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Transferring Cultural Attitudes: Do Parents' Views on Western Culture Shape EFL Learning of Arab Users of English in Qatar

Abstract. This study investigated how Arab parents in Qatar view the cultural content in English and how their views influence adolescents' EFL learning. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research surveyed 30 Arab parents and 30 of their adolescents (ages 14–17), followed by semi-structured interviews with five parent–adolescent pairs. Quantitative results showed that parents support English's academic value, yet worry about Western content in media and curricula. Interviews were thematically analyzed, and the results showed that parents often act as cultural gatekeepers. They encourage their adolescents' English language learning, yet selectively filter content to protect religious and cultural values. Adolescents' responses varied; some adhered to parental guidance, while others took on a more autonomous use of English outside the home, essentially navigating a bilingual identity. The study highlights how language learning is instilled in family dynamics and social norms. It also demonstrates how ambition and cultural caution coexist in conservative settings. These findings suggest that EFL learning in Qatar is often a culturally negotiated process influenced by intergenerational dialogue and local norms. The study stresses the need for culturally responsive approaches to English education in non-Western conservative settings; one that acknowledges how families reconcile language and culture while supporting learners' linguistic development.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), parental attitudes, cultural identity, Arab, Western, language learning, bilingualism, cultural preservation, Qatar.

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1. Introduction

English, often referred to as 'Global English', and used both as a lingua franca (ELF) and as a school subject (EFL), serves as an official language in more than 55 countries and is widely taught as a foreign language worldwide. Thus, it cannot belong only to native speakers' culture (House 2018), given its adoption and adaptation by many non-native speakers (Seidlhofer 2009). According to Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig (2024), around 1.5 billion people worldwide speak English. Crystal (2003) argues that when a language becomes global, ownership of it becomes collective, which enables users to shape it.

The widespread use of English in Qatar has made it an essential tool for technology, professional development, and higher education. While these benefits are substantial, many scholars, such as House (2018) and Li (2005), warn that English's expansion poses threats to other languages and cultures. House (2018) emphasizes cultural risks (e.g., identity erosion and homogenization), whereas Li (2005) focuses on linguistic risks such as reduced multilingualism and marginalization of minority languages. English's global dominance has been described as 'linguistic imperialism' (Phillipson 2012), i.e., the worldwide promotion of English for academic/political gain that can reshape identities and reproduce inequalities (Basu 2013; El-Qassaby 2015). Many scholars use the metaphor of the *Trojan horse* to describe the potential threat of English to local languages and cultures; while welcomed at first for its practical benefits, many learners later feel that English begins to dominate their native language and culture (Pan & Seargeant 2012).

The cultural and religious factors in the Middle East can majorly influence how students interact with English. For many parents and educators in the Gulf, exposure to English-medium content is a valid concern because it is perceived to weaken Arabic and Islamic values (Elshenawy 2017). This concern is especially common in countries like Qatar that aim to balance the learning of English for its practical benefits while protecting local cultural and religious identity.

2. Statement of The Problem

English is widely used in Qatar, and it offers many academic and professional development opportunities. Yet, its Western cultural associations could conflict with local values—encouraging families to view English not just as a tool, but as a carrier of misaligned cultural values. Previous studies have examined parental attitudes in other Arab or immigrant contexts (e.g., Almutairi 2019; Ronderos, Castilla-Earls, and Ramos 2021), yet little is known about how such views translate to adolescents' EFL experiences in Qatar. This study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the cultural frictions Arab parents experience in Qatar and, by extension, how these tensions could affect their adolescents' attitudes toward learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

3. Research Context

Understanding parental attitudes requires considering Arab families' sociocultural setting. Qatar is a small Gulf country that hosts people from diverse countries and backgrounds, with expatriates making up about 88% of the population (Central Intelligence Agency 2025). That includes large Arab communities from various countries such as Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan. These families maintain a strong connection to their home cultures while adapting to life in a society that blends Islamic values and rapid modernization.

