

THE ROLE OF FAMILY NETWORKS IN MAINTAINING ARABIC LANGUAGE USE IN THE RAPARIN TERRITORY

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Abstract

This research investigates the internal family factors that contribute to the preservation of the Arabic language within the Arab community in the Raparin territory of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In contrast to the context of sociopolitical and linguistic shifts following Kurdish autonomy, the Arabic language, once dominant, is now marginalized in many spheres of public life. Relying on sociolinguistic theories of language maintenance and intergenerational conveyance, the research uses a community profile and a structured questionnaire to examine how family dynamics affect linguistic continuity. This study was conducted in the Raparin territory, where 40 Arab ethnic members were asked to fill out eighteen questionnaire items. The data was collected using a quantitative method. The findings expose that family language policy, parental language practice, and the engagement of extended family members, particularly grandparents, play a vital role in maintaining Arabic. Despite external challenges such as media influence and mixed marriages, the family continues to be the main sphere of resistance against language shift. The study stresses the critical role of home environments in protecting minority languages in contexts lacking structural support.

Keywords: Family, language maintenance, Arab community, Raparin territory

INTRODUCTION

Kurds of Iraq have experienced a substantial change in their language policy since gaining *de facto* in 1991. This change in language policy reconfigures social views of language use, particularly with respect to Arabic. Though Arabic remains a federal language because of its ongoing religious, historical, and cultural significance, its use among the Kurdish population has noticeably reduced. This shift is particularly evident in distant areas such as Raparin, where infrastructural limitations and socio-economic marginalization have promoted a distinctive language environment.

In the context of this broader tendency towards language shift, the Arab minority in Raparin faces increasing difficulty in maintaining their ethnic language within a predominantly Kurdish sociopolitical environment. The family, as a fundamental aspect of language shift, plays a vital role in this process. Research in minority language maintenance highlights the family as a main setting for intergenerational language transfer (Fishman, 1991), yet there is a lack of experimental research examining how family-level factors act in the distinct context of Raparin.

This study intends to address that gap by investigating the roles of family language policy, parental influence, and intergenerational communication in the keeping of Arabic among the Arab community in Raparin. Utilizing an integration of community surveying and a focused sociolinguistic questionnaire, the research investigates how Arab families cope with linguistic stress toward integration and the strategies they embrace to preserve their ethnic language.

The research will address the following questions:

1. How does family language policy impact the maintenance of the Arabic language among the Arab community in the Raparin area?
2. What internal family factors lead to the maintenance of the Arabic language within the Arab community in the Raparin territory?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The status of the Arabic language in the region

The 1991 change in political authority in the Kurdistan Region led to a linguistic shift as well, particularly regarding Arabic, which had in the past been the authorized language throughout the entire country.

From Jambaz's point of view (2014), while Arabic no longer maintains official standing in the Kurdistan Region, it continues to be respected due to its importance as a federal language and its cultural, religious, and historical roles. However, its practical usage, especially among the Kurdish population, has decreased considerably. The regional government's promotion of central Kurdish as the language of education, administration, and media has contributed to this decline. Arabic is still taught in schools, but mostly as a second or third language, and is not hugely considered; that is why its proficiency is declining among students (Nasrualldeen, 2017).

Factors like the partial separation of the area, restricted infrastructure, and socio-economic backwardness depict a wider pattern of language shift, wherein Arabic, in spite of its former dominance, is increasingly seen as less relevant in everyday Kurdish life, especially outside the major cities. (IWPR, 2013; CSIS, 2018)

Family as a Decisive Factor in Maintaining the Arabic Language in the Territory

The concept of language maintenance is key to understanding how minority languages survive or preserve their existence across generations. Ferguson, Heath, and Hwang (1981) define language maintenance as the continued form of use of a language within a community despite ongoing external load and pressures to result in eventually having a dominant language. Batibo (2005) holds that maintenance indicates a language's vitality under such pressure and the strength of community resistance to assimilation.

One of the most common and widely studied environments for language maintenance is the family unit. Scholars like Clyne (1985, 1991, 2003, 2005) argue that intergenerational language transmission is massively effective when commenced and sustained at home. Key variables involve whether both parents speak the minority language, the presence of extended family members such as grandparents, the opportunity for visits to heritage countries, and the developmental stage at which children are first introduced to or have been exposed to the predominant language.

