

Parents' beliefs in shaping family language planning: Narrative inquiry of Balti families living in Skardu

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Abstract - Although language planning, which is done at state level plays a pivotal role in deciding the fate of indigenous or heritage languages, family language planning, which is based on language beliefs, language practices, and language management within the home domain, has an equally crucial role to play in contributing towards heritage language maintenance or loss. Being a relatively new field of inquiry, this area needs to be investigated concerning the heritage language communities in Pakistan, which is home to almost 74 indigenous languages. Considering the relevance of FLP and the inclusion of 27 indigenous languages spoken in Pakistan in UNESCO's list of endangered languages, the current study aims to undertake a narrative inquiry of six Balti couples, three living in a joint family while three living in a nuclear family system in Skardu. The data collection instruments include the life stories of these six Balti couples, followed by a series of interviews with them, along with the observations based on their use of language(s) with their children and other family members in the home domain. Despite some similarities in the Balti couples' approach to and use of their mother tongue in the home domain, the findings of the study indicate significant differences in their FLP, which can be attributed to the differences in their family structure as well as other internal and external factors, like their language attitude, language ideology, subjective ethnolinguistic vitality, educational background, profession, the place of residence, etc. The findings of the study can empower the stakeholders, who may be directly or indirectly affected by the linguistic choices made in the home domain, and how these linguistic choices shape their beliefs about FLP. The study is an attempt to reinforce the importance of heritage language maintenance to arrest the loss of heritage languages and cultures.

Keywords: language planning, family language planning, language beliefs, language practices, language management, heritage language maintenance, language endangerment, language loss

1. Introduction

The projection of languages in any multilingual country is a true manifestation of not only the nature of diversity it has, but also how that diversity is treated through its language and education policy. Although language planning, which is done at state level plays a pivotal role



in deciding the fate of indigenous or heritage languages, family language planning, which is based on language *beliefs/ideologies* (How do people perceive language(s)), *language practices* (what they do with language(s)), and *language management* (the efforts made or the steps taken to maintain or develop language(s)), has an equally crucial role to play in contributing towards heritage language maintenance or loss. Language loss can either result in 'language shift' which refers to the reduction in the use of one language over the other (Karan, 2011) or 'language attrition' which refers to the gradual loss of proficiency in a language (Schmid, 2011), is a sign of language endangerment which can ultimately lead to language death – the eventual extinction of a language. This means that languages are at the mercy of their users, particularly their native speakers, and therefore ignoring family language planning can have serious repercussions on the lifespan of these languages. Family language planning involves explicit/overt and implicit/covert, conscious or subconscious language planning with reference to language and literacy practices within home domains and among different family members including children, their siblings, parents, grandparents and other members of the family (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009, 2018; King et al., 2008; Smith-Christmas, 2016, 2020; Spolsky, 2009, 2012)

Since being the intricate tapestry of human communication family as a unit serves as a foundational locus for the transmission and cultivation of language, family language planning delves into the intentional and unintentional processes through which families shape, adapt, and negotiate linguistic practices within their domestic spheres. The conscious or subconscious linguistic choices made by parents and other family members while interacting with children in the home domain not only reflect their own beliefs and language attitudes but also shape their children's linguistic beliefs, which in turn govern their language use at home. In addition to this, mother tongue literacy plays a pivotal role in making such decisions. Besides being instrumental in preserving linguistic and cultural diversity, a lack of mother tongue literacy leads to cultural erosion and identity loss (Robert, 2021). Various resources confirm the role of mother tongue education in the development of linguistic competence, helping children in cognition, academic success, and in learning additional languages (Eisenschlas et al., 2013; Faridy & Syaodih, 2016; Spronk, 2014). The multifaceted concept of family language planning (FLP) encapsulates both the explicit decisions and implicit ideologies that influence language use and acquisition within familial contexts. Being a multidisciplinary field, it would not be wrong to state that FLP is profoundly influenced and shaped by linguistic, historical, socio-political, cultural, and even religious factors, which result in the emergence of language ideologies leading to language practices and language management in the home domain (King & Fogle, 2013; Smith-Christmas, 2016; Spolsky, 2009, 2012).

