SOCIAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACCULTURATION OF YOUNG SAUDI CHILDREN IN THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

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Statement of originality

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Date: 30 November, 2011
Dedication

In loving memory of my father, Abdulrahman Almuraikhi

who taught me the true value of honesty, integrity, and hard work.

To my lovely husband and my best university colleague, Mohammed Albousaif

whose encouragement, support, and unconditional love comforted me all the way
and inspired me to pursue my dreams.

To my two sons, Abdulaziz and Abdulrahman,

who mean the world to me.
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Abstract

This project examines the sociolinguistic situation of bilingual Saudi children in Australian early childhood educational settings. It investigates the social factors surrounding the children and these factors’ effectiveness in the sociolinguistic growth of these young learners of English as a second language (ESL). It is acknowledged that the ESL child’s supportive social network including parents, friends, teachers, and the media can facilitate their social integration either inside or outside the school. Children’s social and cultural backgrounds together with their native languages have a crucial role to play. Additionally, learning a second language is the initial step in the process of acculturation. Researchers indicated an interrelation between acculturation and learners’ achievement level in the second language. The learners’ language competence is seen to be influenced by their desire to communicate with the target culture. Integration into the target community can lead to successful acquisition of the second language. A crucial factor is the learners’ attitude held toward the new culture. Practically, the research looks at the formal and informal sociolinguistic environments surrounding ESL children. It investigates the main social factors affecting ESL children’s acculturation and their implications regarding Saudi children, and other sojourners, in Australia. It aims to specify the sociolinguistic hindrances Saudi children face either in the Australian context or when they return to Saudi Arabia, and to identify strategies provided by parents and teachers to foster their children’s acculturation, reacculturation, and bilingualism.

The research used two types of methods: semi-structured interviews and a structured questionnaire. The interview study had two groups of Saudi mothers: the acculturation group and the repatriation group. A total of 20 interviews reflecting Saudi mothers’ viewpoints regarding the acculturation and reacculturation of their children form the basis of this study; five of them were conducted with returnees to Saudi Arabia. The structured questionnaire was administered to 30 teachers who had dealt with Saudi children in early childhood educational levels within the region of Newcastle. The results of the research highlight how ESL children are influenced by their families’ religious and cultural backgrounds. They are not only crucial for Saudi children but also for young ESL children from diverse backgrounds because they focus on essential aspects of child acculturation and second language acquisition.
(SLA). It is hoped that the results will be beneficial to ESL learners and to the field of linguistics in general.

**Key words:** Saudi children, acculturation, supportive social factors, young sojourners, second language acquisition, re-entry research.