Kayam (2014) highlights that the significance of family language policy lies in the deliberate strategies parents foster to motivate the utilization of a heritage language. A strong FLP builds up the functional usage of the minority language at home and boosts or makes children's bilingual or multilingual identities more forceful. In the same vein, Pauwels (2005) found that even in situations wherein children's spoken fluency is not strong enough, consistent exposure at home helps maintain receptive skills, which can be activated in later stages in life.

Sridhar (1988) and Barnes (1990) highlight the role of parents in language preservation, for example, mothers in particular. In reference to their emotional intimacy with children, mothers are often considered the primary linguistic models. In some contexts, they are willing to speak their ethnic language, even if it is not employed openly. Nevertheless, Jamieson (1980) opposes it by asserting that mothers are likely to feel socially or linguistically indefinite employing the mother tongue, particularly in communities where it maintains low status or structural support.

Grandparents play an essential yet often disregarded role. Holmes et al. (1993) revealed that within groups like Greek immigrants in New Zealand, grandparents were frequently monolingual in their ethnic language and thus functioned as linguistic anchors inside the family. Their presence leads younger family members to maintain at least a passive understanding of the language to sustain communication.

Clyne (2003) indicates that even a favorable family environment may be challenged by external factors such as intercultural marriage, migration, the entry of children into dominant language schools, and economic integration into majority language personnel. These stressors can boost language shift unless deliberate attempts are made to maintain the minority language at home.

In the case of Arabic-speaking families in Raparin, this framework is massively relevant. Given the region's Kurdish-majority environment and lack of institutional support for Arabic, family language policy becomes the primary, if not the only, mechanism for Arabic language maintenance. The lack of Arabic media, community institutions, or peer networks further raises the family's responsibility.

To summarize, the family is the foundational realm for preserving the Arabic language in Raparin area. When families use Arabic regularly and constantly in the home, promote literacy, and involve older generations in childcare and communication, they generate a resilient micro-environment for language maintenance. Without this deliberate effort, the language is likely to decline within a generation, especially in territories where external support is not strong enough or lacking.

METHODOLOGY

The research focuses on the role of the family in preserving the Arabic ethnic language within the Raparin territory. An interactive research design was employed, incorporating multiple data-gathering methods. To achieve the study's objectives, we developed a sociolinguistic questionnaire and utilized a community profiling technique.

The community profile serves as the method for collecting information about the Arab community in the area. It encompasses historical and sociolinguistic data pertinent to analyzing the language situation, based on information from 40 purposively selected respondents from the region.

The questionnaire was specifically designed to address the needs of this research, particularly to investigate the family's role in maintaining the ethnic language. It consisted of one section with 18 items, drawing on similar

questionnaires developed by researchers who studied various ethnic minorities worldwide (Fishman, 1966; Dweik, 2000; Tu-wakham, 2005; Nofal, 2011; Habtoor, 2012; et al.). The items were adjusted and modified to suit the specific community being studied. The questionnaire was carefully designed with prescribed wording and a consistent order of questions to confirm that all respondents received the same cues.

One of the main goals of our research is to analyze the effect of family on the maintenance of the Arabic language in this territory. For this purpose, the following items were illustrated to the participants.

Findings

To explore the role of family in language maintenance, specifically Arabic, among Arabs in the Raparin territory, a number of statements were ordered to interpret their motivations and attitudes towards the issue. Respondents were presented with eighteen statements, each with five response options: Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Neutral, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

The results of a two-item survey are presented in Table 1. Item (1) uncovers that the majority of participants (92.5%) use Arabic at home, while 2.5% do not, and 5% are undecided. Item (2) shows that the vast majority (97.5%) of respondents indicated their parents speak only Arabic, with 2.5% undecided.

Table (1): The use of the Arabic language

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I frequently use the Arabic language at home.	33	4	2	0	1
My parents primarily use the ethnic language at home.	31	8	1	0	0

Chart (1) below shows the extent to which mothers encourage their offspring to speak in Arabic. The outcome of the third item of the survey indicates that the overwhelming majority of mothers (70%) ask their children to speak in Arabic, whereas 17.5% do not, and only 12.5% are equivocal.