Nevertheless, the significance of family language planning extends far beyond the confines of the household, as it plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' linguistic identities and contributing to broader sociolinguistic landscapes. The intentional decisions made by parents or guardians regarding language policies impact not only the immediate communicative dynamics within the family but also influence the linguistic development and proficiency of the younger generations. This field encompasses a spectrum of considerations, ranging from the explicit establishment of language policies to the subtle transmission of cultural and linguistic values. Visible aspects of family language planning may include decisions about bilingualism, language maintenance, or the explicit teaching of a particular language. Simultaneously, invisible dimensions delve into the implicit ideologies, attitudes, and cultural norms that subtly guide language practices within the familial context.

In this exploration of family language planning, we embark on a journey into the complexities of linguistic decision-making within households to unravel the interplay of cultural, social, and individual factors that contribute to the rich mosaic of languages within families. As we navigate this terrain, we gain insights into the profound impact of family language planning on individual identity, intergenerational transmission, and the broader linguistic diversity of societies.

Family language planning in Baltistan, Pakistan, holds significant importance within the socio-cultural and educational context of the region. Baltistan, situated in the northern part of Pakistan, is known for its unique linguistic and cultural diversity. Understanding the significance of family language planning in this region involves considering several key factors: preservation of indigenous languages, cultural heritage and identity, education and literacy, intergenerational transmission and communication, societal integration, language shift, and endangerment.

Although family has always been considered one of the most powerful domains with regard to the intergenerational transmission and maintenance of heritage languages, family language planning did not capture the attention of research scholars before the 1990s. Fishman (1991, 2000, 2001), who emphasized the need for a reversal of language shift in the case of immigrants and ethno-linguistic minority groups, was among those few scholars who realized the pivotal role families can play in maintaining their heritage language and culture. Despite being a relatively new field, there is ample research literature available on family language planning in different communities (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Gao & Zeng, 2021; Kang, 2013, 2015; King & Fogle, 2006; King & Logan-Terry, 2008; Kirsch, 2012; Óhlfearnáin, 2013; Palviainen, 2020; Schwartz & Verschik, 2013; Zhu & Li, 2016). However, it cannot be denied that the seminal work by King et al. (2008) led to a sudden wave of interest in family language planning research among sociolinguists, resulting in the exponential growth of research in this field. Their article focuses on designing an integrated framework by establishing a connection between family language policies and child language acquisition and corroborates the findings of some preliminary research on the crucial role family language planning plays not only in the success or failure to acquire heritage language on the part of children, but also in shaping children's beliefs about languages they are exposed to in the home domain.

Schwartz (2010) reviews studies on FLP spanning ten years from 1998 to 2008, providing a snapshot of the nature of research on FLP conducted more than a decade ago. Like Schwartz (2010), Lomeu-Gomes (2018) in his article provides a critique of the studies on FLP published between 2008 and 2017 by identifying the inadequacies in the research frameworks utilized for conducting these studies. Even the three-dimensional model proposed by Spolsky (2004), which is used by most researchers conducting research on language planning in general or family language planning in particular, has also been criticized for not being able to account for the multidimensionality of the concept of FLP. Instead of encouraging research scholars to adopt any of the available theoretical frameworks for studying FLP, Lomeu-Gomes (2018) proposes a decolonial approach to study multilingualism in the home domain for an in-depth understanding of family language planning. Nevertheless, despite the identification of the limitations of the available theoretical models, research scholars still utilize the theoretical framework proposed by Spolsky (2004) for its user-friendliness as well as its multidimensionality.

Family Language Policy (FLP) has evolved from a narrow focus on parental language management toward a broader understanding of the dynamic interactions among ideology, agency, identity, emotion, and sociopolitical context within multilingual families (Catedral & Djuraeva, 2018; Hatoss, 2024).

One of the major strengths of contemporary FLP research is its recognition that language practices are deeply embedded in parental ideologies and moral constructions of personhood rather than being merely linguistic decisions (Catedral & Djuraeva, 2018). However, this perspective may overemphasize ideological dimensions while paying less attention to structural constraints such as socioeconomic status and institutional pressures that influence family decisions (Catedral & Djuraeva, 2018).

Research on Chinese immigrant families demonstrates that children are not passive recipients of parental language policies but active participants who negotiate, resist, and reshape language practices within the family (Shen & Jiang, 2023). Nevertheless, the small-scale qualitative nature of such studies limits the generalizability of findings across diverse immigrant communities and linguistic contexts (Shen & Jiang, 2023).

