to learn the language and I explain to them when they ask me questions about what is being said.”* Reading of Somali literature is another strategy employed by the study informants, as stated by participant 6, *“Sometimes we get Somali books and read for them.”*

Besides that, other parents go to the extent of hiring teachers to teach the language as affirmed by participant 8, who stated the following, *“I hire a Somali teacher to teach them the language.”* In agreement with the above sentiments, participant 6 outlined that, *“I take them to Quranic schools on the weekends and I encourage the Quran teachers to speak to them in Somali when they are teaching them Quran.”* This shows the extent to which the informants of the study go in order to get their children to learn the Somali language. Speaking the language with the children is another strategy used by the study informants, as stated by participant 7 as follows, *“I do my best to speak to my children in Somali at all times when they are with me and they are not in school.”* Participant 1 was in agreement with the above postulation but participant 3 disagreed stating that the children, *“understand me but they respond to me in English”*. As such, the strategy was not efficient in teaching the language. Participant 5 did not comment on the strategy

for teaching the native language. From these findings, it can be inferred that the study informants make efforts to teach the children the Somali language.

Theme 4: Factors Influencing Language Learning

Table 5

Coding Process for Theme 4

| Code | Evidence from the interview responses | Coding mark | Theme |
|---------------------------------------|---|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| Friends, technology influence English | <i>“I never speak to my children in English but there are so many things that influence their language such as friends, TV and using technology,”</i> participant 1 | D1 | Factors Influencing language learning |
| Social media | <i>“The things that influence our children’s learning experience are TV, social media and other technology,”</i> participant 3 | D2 | |
| Mainstream and friends | <i>“We try our best to teach the Somali language, but the mainstream and friends influence that.”</i> Participant 2 | D3 | |

As parents make efforts to teach their children their native language, some factors influence the learning of a language by children. The environment in which the children live has a great influence on the language of the children. Such factors include people such as friends with whom the children interact; as stated by participant 1, *“I never speak to my children in English but there are so many things that influence their language such as friends, TV and using technology.”* In agreement with the above sentiments, participant 3 stated the following, *“The things that influence our children’s learning experience are TV, social media and other technology.”* This was in line with participant 2’s sentiments who outlined the following, *“we try our best to teach the Somali language, but the mainstream and friends influence that.”*

Since the society that the children live in embraces and upholds the English language, children master the English language easily as stated by participant 3, *“they know English very*

well and they can read and speak it.” Participant 4 was also in agreement with the above statement by outlining that *“all they know and see is English everywhere”*. Thus, the children cannot easily learn their native language due to the society that emphasizes the second language. The other four informants did not comment on the issues influencing the learning of the Somali language. From these responses, it can be inferred that the environment, society, and the people that the children interact with play a big role in influencing the children’s language.

Theme 5: Challenges of Teaching the Somali Language

Table 6

Coding Process for Theme 10

| Code | Evidence from the interview responses | Coding mark | Theme |
|------------------------------|--|-------------|--|
| No opportunities to practice | <i>“We face many problems because there are no opportunities to practice the language at school or with friends. They speak English most of the time.”</i> Participant 1 | J1 | Challenges of teaching the Somali language |
| Lack of resources | <i>“My biggest challenge is how to teach them Somali and we don’t have all the resources we need to teach Somali.”</i> Participant 2 | J2 | |
| No useful tools | <i>“I tried to find some ways to teach them Somali online or YouTube but I couldn’t find anything useful.”</i> Participant 3 | J3 | |

This theme explores the challenges that the study informants encounter as they try to get their children to master the Somali language. The study informants cited the following challenges: lack of opportunities for the children to practice the Somali language as stated by participant 1 as follows, *“We face many problems because there are no opportunities to practice the language at school or with friends. They speak English most of the time.”* Five of the eight participants were in agreement with the above statement, citing that the heavy focus on the English language was a challenge to the Somali language. Another challenge is the lack of

resources, as stated by participant 2, *“My biggest challenge is how to teach them Somali and we don’t have all the resources we need to teach Somali.”* Another challenge is the lack of resources, as stated by participant 2, *“My biggest challenge is how to teach them Somali and we don’t have all the resources we need to teach Somali.”*

Similarly, Participant 3 noted that the tools available are not useful enough in teaching the Somali language. These were participant 3’s sentiments, *“I tried to find some ways to teach them Somali online or YouTube but I couldn’t find anything useful.”* This signifies the lack of resources or support to teach the Somali language in the U.S. As such, the interview responses depict the challenges that the study informants face. With these challenges, learning and teaching of the native language become a problem. The other five informants did not comment on the challenges of teaching the Somali language.