Chart (2) depicts items (4) and (5) concerning the role played by older family members in maintaining the ethnic language. It displays that (77.5%) of older siblings and grandparents play their roles in preserving their ethnic language, (15%) of older siblings and (10%) of grandparents do not have any roles. Furthermore, (7.5%) of older siblings and (12.5%) of grandparents were undecided.

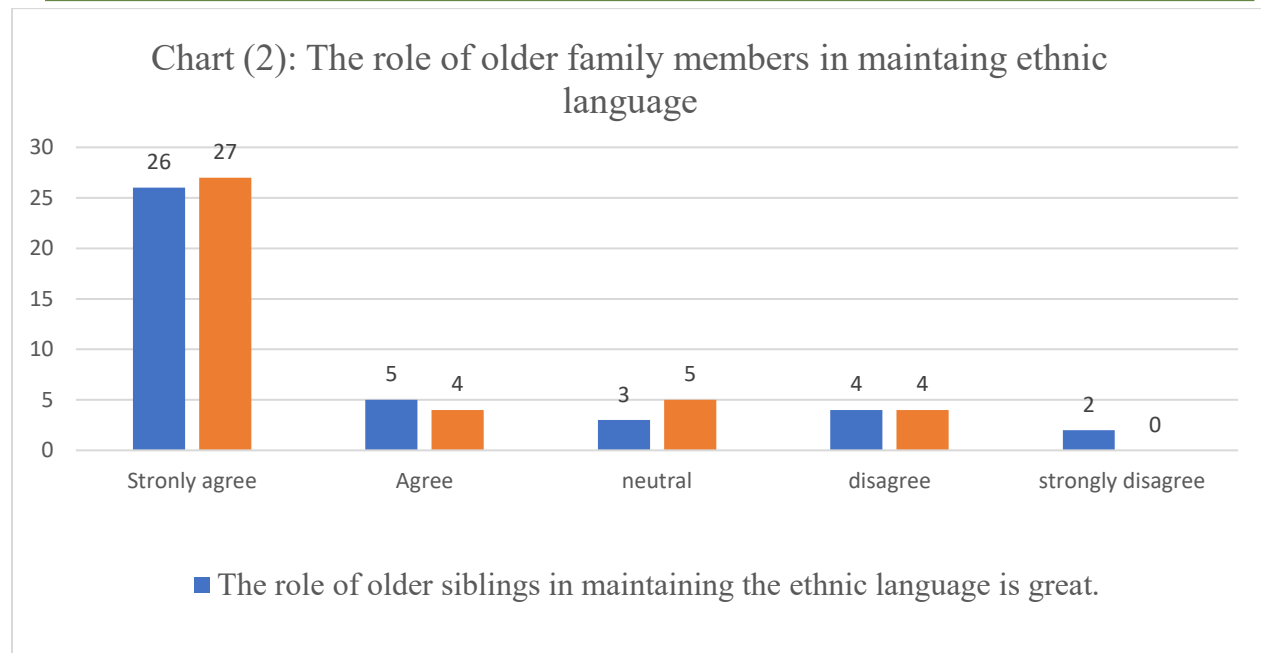


Chart (3) represents a two-item survey regarding the importance of family environment and policies in preserving the ethnic language. It illustrates that a large number of the participants (92.5%) have the supporting view that family environment helped them in preserving their ethnic language, while only 2.5% have an opposing view, and 5% are undecided. It also displays that (85%) think, with no exceptions or different opinions, that family policies are essential for preserving their language, and (15%) are equivocal.