The examination of conflicting linguistic identities among rural migrant families reveals how parents and children frequently hold divergent language aspirations due to differing social experiences and educational opportunities (Yang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2020). While the study effectively highlights identity tensions, it provides limited insight into how these conflicts evolve over longer periods of family development (Yang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2020).

The case study of Chinese families transitioning to Canada contributes valuable insights into how migration reshapes language ideologies and family language management strategies (Liu & Lin, 2018). However, reliance on a single-family case restricts the ability to understand broader patterns of adaptation among immigrant families (Liu & Lin, 2018).

The application of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and social field offers a sophisticated theoretical framework for understanding language policymaking among internal migrant families in China (Wei et al., 2021). Yet the emphasis on sociological theory occasionally overshadows the everyday linguistic practices through which family members negotiate language choices (Wei et al., 2021).

Studies examining transnational families reveal that success and failure in heritage language maintenance are often subjective and emotionally interpreted rather than objectively measurable outcomes (Mirvahedi & Hosseini, 2023). This perspective enriches FLP scholarship by emphasizing personal narratives, although the findings remain difficult to operationalize for comparative research purposes (Mirvahedi & Hosseini, 2023).

Research on urban Chinese families highlights the influence of broader sociopolitical structures on family language planning, particularly the prestige associated with dominant languages and educational mobility (Zheng & Mei, 2020). However, the emphasis on macro-level forces sometimes underrepresents the agency exercised by individual family members (Zheng & Mei, 2020).

The investigation of parents whose children attend international schools demonstrates how parental beliefs strongly shape language learning trajectories and educational investments (Wan & Gao, 2021). Nevertheless, the study primarily reflects the experiences of relatively privileged families and may not capture the realities of lower-income households (Wan & Gao, 2021).

The concept of parental agency from a language-as-resource perspective provides a valuable lens for understanding how families strategically mobilize linguistic resources for social and economic advancement (Peng & Wan, 2023). Despite its strengths, this approach may underestimate the emotional and identity-related dimensions of language maintenance and shift (Peng & Wan, 2023).

Recent scholarship has expanded FLP beyond language management by incorporating parental wellbeing and emotional experiences into theoretical models (Hatoss, 2024). This development represents an important advancement because it acknowledges that language decisions often affect family relationships, stress levels, and emotional health (Hatoss, 2024).

The proposal to blur the traditional boundaries between home and school environments challenges the conventional assumption that family language policy operates exclusively within domestic spaces (Maseko, 2024). However, further empirical evidence is required to demonstrate how such boundary crossings function across diverse educational systems and cultural contexts (Maseko, 2024).

Longitudinal investigations have shown that family language policies are not static but continuously evolve in response to changing family circumstances, educational demands, and social environments (Hollebeke, 2023). This finding challenges earlier FLP models that implicitly assumed stability and consistency in parental language management (Hollebeke, 2023).

Research exploring Chinese parents' beliefs about Chinese and English language learning illustrates the coexistence of heritage language preservation and global language aspirations within multilingual families (Liu et al., 2024). Nonetheless, the focus on parental

perspectives leaves children's interpretations and experiences comparatively underexplored (Liu et al., 2024).

Studies of mixed-language families reveal the complexity of parental discourses surrounding bilingualism, identity, and language transmission in increasingly diverse family structures (Kostoulas & Motsiou, 2020). However, reliance on online parental discussions may not accurately reflect actual language practices occurring within households (Kostoulas & Motsiou, 2020).

Overall, contemporary FLP research demonstrates a clear shift from viewing language policy as a top-down parental endeavor toward understanding it as a dynamic, negotiated, and emotionally charged process involving multiple family members and social actors (Shen & Jiang, 2023; Hollebeke, 2023; Hatoss, 2024). Despite significant theoretical and methodological advances, the field would benefit from more longitudinal, comparative, and mixed-method studies capable of capturing the complex interactions among language ideology, agency, identity, emotion, and sociopolitical structures across different cultural contexts (Hollebeke, 2023; Hatoss, 2024; Maseko, 2024).