English's global status has undoubtedly influenced its adoption in Qatar's education system; it is the main medium of instruction in schools, universities, and workplaces, except for cultural and religious practices (Mustafawi et al. 2021). It is also commonly viewed as a gateway to academic and professional success. However, this coexistence of Western cultural elements with traditional Arab values creates a dilemma for parents. Schools often operate in English (some with English-only policies), and adolescents' media use reflects Western norms. As such, these parental perceptions may affect adolescents' motivation, access to language resources, and attitudes toward English.

Having lived in Qatar for years, I observed the coexistence of Western and Islamic cultural elements in daily life. Public schools remain gender segregated—a reflection of Islamic traditions—while English is commonly spoken in public places[1] and among expatriates. Also, English-language media and advertisements have a strong presence; yet, Islamic expressions like *inshallah* (God willing) and *mashallah* (God has willed it) remain deeply rooted in daily interactions. This mix of glocal elements affects how Arab parents approach English education at home.

Given the sociocultural complexity in Qatar, English learning is not only about linguistic proficiency but also about balancing global communication and cultural preservation. Arab parents play an essential role in mediating this balance. As a result, this calls for a more thorough understanding of their influence on language attitudes and practices within the home and educational settings.

4. Literature Review

4.1. Global English and Cultural Identity

English as a global means of communication has been a topic of debate among scholars, especially in the context of the cultural implications associated with the language. English is not merely a neutral language for transmitting information; rather, it often acts as a carrier of values, ideologies, traditions, customs, and the worldview of its native speakers. This applies to any language, as Brown (2007, 189–190) put it, "intri-

[1] Arabic is the official language; English functions widely as a working lingua franca.

cately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture." This notion is further supported by scholars such as Kramsch (1998) and Ardila-Rey (2008). The concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) emphasizes its adaptability; it is used by diverse speakers and not owned by any one culture (e.g., Seidlhofer 2009; Jenkins 2015). However, to some critics, English remains tied to Western norms and values (Phillipson 2012).

This concern is part of a broader discussion on "linguistic imperialism", a term coined by Phillipson (2012) to describe how the global dominance of English can marginalize other languages and cultures. According to Phillipson, this occurs through control of language resources and infrastructure (e.g., control of curricula, publishing, and teacher training worldwide). Dominant languages garner more support, thereby privileging those proficient in them and resulting in a loss of language, culture, and identity (Chui 2023). However, the view of English linguistic imperialism positions English not as a tool for communication or a better education, but rather as a vehicle for transmitting Western ideology that has an active impact on identity, cultural values, and social structures. Despite this influence not always being intentional, its effects can inevitably be felt over time, especially in the context of non-Western societies where English is taught through materials filled with Western references, as illustrated in various studies such as (Pinto 2013; Kazemi, Aidinlou, and Asl 2017; Fauzan 2023).

In the context of these discussions, a recurring point is cultural transmission through language. Many scholars argue that language and culture are inseparable (Kramsch 1998; Brown 2007). Learning a language implies, to some extent, learning a second culture (Brown 2007, 193), including gender roles, customs, and ideologies (Jacobson 1996). In conservative Muslim settings, this can cause tension when local and target norms diverge. In this article, English in Qatar is treated primarily as EFL (school-based learning for academic advancement), while acknowledging that everyday intercultural use often resembles ELF.

4.2. Parental Influence in EFL Learning

The way in which parents view English and its cultural associations affects adolescents' attitudes towards learning a language. This is especially valid in contexts where the target language contains cultural elements that are either vastly different from the local culture or do not align with local traditions. Several studies show that parents' beliefs, home practices, and language use directly affect how children interact with English as a foreign language (Ronderos, Castilla-Earls, and Ramos 2021; Zhang and Lau 2024). In these instances, language learning shifts from a pedagogical matter to a reflection of broader social, cultural, and ideological concerns.