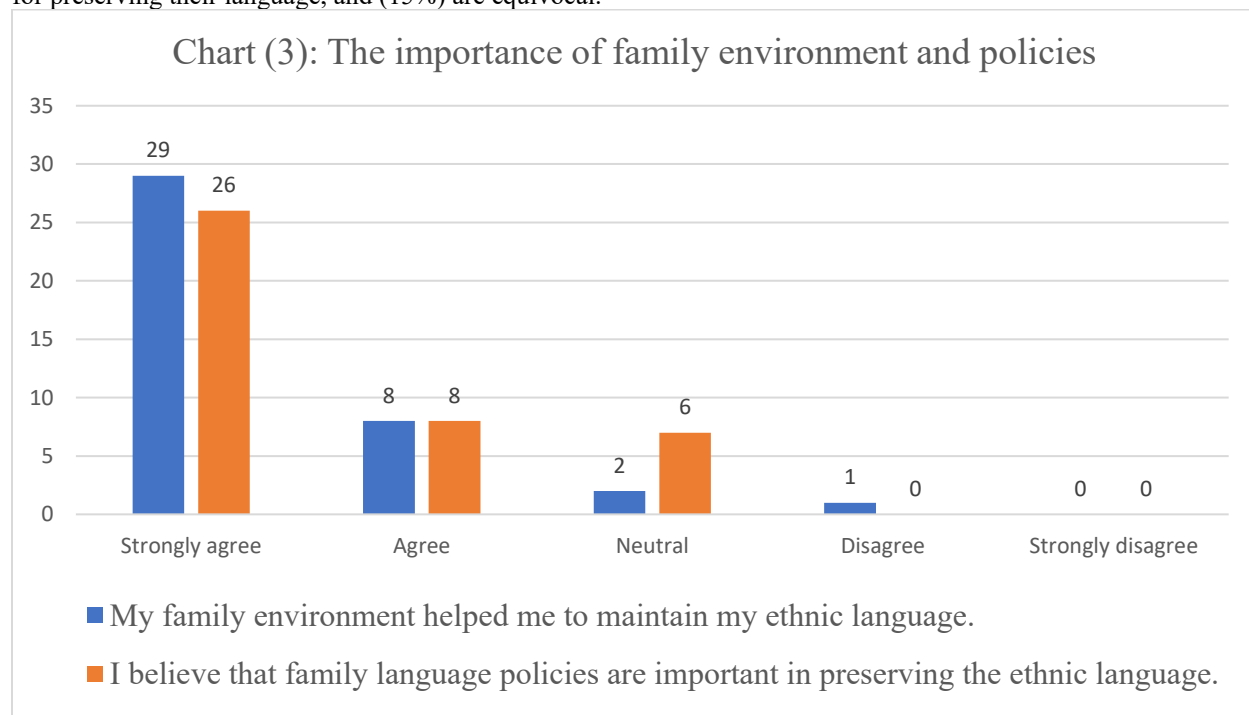


Chart (4) presents survey results on the impact of ethnic language on cultural heritage and family identity. Most respondents (87.5%) believe Arabic is crucial for preserving their cultural heritage and family cohesion. Regarding cultural heritage, only 2.5% think ethnic language is unimportant, and 10% are undecided. Additionally, 7.5% feel ethnic language does not contribute to family identity, while 5% remain uncertain.