Research on family language policy (FLP) has increasingly emphasized the dynamic relationship between language ideologies, parental agency, and heritage language maintenance in multilingual and transnational families. Existing studies consistently demonstrate that parents' beliefs about language as a cultural, economic, and identity resource significantly shape language practices and management strategies within families. Nevertheless, much of this research remains concentrated on specific migrant communities, limiting the transferability of findings across diverse sociolinguistic contexts and reducing opportunities for broader theoretical generalization (Tamleh et al., 2024; Tang & Zheng, 2023; Park & Jee, 2024).

Studies on intergenerational language transmission reveal that family language policies are not static but evolve in response to migration experiences, children's preferences, and changing family circumstances. Research involving Turkish, Chinese, and transnational families illustrates the tensions between parents' aspirations for heritage language maintenance and practical challenges encountered in multilingual environments. However, these studies often privilege parental perspectives while paying insufficient attention to children's agency and the bidirectional nature of language socialization processes (Et-Bozkurt & Yağmur, 2022; Bezcioglu-Goktolga & Yağmur, 2022; Wang & Hamid, 2022; Mirvahedi & Hosseini, 2023).

Recent scholarship has highlighted the role of pragmatic decision-making, translanguaging practices, and overt and covert planning strategies in sustaining bilingualism and multilingualism. These studies demonstrate that successful heritage language maintenance frequently depends on flexible and adaptive approaches rather than rigid language rules. Nonetheless, there remains a tendency to conceptualize language maintenance primarily within the family sphere, with insufficient consideration of external influences such as schools, digital media, peer networks, and broader societal language ideologies (Bilgory-Fazakas & Armon-Lotem, 2025; Wilson, 2020; Rose et al., 2024; Kostoulas & Motsiou, 2020).

Several studies have also explored parental agency and language attitudes in both migrant and non-migrant contexts, revealing that family language policies are shaped by socioeconomic conditions, educational aspirations, and identity negotiations. Research on bilingual parenting in monolingual environments and language attitudes in local family settings provides valuable insights into the diversity of FLP practices. However, methodological reliance on interviews and small-scale case studies continues to constrain comparative and longitudinal understanding of how language policies change over time and across generations (Peng & Wan, 2023; Li et al., 2022; Nupus & Riandi, 2021).

Emerging longitudinal and multigenerational studies indicate that family language policies are inherently fluid, requiring continuous adaptation to changing linguistic and social realities. Research increasingly acknowledges the importance of integrating youth perspectives and examining policy stability over time. Future investigations should therefore adopt

longitudinal, mixed-methods, and cross-cultural approaches that incorporate multiple family members' voices and explore the interaction between family practices and broader social institutions in shaping heritage language maintenance and multilingual identities (Hollebeke, 2023; Bloch, 2024; Yu et al., 2026).

Recent studies highlight the interconnected roles of culture, family, technology, and social context in language development and learning. Research has examined feminist perspectives in Balti folklore, cultural influences on higher education, and cross-linguistic differences in reduplication (Ahmed et al., 2025; Surata et al., 2025; Santuso & Sukarno, 2025). Other studies show that screen exposure, family language policies, and differences between home and school languages can shape children's language development and learning, particularly in multilingual contexts (Le et al., 2025; Abilkassymova et al., 2025; Kalantari & Sahrai, 2026). Family demographic factors have likewise been associated with language development among preschool children (Ghelichi et al., 2023). Beyond language education, research on health behavior and corporate innovation demonstrates the broader relevance of behavioral, social, and organizational factors in shaping individual and institutional outcomes (Xie & Luo, 2024; Wu et al., 2025).

If we have a closer look at the existing body of research on FLP, irrespective of what theoretical framework was employed, it is clear that earlier studies on FLP that investigated parents' linguistic choices in the home domain primarily focused on external factors influencing parents' family language planning. It was in the early 2000s, however, that some researchers shifted the focus from external to internal factors by embarking on the psychological and emotional aspects related to the linguistic choices parents make while interacting with their children in the home domain (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004; Okita, 2002; Tannenbaum, 2005; Wong-Fillmore, 2000). One such study that requires discussion is by Okita (2002), who investigated the linguistic choices made by Japanese women while talking to their children in the home domain. The study focused on those Japanese women who were married to English men and had settled in the UK. The study aimed to explore these immigrant mothers' psychological journey from their mother tongue to the other tongue by conducting ethnographic interviews. The findings of the study revealed that the Japanese women's resistance against the use of the Japanese language while talking to their children was the result of their negative experience with their families in Japan. Their preference for using English with their children in the home domain was not just because of their living in the UK, where English is the dominant language, but also because of their complex relationship with their Japanese parents and other family members in Japan.