Parents who view English as a language granting opportunities may encourage their children to learn it, thereby fostering positive attitudes and motivation in children to learn the language (Carmel 2019). However, other parents may perceive English and its cultural associations as a threat to their children's cultural values and national

identity. For example, Almutairi (2019) found that many Kuwaiti parents preferred curricula that promote local culture over Western cultural content. These parental concerns often affect how much parents support or restrict their children's exposure to English at home, in school, or through media.

Other parents, however, may opt for a more balanced approach whereby they encourage the learning of English for instrumental reasons while actively maintaining the local language and culture (King and Fogle 2006). This is often reflected in the Home Literacy Environment (HLE). Parents who provide access to English books and informal learning activities tend to have a positive impact on their children's attitudes towards English (Li et al. 2025). This shows that home is not only a learning environment, but also a space where cultural identities are reinforced through language practices and parental choices. Home-language choice correlates with identity prioritization (Phinney et al. 2001; Chan 2023), especially in contexts where parents are adamantly seeking to preserve their cultural or religious identities.

Language is emotional, and parent-child interactions are influenced not only by what is spoken but how it feels to speak it (Pavlenko 2004). In such contexts, Arab parents may seek to maintain Arabic as the primary language spoken at home to ensure the safety of their identity, while English is treated mostly as a utility. In diasporic contexts, parents often see themselves as cultural gatekeepers (Tsai et al. 2012), reinforcing religious norms and values while regulating exposure to English Western language content (Merali 2011). These strategies might include limiting access to certain media, monitoring content, or choosing culturally aligned materials.

In a multi-cultural setting like Qatar, this parental influence becomes central to adolescents' motivation and comfort level towards learning English. As such, understanding this influence is of the essence when examining how cultural values intersect with foreign language learning in conservative or otherwise religious contexts.

4.3. Cultural Intersections in Arab EFL Education

The integration of English language education in Arabic and Islamic contexts vis-à-vis cultural and religious preservation has long been debated. In conservative communities, the growing presence of English and its Western elements can cause discomfort or rejection. This tension is often more prevalent in education, namely, where Western themes in textbooks, media, and school culture may conflict with local values and expectations. As such, families in Qatar may find themselves questioning not only how English is taught but also what cultural values their children absorb.

In Islam, seeking knowledge is a religious duty and a form of worship. Teaching typically operates within a particular framework shaped by Islamic principles and Arab cultural traditions (Halstead 2004), influencing what is considered appropriate in education. This framework shapes how foreign language learning is approached in the Arab and Islamic world.

Spathopoulou and Pitychoutis (2025) note that in the Arab Gulf region, English language teaching is heavily influenced by societal norms and Islamic traditions, which often require educators to navigate sensitive themes like gender, religion, and family. In Iran, for instance, English education was restructured after the Islamic Revolution to align with Islamic identity (Moghaddam and Murray 2019). This was done by revising textbooks and removing topics deemed culturally incompatible. In Indonesia, English instruction in Islamic universities is interwoven with religious teaching (Syuhda et al. 2024). These examples illustrate the broader struggle within Islamic and Arab societies; they seek to adopt English language education without compromising their religious and cultural values—a negotiation that mirrors the concerns in Qatar.

The preservation of the Arabic language is also a key concern for many parents, given its link to religious and cultural identity. Arabic is still the primary language in cultural and religious contexts, while English is used more often in professional and academic settings due to its perceived benefits (Mustafawi et al. 2021).

According to Ellis (1994), the attitudes of learners determine their success or failure in learning a language; those with a positive attitude are more likely to succeed and achieve language proficiency than those with a negative outlook on the language. In the context of Qatar, these attitudes are affected by cultural concerns. For example, Elshenawy (2017), while examining the effect of globalization on Qatari culture, claimed that the dominance of English in universities, schools, and daily life has led to a decline in Arabic language usage and has negatively impacted Islamic religious teaching and Qatari values. This sort of cultural impact can create tension—and ultimately a resistance—towards language learning, as many Arabs perceive English as a threat to their culture (Ateyat and Gasaymeh 2015). Motivation may decline when students feel their identity is at risk. That is why it is of utmost importance to implement culturally sensitive approaches to language learning in non-Western or conservative settings to simultaneously secure language proficiency and cultural identity.