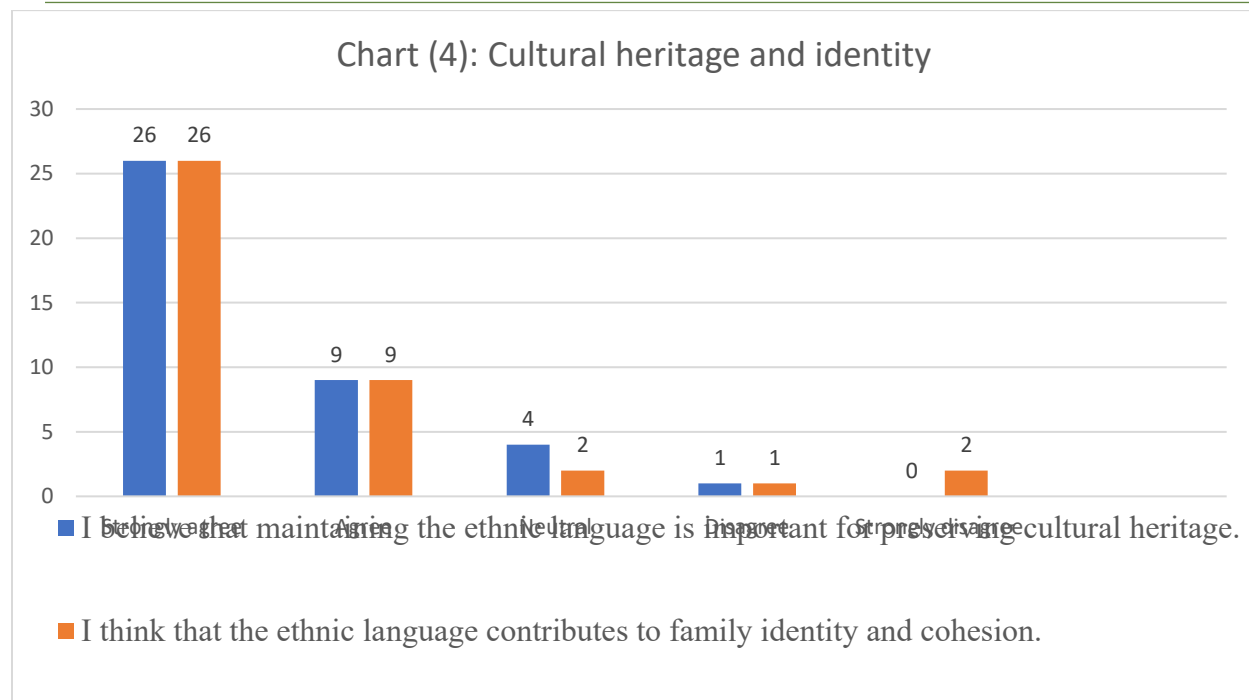


Chart (5) demonstrates two key findings from the survey regarding communication and family dynamics. First, it presents that a significant majority of participants (72.5%) encourage the use of ethnic language at home, while (7.5%) do not and (20%) remain undecided. Second, the chart finds out that (70%) of participants believe that the use of ethnic language effectively affects family factors, whereas (15%) disagree, and another (15%) are unsure.