Using an ecological approach to family language planning research, Shen, et al. (2020) conducted a study to explore the use of Miao language among the Miao families living in Miao County in Guizhou Province, Southwest China. Being a mixed methods research, the data for the study were collected by administering an online survey on 900 Miao families followed by three rounds of semi-structured interviews of 20 parents (nine from Kindergartens and eleven from primary schools) to explore the relationship among their language ideologies, language practices, and language management efforts within their families. The findings of the study revealed an obvious decline in the use of Miao language in the second generation, as the parents informed that the children despite being able to understand Miao are unable to speak it fluently because they are required to speak Putonghua in school and are therefore encouraged to speak the same language at home. The results of this study indicate a strong role that the national language and education policy of a country can play in shaping parents' beliefs and practices about their family language planning.

There are quite a few studies on FLP that focus on family language policy of the Chinese native speakers living in China and those living in other countries as immigrants (Curd-Christian, 2009; Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018; Hu, 2020; Hu, et al., 2014). In fact, research on family language planning with reference to immigrants has drawn the attention of many research scholars (Canagarajah, 2008; Gu & Han, 2020; Karim & Haq, 2013; Schwartz, 2008; Zhu

& Li, 2016). Not only have the researchers investigated the complex dynamics of family language planning in case of Chinese immigrants, but also other immigrants settled in different countries (Curd-Christiansen & La Morgia, 2018; Hua & Wei, 2016; Kang, 2013; Kirsch & Gogonas, 2018; Mills, 2005; Park & Sarkar, 2007).

In a relatively recent study, Cui and Zheng (2021) explored the Korean-Chinese migrant families' decisions regarding family language planning in Shanghai, China. A questionnaire was administered to 30 Korean-Chinese bilingual families living in Shanghai, while six families were selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews along with home visits for observation of their language use in the home domain. The findings of the study revealed parents' preference for Chinese and English over Korean, resulting in a Korean language shift even in the home domain, which is considered to be the last refuge for language maintenance and preservation. For the bilingual parents who were interviewed, ethnic identity is not tied to language; it is in one's blood. Since it is believed to be in one's blood, whether one continues to speak Korean or abandons it, Korean identity will remain intact. The study not only provides insights into parents' beliefs about ethnic identity, but also how their beliefs shape their family language policy in the home domain.

Unlike the studies on FLP that mostly fall under qualitative paradigm or utilize mixed methods research, Hollebeke et al. (2022) employed quantitative paradigm using correlational research design by applying Spolsky's tripartite framework to not only study the relevance of the three components independently, but also to find out the relationship among language beliefs, language practices, and language management in case of multilingual families in the Flemish community in Belgium. Being a quantitative correlational study, the data were collected from 776 multilingual families through a large-scale survey that required parents having children under the age of three years to respond to a questionnaire. The data were analyzed using confirmatory analysis. The results of the study revealed a significant correlation between beliefs and practices, as well as between practices and management. However, there was no significant correlation found between beliefs and management. The study also revealed that despite being interconnected, the three components can be described independently.

Based on most of the studies on FLP reviewed in this section, it can be observed that parents were the key participants, and therefore their language beliefs and ideologies were seen playing a crucial role in the construction of their family language policy. A major gap found in such studies is the lack of attention to children's contribution as active agents in the construction, or, to be more precise, co-construction of their family language policy. In order to fill in this gap, Smith-Christmas (2021) has proposed a theoretical model for research on FLP that focuses on children's linguistic choices by taking into consideration four aspects that include "compliance regimes; linguistic norms; linguistic competence and generational positioning" (p. 3). This theoretical model acts as a bridge between childhood studies and FLP.