English language education in the Arab and Islamic world often reflects Western cultural values that are embedded in textbooks and instructional materials (Messekher 2014; Alsaif 2016; Kazemi et al. 2017), which can create various challenges due to cultural differences. Some families and educators in Arab societies express concern that English language materials produced by Western publishers may include references to topics such as dating, alcohol, or secular celebrations that they feel do not align with Islamic cultural values. Even when subtle, the underlying ideologies of individualism and freedom of speech contrast with predominant religious values in Arab societies (Sadeghi and Sepahi 2017). For example, even texts depicting mixed-gender interaction or independence from parental authority may raise concern or be perceived as a challenge to traditional views rooted in religion in conservative communities.

In the context of EFL classrooms in Qatar, where public education reflects Islamic traditions and gender segregation is common, the presence of these values could undoubtedly alarm parents about the erosion of moral values and cultural identity. Rashid and Ibrahim's (2018) study revealed that EFL textbooks used in Qatar often reflect Western

cultural values that may not align with learners' attitudes and religious beliefs, including holidays, gender relations, and individualism. Such exposure—common in Qatar's imported English curricula and media—can unsettle locally valued norms, encouraging parental mediation of what and how adolescents learn. Some countries, like Oman, have responded to these challenges by integrating policies to preserve cultural identity while promoting English language education (Siddiqui and Sahai 2020). Similarly, there is a call for reforming educational policy in Saudi Arabia to better align with local conditions and preserve cultural identity (Barnawi and Al-Hawsawi 2016). These cultural concerns have led to various responses across the Arab and Islamic world, ranging from policy adaptations in education systems to parental efforts to regulate their children's exposure to Western values, as embedded in the learning of English. To explore this dynamic, the present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are Arab parents' views towards the inclusion of Western culture in their adolescents' EFL learning?
2. How do parental attitudes appear to influence adolescents' motivation and behaviour toward English learning, based on insights from parent-adolescent interviews?
3. In what ways do Arab parents in Qatar support or limit their adolescents' exposure to the English language and culture?

5 Methods

To address the three research questions, I employed both quantitative and qualitative methods as follows:

5.1. Participants

A total of 30 Arab parents and 30 of their adolescents residing in Qatar participated in the study. The parent sample (n = 30) included 20 females and 10 males, aged 32–63, primarily from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Kuwait. Most (24) had lived in Qatar for over 10 years; 18 held bachelor's, 11 master's, and 1 doctoral degree. Adolescent participants (n = 30; 13 female, 17 male) were 14–17 and all enrolled in school. Interview pairs reflected similar variation in age and gender. Detailed socioeconomic data (e.g., income) were not collected to preserve participants' anonymity. For the qualitative component, five-parent adolescent pairs were selected from this group based on their willingness to participate in interviews. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling, starting with families known to the researcher and expanding through their social networks.

5.2. Procedures

The study was conducted independently following standard research ethics. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. No identifying information was collected. Given minimal risk and no institutional funding, ethics approval was

not sought. As survey responses were anonymous and not linked between parents and adolescents, no paired analysis was possible in the quantitative phase. However, qualitative interviews with five matched parent-adolescent pairs allowed for an exploration of how parental views may shape adolescents' language attitudes and behaviours.