Theme 6: Challenges in the School System

Table 7

Coding Process for Theme 6

| Code | Evidence from the interview responses | Coding mark | Theme |
|-------------------------------------|---|-------------|---------------------------------|
| Schools do not help | <i>“The schools don’t help much with the Somali language at all and we are very frustrated with that,”</i> participant 1 | F1 | Challenges in the school system |
| Schools focus on English only. | <i>“We don’t get the support we need for our children from schools because they only focus on English,”</i> participant 3 | F2 | |
| Frustrations with the school system | <i>“All they know and see is English everywhere. That’s why we, like many parents, are frustrated with the system of education here,”</i> participant 4 | F3 | |

This theme presents the perceptions of the study informants towards the school system with regards to the learning of the English language and the native language. From the interview responses, it was established that the study informants are frustrated with the school system as stated by participant 1 as follows, *“the schools don’t help much with the Somali language at all and we are very frustrated with that.”* In line with these sentiments, participant 4 further stated the following, *“All they know and see is English everywhere. That’s why we, like many parents, are frustrated with the system of education here.”* Participants 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8 were in agreement with the above response, outlining that the school system put heavy focus on the English language, at the expense of the Somali language. Participant 5 did not comment on the issue.

The frustrations of these parents stem from the fact that the school system only focuses on the learning and use of the English language in school, as stated by participant 3, *“we don’t get the support we need for our children from schools because they only focus on English.”* As such, the study informants do not get the support to teach their children their native language. This indicates the nature of the school system in the U.S., which only focuses on the English language.

Theme 7: Importance of Charter and Quranic Schools

Table 8

Coding Process for Theme 7

| Code | Evidence from the interview responses | Coding mark | Theme |
|-----------------|--|-------------|---|
| Charter schools | <i>“We believe Somali charter schools will help with the heritage language,”</i> participant 2 | E1 | Importance of charter and Quranic schools |
| Quranic schools | <i>“I take them to Quranic schools on the weekends and I encourage the Quran teachers to speak to them in Somali when they are teaching them Quran.”</i> Participant 6 | E2 | |

Because of the challenges that parents face in teaching their children the Somali language, they have sought remedies to this challenge. These remedies include taking their children to Somali charter schools and Quranic schools. Participant 2 outlined that the charter schools teach the children their heritage language and offer them the opportunity to practice the language. *“We believe Somali charter schools will help with the heritage language because they offer opportunities to speak Somali and we want them to learn their heritage language.”*

Similarly, the Quranic schools have Somali teachers who can teach the children the language as they learn about religion. This was stated by participant 6 as follows, *“I take them to Quranic schools on the weekends and I encourage the Quran teachers to speak to them in Somali when they are teaching them Quran.”* These findings are an indication of the solutions that the study informants seek to help her children learn their heritage language. The other six informants did not comment on the issue of Quranic or charter schools.

Theme 8: Bilingualism

Table 9

Coding Process for Theme 8

| Code | Evidence from the interview responses | Coding mark | Theme |
|--------------------|---|-------------|--------------|
| Somali and English | <i>“I want my children to be like me because I speak both Somali and English,”</i> participant 7 | 61 | Bilingualism |
| Bilingualism | <i>“It is important to us as a family to have bilingual children because we know bilingualism is good,”</i> participant 5 | 62 | |
| Both languages | <i>“It impacts the children’s ability to speak both languages,”</i> participant 7 | 63 | |

This theme outlines the perceptions of the study informants towards the learning of English and the native language by their children. From the interview responses gathered, it is

clear that the study informants want their children to learn both the English language and the Somali language. This was gathered from the following responses: *“I want my children to be like me because I speak both Somali and English,”* participant 7. *“It is important to us as a family to have bilingual children because we know bilingualism is good,”* participant 5. The informants of the study embrace bilingualism, as noted from the above responses.