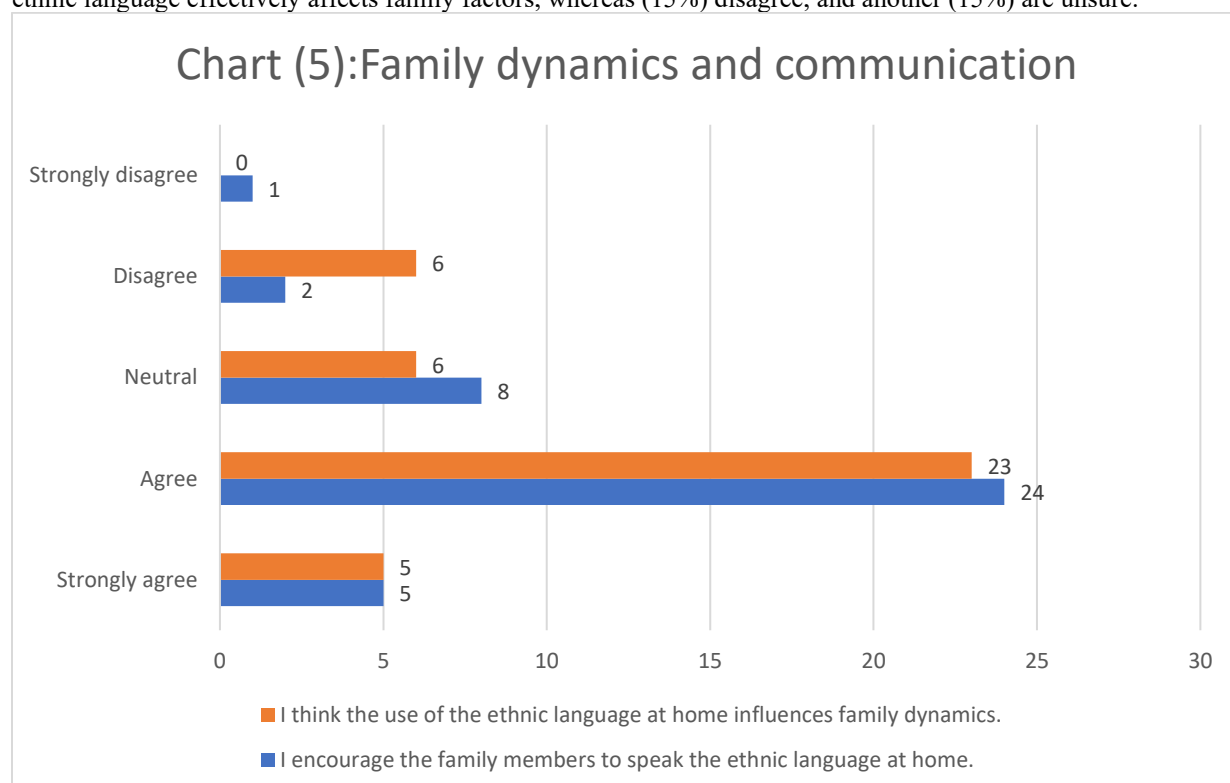


Chart (6) presents survey responses on ethnic language maintenance and change within families. It shows that 87.5% of respondents believe homecoming trips help preserve the ethnic language, with minimal disagreement (7.5%) or neutrality (5%). In contrast, 62.5% feel that the ethnic language use in their families has remained stable over time, while 22.5% acknowledge some changes, and 15% remain uncertain.

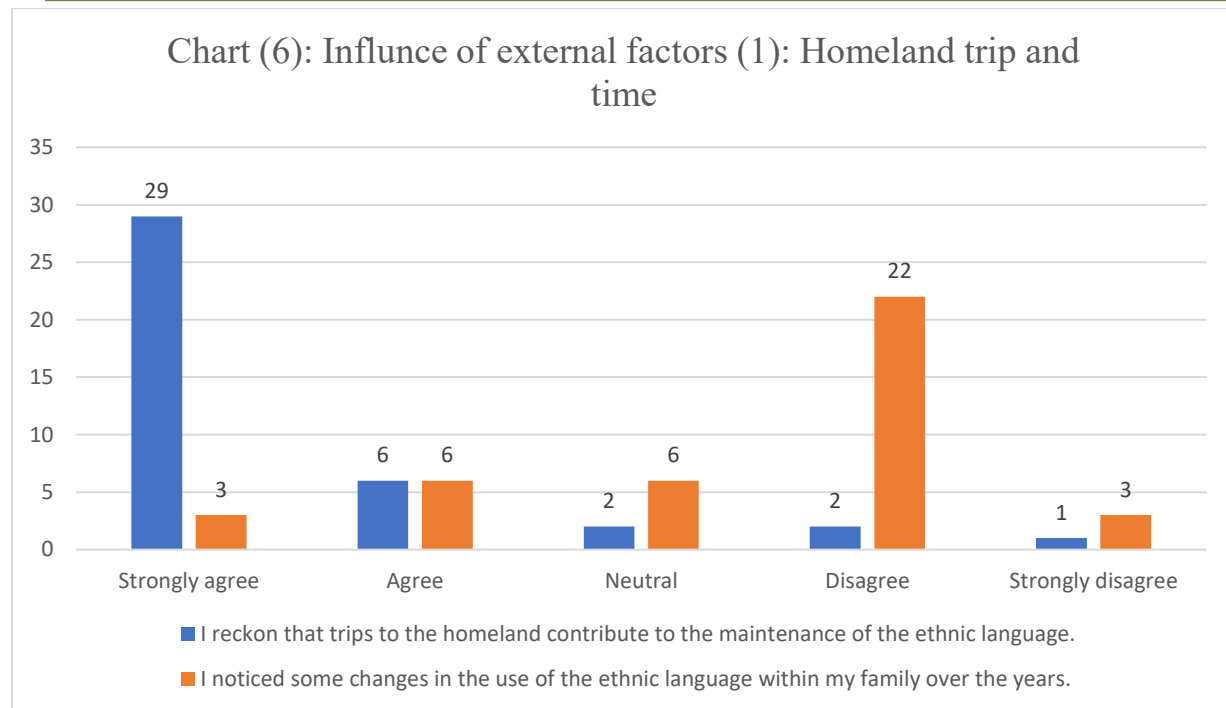


Chart (7) highlights the influence of three external factors—mixed marriage, technology/media, and socializing—on ethnic language maintenance. Firstly, 25% of respondents believe mixed marriage affects language use, while 7.5% disagree, and 67.5% are unsure. Secondly, 67.2% acknowledge the role of technology and media in shifting language use, though 17.5% downplay its significance, and 15% are uncertain. Lastly, 40% feel social interactions impact language use, 20% disagree and 35% remain uncertain.