5.3. Measures

1. Quantitative survey:
   Two complementary questionnaires were developed: one for parents and one for adolescents. Each consisted of 15 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree).
   a) Parents' survey focused on:
      - Attitudes toward English and Western culture
      - Perceptions of cultural identity and its influence on EFL learning
      - Home practices related to English exposure and cultural content
   b) Adolescents' survey examined:
      - Motivation and interest in learning English
      - Experiences with cultural exposure in English learning
      - Perceptions of parental influence and home environment on language learning

   Parallel constructs were targeted with age-appropriate wording (e.g., parents: "conflicts with our values"; adolescents: "differs from my religious/cultural values").
2. Qualitative interviews:
   Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five parent-adolescent pairs. These explored views on Western culture in English education, language practices at home, and how parental values shape adolescents' language use. Interviews were thematically analyzed. Sample survey items are provided as supplementary materials for editorial review purposes; the full instrument is available upon request.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1. Parental Views on English and Western Culture

Survey findings show that while a majority of parents (90%) believe English is essential for their adolescents' academic and professional success, a substantial portion (66.6%) agree or strongly agree that English language media and textbooks often reflect Western values that differ from their own (see Figure 1). Interestingly, the majority of adolescents (96.6%) confirmed this view (see Figure 2).

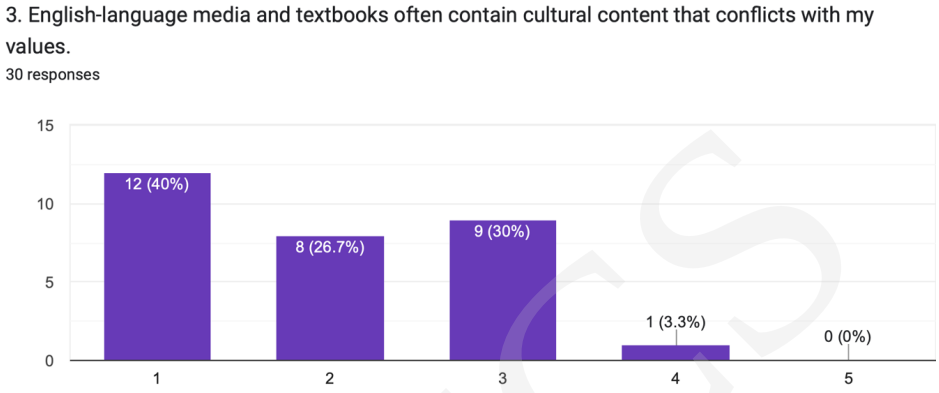

Figure 1. Parents' Concern About Western Content

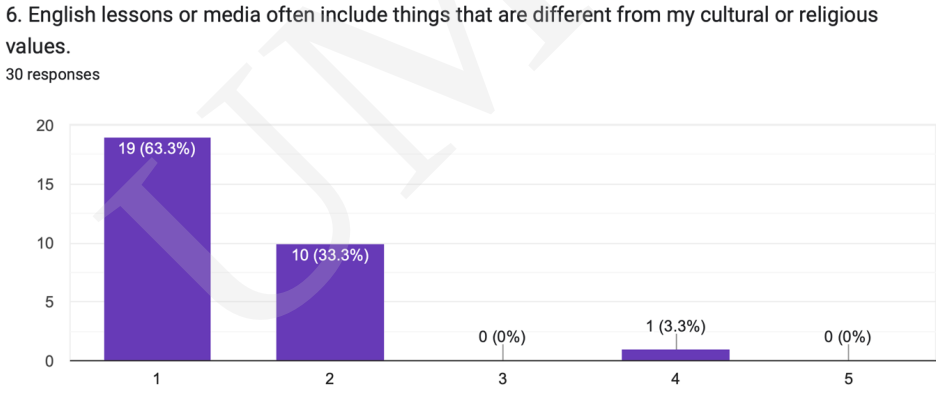

Figure 2: Adolescents' view of Western Content

In interviews, parents expanded on these concerns. Parent #2 noted, "English brings with it things that are not from our religion or culture. Things like Christmas, dating, or living alone and ideas of individual mentality (interpreted as individualistic values). These are shown as normal in English books, but we don't accept these things here. I don't want these to be normal for my son." Similarly, Parent #4 stated their discomfort when their adolescent mentioned Halloween at home, describing it as "funny but foreign and unnecessary." Parent #1 mentioned: "I want my child to learn English, not become Western." These qualitative insights inform the quantitative data, essentially showing that English is perceived not just as a language, but as a conduit through which cultural norms challenge Islamic values.