Furthermore, they make efforts to make their children learn both languages; as stated by participant 3, *“I will make sure my children learn both languages.”* Such efforts include sending the children to preschool at a young age for them to learn English as the parents teach them Somali at home. This was pointed out by participant 7 as follows, *“So many parents in the Somali community believe in sending children to preschool and we did the same thing and the only thing that they learned there was the English.”* The responses indicate the positive perception that some of the study informants have towards bilingualism. However, participant 8, alongside three other participants (participants 2, 4 and 6) believed that the Somali language should have more emphasis as it is a sign of cultural identity.

Theme 9: Taking Children Back to Somalia

Table 10

Coding Process for Theme 9

| Code | Evidence from the interview responses | Coding mark | Theme |
|--|--|-------------|---------------------------------|
| Take them back home | <i>“we prefer to take them back home for few good years when they are very young,”</i> participant 1 | H1 | Taking children back to Somalia |
| Take them to gain exposure. | <i>“take them back home for some time like many other parents so they can get some exposure to the language and master it,”</i> participant 2 | H2 | |
| Opportunity to speak to families at home | <i>“I still want to take them back home for few years so they can see their country and get the opportunity to speak to families and friends,”</i> participant 8 | H3 | |

This theme explores the remedy of taking children back to Somalia that the study informants have hatched in a bid to make their children learn their native language. From the interview responses, many study informants believe that taking their children back to Somali will help them learn the language. This was drawn from the following responses: *“I still want to take them back home for few years so they can see their country and get the opportunity to speak to families and friends,”* participant 8. *“I need to take them back home for some time like many other parents so they can get some exposure to the language and master it,”* participant 2.

The informants also believe that taking their children back to Somalia at a young age is important because when they grow older, they may not want to learn their native language. This was argued out by participants 1 and 4, who outlined the following: *“we prefer to take them back home for few good years when they are very young,”* participant 1. *“I believe I should take them back home while they are still young because if they get older, they may not even want to go and*

learn their language and culture,” participant 4. From the above responses, it is clear that the informants of the study highly believe that taking back their children to Somalia will help them learn and gain good mastery of the Somali language. Furthermore, the responses depict that they believe that it is essential to take the children back at a young age as this will make them master the language easily. However, the other four informants did not comment about taking their children back to Somalia. Nonetheless, the participants agreed that they need to do whatever is within their reach to ensure that the children learn the Somali language.

Theme 10: Parental Responsibility in Language Learning

Table 11

Coding Process for Theme 10

| Code | Evidence from the interview responses | Coding mark | Theme |
|------------------|--|-------------|--|
| Raising children | <i>“Parents have a big job in raising their children and it is very important to teach your children the Somali language,”</i> participant 5 | 11 | Parental responsibility in language learning |
| Learn from me | <i>“I choose to speak to them in Somali and make sure they learn it from me.”</i> Participant 3 | 12 | |
| Role model | <i>“I speak to them in Somali all the time because I have to be a role model for them.”</i> participant 2 | 13 | |

This theme presents the study informants’ perceptions towards the responsibilities of parents in teaching the Somali language. From the interview responses, the following sentiments were gathered. *“Parents have a big job in raising their children and it is very important to teach your children the Somali language,”* participant 5. This indicates that the responsibility of teaching the Somali language lies in the hands of the parents.

Furthermore, the informants of this study believe that they have the responsibility of setting an example to their children. This was drawn from the responses of participants 2 and 3, as outlined below: “*I speak to them in Somali all the time because I have to be a role model for them.*” participant 2. “*I choose to speak to them in Somali and make sure they learn it from me,*” participant 3. The interview responses indicate that the parents have a key role in ensuring that their children master their native language. All the participants believe that it is their responsibility as parents to ensure that their children learn their native language. They also believe that the school can help them integrate the language into the education system.

Summary and Key Findings

From the analysis and critical review of the analysis, the major findings drawn from the study included ten themes. The first theme was Language Loss whereby the study informants highly dread language loss and are willing to make any sacrifices that will help their children uphold their native language. Secondly, it was established that the study informants highly value their native language since it is a sign of cultural heritage and identity to them. As such, the informants of this study have devised various ways of teaching their children the language and include the following: Speaking to them in Somali, hiring them Somali tutors, making them watch Somali movies and shows, taking them charter schools and Qur’anic schools.