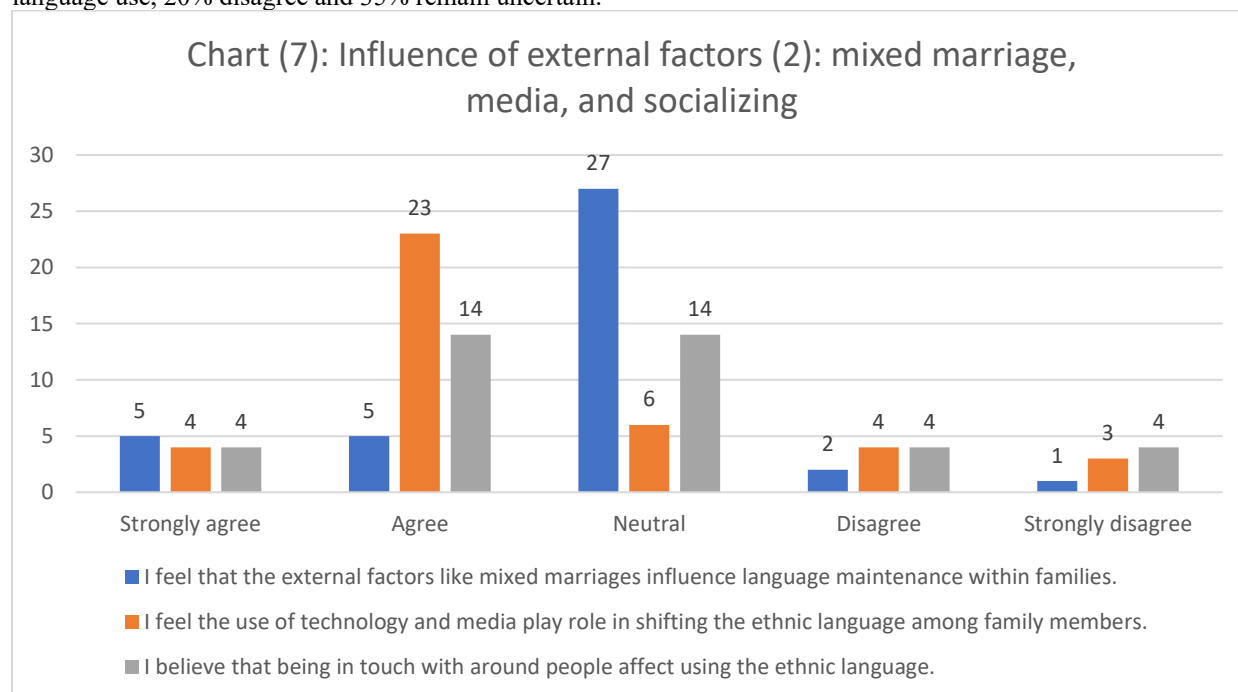
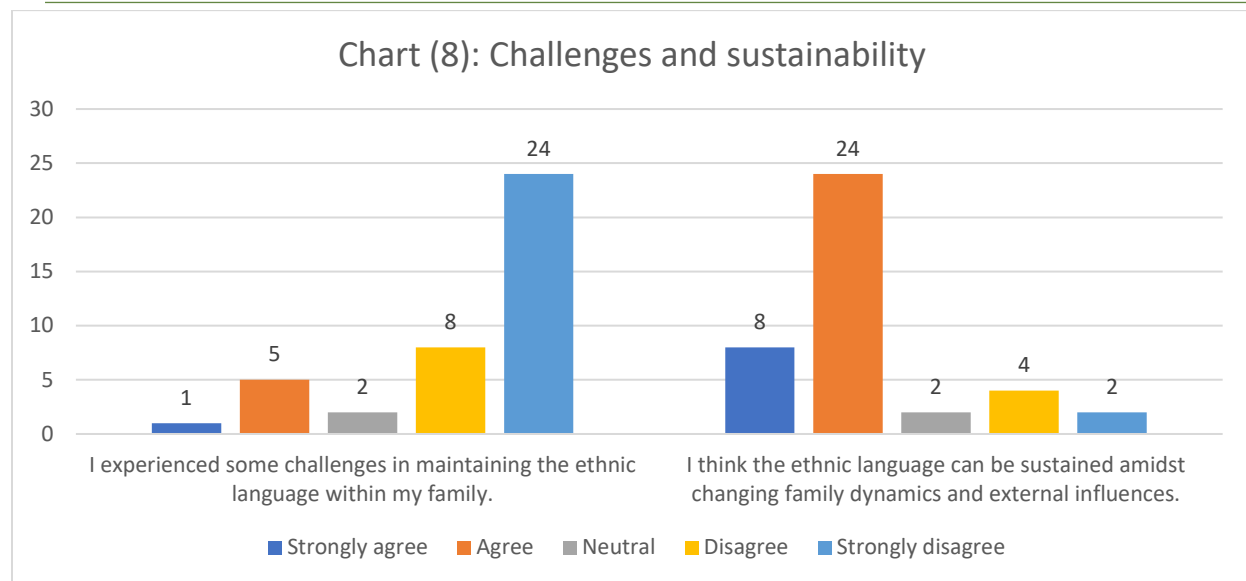