6.2. Influence of Parental Beliefs on Adolescents' EFL Motivation

Adolescents showed high motivation; 77% enjoy English, 96.6% see future benefit (see Figures 3–4). Most adolescents also reported that they are most motivated when English aligns with their culture (see Figure 5)

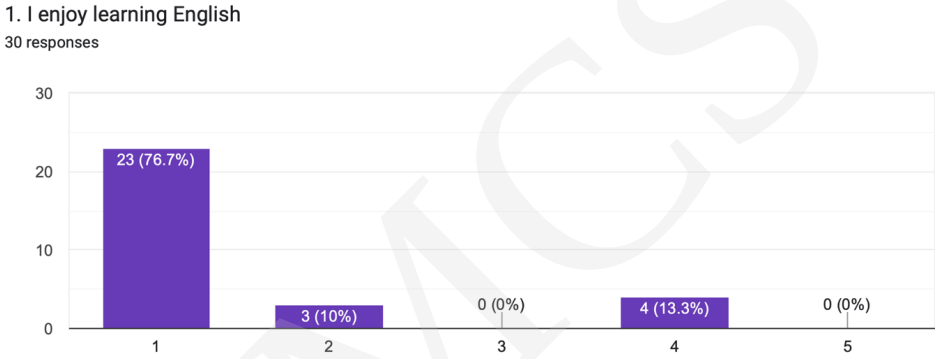

Figure 3. Adolescents' Motivation to Learn English

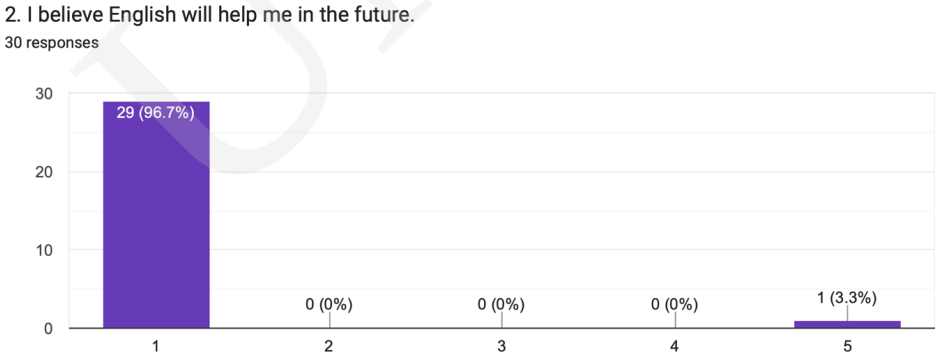

Figure 4. Adolescents' Perceived Importance of English for Their Future

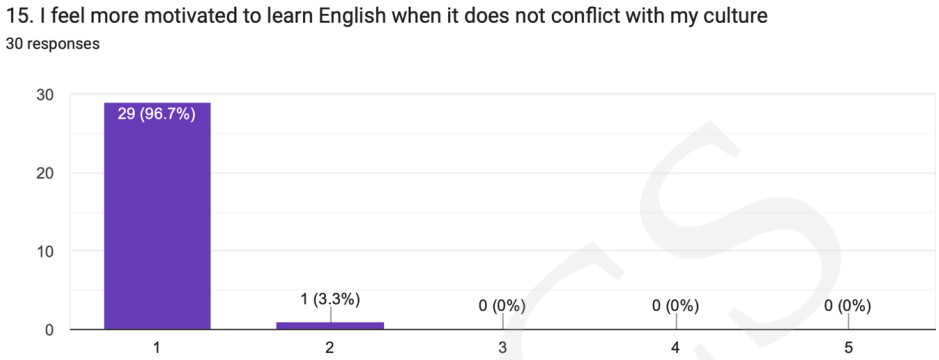

Figure 5: Effect of Cultural Compatibility on Motivation (adolescents)

These responses do not reveal how parental attitudes shape that motivation. Insights from interviews, however, reflect how adolescents' enthusiasm is often shaped, reinforced, or constrained by their parents' cultural concerns and guidance.