Charter schools and Qur’anic schools use the Somali language for instruction and foster the children’s learning of the language. Moreover, many of the informants in this study believe that taking their children back to Somalia helps them master the Somali language. It was also established that among the factors affecting Somali language learning, a heavy focus on the English language was the predominant factor. The school system also emphasizes English use, and this undermines native language learning. Therefore, the school system poses a great

challenge to parents who aim at teaching their children the native language. Another key finding is that the study informants value bilingualism and would love seeing their children master both English and Somali languages.

Chapter 5: Results Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the study's findings while making linkages with the literature review. The discussion is presented under headings that link with the themes identified in chapter four. The discussion will form the basis for the conclusion and relevant recommendations to be drawn. The study's research question was: What are the perceptions of Somali parents about their children's inability to attain native-like mastery of the English language while upholding the Somali language? The following discussion presents the answers to the question.

Results Discussion

This section presents the discussion of the results of the analysis from Chapter 4. The results are discussed under the following headings.

Language Loss

From the data analysis, it was established that the study informants dread the issue of language loss amongst their children. It was also evident that these parents highly value their native language, and they perceive the language as a source of identity and cultural heritage. These findings are consistent with the postulations from the literature review section, which point out that the Somali parents highly value their culture and want to instill the cultural values in their children (Hussein, 2012, p. 160).

The study informants also make efforts to teach their children their native language, as affirmed by the informants of this study in the interview responses. Despite the efforts, there are cases of children losing the native language they are taught. This is also in consistence with the postulation of Drake and Mutua-Kombo (2009, pp. 110-111) from the literature review, who

argued that children lose their primary language as they adjust to the new society that they live in and end up adopting the second language at the expense of the native language. The data analysis established that the children commonly use the English language in communication, even when with their parents, and hence end up losing their native language. Therefore, the adoption and continued use of the second language (English) can be inferred as a contributory factor to language loss.

Measures of Teaching Language

The data analysis reveals that Somali children learn their second language (English) majorly in school, and when they interact with friends who use the language in communication. For the native language, it was established that the informants of this study use different strategies to teach their children the Somali language. Some of these strategies include watching Somali shows, reading Somali books, hiring Somali tutors, and speaking to them in the Somali language. These findings are consistent with the literature review outlining that the Somali parents make efforts to get their children to learn their native language in order to preserve their culture (Hussein, 2012, p. 160).

Furthermore, the study informants have been reported to embrace bilingualism and want their children to learn both Somali and English since they believe that bilingualism is good. These findings are in congruence with the sentiments from the literature review, positing that bilingualism is good for the development and academic advancement of learners (Dadamirzayeva, 2019, p. 222; Fry & Lowell, 2003, p. 128).

Challenges in Teaching the Native Language

The data analysis findings indicate that the informants of this study face numerous different challenges as they try to teach their children the native language. These challenges

include the lack of resources for facilitating learning, lack of opportunity for the children to practice the Somali language, and the school system, which poses the greatest challenge. The school system only focuses on the use of English and has no provision for the learning of the native language.

As such, the parents are frustrated with this system. These findings are consistent with the literature review indicating that the school system in the U.S. does not favor the native language's learning since a heavy focus is put on the English language (Gantt, 2016, p. 14; Plans, 2015, p. 3). Because of the high emphasis placed on the second language, children fail to learn their native language.

Remedies to Challenges

The data analysis established that the informants of this study have sought remedies to help their children master their native language. One of these remedies includes taking their children to Quranic schools and charter schools, where they get to learn the Somali language. They believe that charter schools help their children master their native language since they give them an opportunity to speak their native language. These findings are in line with the literature review, which outlines that the charter schools teach the native language and hence helps in upholding the Somali culture (Hussein, 2012, p. 150; MnEEP, 2018, p. 20).

The study findings also established that most Somali parents also opt to take their children back to Somalia to make them learn the Somali language, culture, and heritage. They also opt to take these children at their young ages. These findings concur with the literature review argument, outlining that the Somali parents take their children back to Somalia for them to acquire teachings on culture and their language (Bowie et al., 2017, p. 8).

Factors Influencing Language Learning

The research study established that there exist factors that have an impact on language learning among children. One finding is that the study informants perceive that children learn and master a language faster compared to when they are older at a younger age. For this reason, they take their children back to Somalia at a young age for them to learn the Somali language.