Chart (8) shows the challenges and sustainability of ethnic language. Most (80%) do not feel they have faced significant challenges in maintaining the ethnic language, and they believe that it can be maintained despite changing family dynamics and external influences. A smaller group (15%) faces challenges and less optimistic about its sustainability, while only 5% are unsure.



DISCUSSION

This investigation aimed to identify the role of the family in maintaining the Arabic language for Arabs in the Raparin territory of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. To accomplish this, two questions were formulated, and the responses to these questions are presented below.

1. How do family language policies impact the maintenance of the Arabic language among the Arab community in the Raparin area?

The results presented in chart (3) showed that the majority of the participants with no exceptions or different opinions believed that their family policies helped them in maintaining their ethnic language, this result ultimately agrees with the words of O. Kayam who stated that family language policy is a strategy to maintain the heritage language and it is a highly important factor in transmitting Mandailing Language, hence maintaining it, as it keeps it functional. That is, it continues to be used in daily life.

Regarding the language policy, family environment is another vital factor which plays a role in maintaining the heritage language, the results demonstrated in chart (3) also prove that the high majority of the respondents think that family environment helped them in preserving their ethnic language, this result matches the words of M.G. Clyne who argued that family environment is a motivating factor in the promotion of successful intergenerational maintenance of the community language. [Clyne 2003].

2. What internal family factors lead to the maintenance of the Arabic language within the Arab community in the Raparin territory?

Inside the family, there are a number of factors that helped the respondents maintain their ethnic language; the frequent use of ethnic language by parents, especially by mothers, is one of the factors. The results (as demonstrated in Table 1) show that the vast majority of the participants use the Arabic language frequently at home. This result matches what Sridhar (1988) and Barnes (1990) addressed, 'the role of parents, especially mothers, in language preservation. Due to their emotional closeness with children, mothers often serve as the primary linguistic models.

Another affective factor is the presence of grandparents in the family, Holmes (1993) stated that grandparents could play an even more important role in language maintenance as they very often speak only the mother tongue and not the language(s) of the host society, what Holmes highlighted is ultimately reflects the results that have been gained in this investigation and presented in table (1).

CONCLUSION

This study has illustrated that internal family factors play an essential role in the preservation of the Arabic ethnic language within the Arab community of Raparin. In a region where the Arabic language lacks official endorsement and faces fading prominence in public life, the family can be seen as the last stronghold for linguistic continuity. The findings highlight the significance of family language policy, the parental impact on early linguistic socialization, and the effort of family members, such as grandparents, in preserving the ethnic language.

Despite external pressures from dominant-language schools, technology, and intercultural marriages, families that reliably use Arabic at home, encourage its cultural worth, and furnish environments supportive of language practice

tend to maintain it throughout generations. This states the extended importance of liberating families and communities in language preservation attempts, especially in multilingual and politically complicated regions.

Eventually, the research asserts that without the intentional engagement of families, Arabic is expected to continue its reduction in Raparin territory. However, with deliberate attempts inside the home, the language can persist as a crucial marker of identity, ancestry, and community cohesion.

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