For instance, Parent #1 stated that "English is important for their future," but stressed that adolescents should "learn only what we don't mind in our culture." Adolescent #1 confirmed this: "I like learning English and my parents only stop me if they think what I'm learning is inappropriate." Here, motivation is high, yet it is conditioned by parental oversight. This shows that engagement with English depends on cultural acceptability.

A stronger form of restriction appeared in Parent #2, who said, "I told her not to read books that include dating or promote very different lifestyles." Adolescent #2 admitted, "I love English but sometimes I feel like I can't really enjoy English stuff because my parents say it's not for us. This kind of makes it less fun." In this case, parental protection dampened intrinsic motivation, thereby replacing enjoyment with caution.

Parent #5 viewed English and Arabic as "equally important," explaining that learning English "doesn't mean they have to consume the culture." Adolescent #5 reflected that "my parents are very accepting and we have a common trust… if it's not bad for me and my Arabic identity, I can watch or read anything." Here, trust and balance foster an autonomous and culturally secure motivation.

These examples show that adolescents' motivation to learn English is shaped through parental mediation rather than personal preference alone. When boundaries are strict, motivation narrows; when dialogue or trust prevails, it strengthens. Parental beliefs, therefore, influence not only how much adolescents are motivated but also how they engage with English, either cautiously within constraints or confidently. Across the five pairs, alignment varied from strict gatekeeping to negotiated autonomy, illustrating graded parent-adolescent dynamics.[2]

[2] A few adolescents showed quiet dissent (e.g., selective avoidance), indicating internal negotiation despite outward compliance.

6.3. Home Practices: Support and Regulation of English Exposure

Data from both surveys and interviews show a pattern of support for English learning accompanied by an active regulation of cultural exposure. Most parents (86.6%) reported feeling confident in monitoring the cultural content to which their adolescents are exposed (see Figure 6). This reflects a parental agency over what adolescents consume. This perception is supported by adolescents' responses, with 73.4% indicating that their parents discuss English-language content they watch or read (see Figure 7), indicating open family communication about potentially conflicting values.