Contrary to these findings, some arguments from the literature review outline that age has no significant effect on the mastery of a language (Huang, 2014, p. 414). The only effect of age on language is on the aspect of pronunciation, as outlined in the literature review (Birdsong, 2006, p. 12; Huang, 2014, p. 414).

The research study's findings also indicate that the environment within which a child lives, the people they interact with alongside technology, and social media affect the second language acquisition and the retention or loss of the primary language. The study informants outlined that their children interact with their friends who speak English, the technology and social media use English and hence foster their children's mastery of the English language while also fostering the Somali language's loss, which is the primary language. These findings are also consistent with the literature review, which outlines that the society influences second language acquisition and the loss of the first language (Drake & Mutua-Kombo, 2009, p. 110; Kruienza, 2010, p. 2). The interplay of these factors causes children to master the second language and lose their primary language.

Conclusion

From the results discussed above, the following conclusions regarding the study can be drawn. The informants of this study highly value their native language since it is a sign of cultural heritage and identity. For this reason, they make efforts to ensure that their children learn

the language. Furthermore, these parents embrace bilingualism and desire that their children learn both the Somali and English languages. However, this desire has been met with numerous challenges since, as the children learn the English language, they tend to lose the Somali language. This is occasioned by factors such as the American school system that only focuses on learning the English language. Lack of resources to facilitate Somali language learning has also frustrated the efforts of teaching the Somali language.

In a bid to salvage the situation, most of the study informants outlined that they resort to taking their children back to their homeland to learn the language and culture. Other parents enroll their children in Somali charter schools, which support the learning of the native language. Most of the research study's findings support the arguments from the literature review. The synthesis of the research findings and the literature review indicates that the school system, technology, social media, society, and the people with whom the children interact impact language learning. Therefore, it is safe to say that the informants of this study perceive that these factors greatly impact their children's inability to attain native-like mastery of the English language and, at the same time, uphold the mastery of the Somali language.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can be drawn from the present research study. These recommendations are categorized into specific stakeholders, as shown below.

Recommendations to Parents

Given that the informants of this study believe that bilingualism is good, they should continue supporting their children to learn both languages. They should encourage their children to learn their native language by speaking to them the language whenever they are home. They should also uphold the measures that they use to teach their children the native language. Besides

that, these parents should lobby for the inclusion of the native language in the school curriculum. This can be done by making arrangements with the school administrators for the native language to be allocated time for it to be taught in school. This can go a long way in boosting the upholding of the primary language.

Recommendations to School Administrators

Many parents are frustrated with the school system since it does not support the learning of the native language. Therefore, the school administrators should consider including the native language in the school curriculum to support bilingualism. This will help in ensuring that children learn both languages easily. The school administrators should also help to inculcate a positive attitude towards the native language in the children.

Limitations of the Present Study

The present research study only focuses on the Somali community and draws insight from only eight interviews conducted. This limits the generalization of the study findings. Nonetheless, an in-depth analysis of the interviews is conducted, and this helps to mitigate these limitations.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present study solely focuses on the Somali community. Further research with a wider focus on more immigrant communities in the U.S. should be carried out to complement this present research study's findings. Other factors influencing language loss and language acquisition should also be explored in order to complement the findings of the present research study.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Section A: Questions on Socio-Demographic Information

1. What is your age?
2. How long have you been residing in the United States?
3. How many children do you have?
4. Which type of schools do you prefer to enroll your children in?
5. What is the highest level of education that your children have reached?

Section B: Questions on Language Loss and Acquisition

6. Do you teach your children the Somali language?
7. Briefly describe the approaches you use to ensure that they master the Somali language
8. How do you ensure that the children uphold the Somali language and do not lose it even after joining school and learning English?
9. Describe the problems that you encounter while trying to ensure that the children do not lose the Somali language
10. At what age do the children start mastering the English language?
11. Briefly describe the English learning experience of the children
12. How do you support your children to enhance their proficiency in the English language?
13. Explain the roles that school plays in enhancing children's language development?
14. Describe the challenges which hinder the children from becoming highly efficient in the English language?

15. What are your recommendations for the enhancement of language development among bilingual English learners?
16. Do you think racism has anything to do with the education of your children?
17. What strategies do you use to deal with racism?