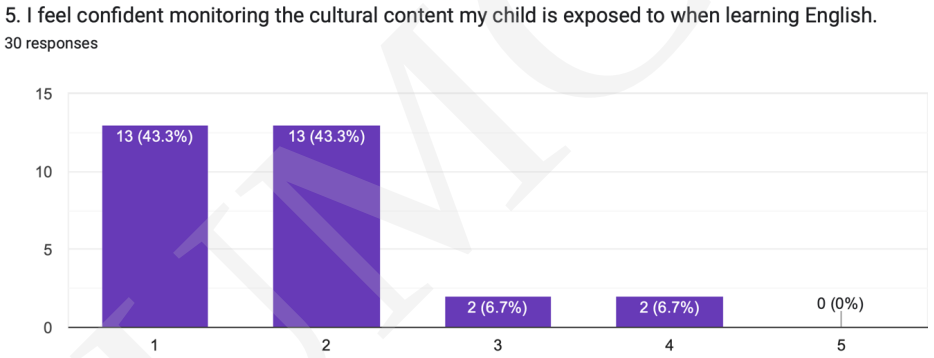

Figure 6: Parents' Confidence in Monitoring Cultural Content

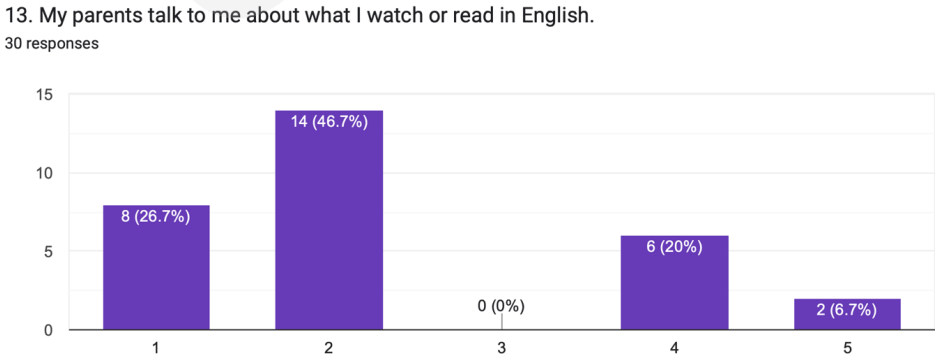

Figure 7: Parent-adolescent Discussions about English Media

Interviews indicate that the majority of parents are selective in the type of English content allowed at home, with an emphasis on balancing language learning with cultural preservation. Parent #1, for example, strongly supports English for practical reasons (e.g., university, travel), but expressed concern about Western values such as dating, individualism, and non-Islamic holidays, stating that children "need to learn

the language… but not the culture, religion, or values." This concern manifests as close supervision at home, as Adolescent #1 noted that their parents "want to know what I'm reading or watching," and would intervene "if there's something they think is wrong." Parent #2 echoed a similar sentiment, stating that "if they're about to adopt Western values, it's time to interfere." Despite these boundaries, encouragement toward English learning remains, especially for educational content. Adolescent #2 mentioned that their parents "always encouraged me to read books in English, so long as they're educational." Similarly, Parent #5 noted that "learning the language doesn't mean adopting the culture," and emphasized the role of parents to "guide them in the right direction." Adolescent #5's experience aligned with this approach: "My parents never asked me to stop watching anything as long as it doesn't hurt my values." Parent #4 was highly critical of Western influence regarding modesty and religion, albeit acknowledging the importance of English for global participation. Adolescent #4 stated that they "don't talk much" about content with their parents, but understand the boundaries. In contrast, Pair 5 demonstrated a strong balance, whereby Parent #5 expressed pride in both English and Arabic, stating that their children can learn English for communication while preserving their culture and religion. Adolescent #5 confirmed this sentiment, saying, "I will take from their culture what I like and what I don't like and what is against our traditions… I won't take."

These examples show that while English is valued for its practical benefits, its integration into home life is carefully managed. Parents not only encourage language learning but also act as cultural gatekeepers, establishing boundaries through dialogue. These findings highlight the balancing act of Arab parents in Qatar, whereby they support English language acquisition while protecting cultural and religious values. Understanding this balance is essential for creating more culturally responsive approaches to English language education in culturally conservative contexts like Qatar. Parents' monitoring confidence coexists with concern, reflecting vigilance, not the absence of risk. The following section offers a summary of the insights, implications for stakeholders, and recommendations for more culturally sensitive English language instruction.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examined how Arab parents in Qatar view English's cultural aspects and how those views influence adolescents' EFL learning, revealing a clear tension: parents support English's educational benefits yet remain cautious about Western cultural influences. Many monitor content and guide adolescents' use of English to protect cultural and religious values. Adolescents' responses reflected varying alignment with parents; some complied closely with family expectations, while others used English more freely outside the home. Several adolescents also associated English with academic confidence and access to wider knowledge, suggesting benefits alongside the

cautions parents emphasize. These dynamics imply that English learning is not merely academic but culturally negotiated.

Based on these findings, the researcher recommends adapting English materials to local culture and avoiding content likely to clash with local or religious norms; preparing instructors to navigate culturally sensitive topics; promoting resources that balance English proficiency with the preservation of Arabic language and identity; and strengthening school-family communication to align goals and address concerns. Future research should examine how parental influences shape learners' long-term language attitudes and identity development.

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