Despite the existence of a substantial body of research on FLP conducted from different dimensions across the world (Andritsou & Chatzidimou, 2022; Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020; Gyogi, 2015; Hashimoto & Lee, 2011, Said & Zhu, 2019; Schwartz & Verschik, 2013; Tannenbaum, 2005), the field is underexplored in Pakistan. Although there is significant research literature available on Pakistan's language and education policy (Ali, 2018; Manan et al., 2015; Mansoor, 2004; Rahman, 2006; Shahzad et al., 2018), except a small-scale case study by Ismail (2021) on two native Urdu speaking families concerning the parents' and children's perceptions regarding mother tongue transmission, research on family language planning is almost non-existent in Pakistan. The current study, therefore, is undertaken to fill in the existing gap in this field of inquiry by focusing on the family language planning of parents whose mother tongue is Balti, an indigenous language spoken in the Baltistan region of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.

After reviewing the exiting body of research literature on family language planning, particularly, its importance in intergenerational transmission of heritage language(s) and

maintenance through providing rich linguistic diet in the form of indigenous language(s) in the home domain, the current study has been conducted with the specific aim to explore how Balti families living in Skardu construct and project their Balti identity through family language planning at home.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How do the Balti parents' language beliefs shape their family language planning in the home domain? (2) Do these parents' language beliefs synchronize with their language practices and language management? (3) Are the linguistic choices made in the home domain the result of conscious decision-making reflecting a clear family language policy?

The study, being the first of its kind in Pakistan, can pave the way for local research scholars to explore this area concerning the family language planning of other ethno-linguistic communities as well living in the country.

2. Method

2.1 Research Paradigm and Design

The current study falls under qualitative paradigm as it is emic in nature and aims to provide an in-depth account of the linguistic choices made by Balti families living in Skardu. Since the study aims at exploring family language planning from a multitude of perspectives including external and internal factors governing parents' and their children's linguistic choices in the home domain, it utilizes the three dimensional language policy framework proposed by Spolsky (2004; 2009; 2021), which is based on three components: *language beliefs/ideologies*, *language practices*, and *language management*. Although there are other theoretical models as well that are available for studying FLP, Spolsky's tripartite model fits the aims and research questions of this study. Since the tripartite model proposed by Spolsky addresses the issues based on language beliefs, language practices, and language management included in the research questions, it is an effective model for answering the research questions posed in the study.

Besides utilizing Spolsky's (2004) three-dimensional language policy framework, the study employs narrative inquiry as its research design in order to further strengthen the methodological framework. Webster and Mertova (2007) consider narrative inquiry "an event-driven tool of research" (p. 72). They propose an analysis of narratives through a critical events approach, which requires foregrounding critical events contained in stories of experience. According to Measor (1985), there are three types of critical events: *extrinsic*, *intrinsic*, and *personal*. 'Extrinsic' critical events can be produced by historical and political events, 'intrinsic' critical events occur within the natural progression of a career, while 'personal' critical events can be family events, illness, etc.

The rationale for choosing narrative inquiry for this study is that it can provide an emic picture by engaging the participants in sharing their life stories and experiences, which they consider to have played a decisive role in shaping their language ideology, language practice, and language management in their family domain.

Justification for selecting Balti families, including selection of the selected sampling techniques, and sample size

As mentioned earlier the study focuses on Balti parents' FLP, it is pertinent to justify the selection of Balti parents as the research participants. The primary reason for choosing Balti parents was that Balti is a major language that is widely spoken in Skardu, Khaplu, Shigar, and Kharmang, in the Baltistan region of GB. Another reason for choosing Balti parents was that it is the only language from the Sino-Tibetan language family that is spoken in Pakistan. However, despite being the second widely spoken language after Shina in GB, with an estimated population of 2,70,000 speakers, Balti is included in UNESCO's list of endangered languages (Rahman, 2006). All these reasons were strong enough to conduct this study on Balti parents' FLP.

As far as the selection of Balti parents for this study is concerned, purposive sampling was mainly employed for the selection of the six Balti couples. Only those Balti parents were

selected for this study who were born in Skardu and have lived in Skardu either since their birth or for more than a decade, are educated, and have school-going children. Besides purposive sampling, we also utilized stratified sampling technique by focusing on three couples living in a nuclear family in Skardu, while three living in a joint family, in order to identify the differences, if any, in their family language planning. The rationale for confining the study to a small sample size based on six Balti couples was to engage in a detailed discussion with the participants to provide a thick description of their narratives based on their life stories, including the critical events they had passed through. Another rationale for selecting a small sample size was that the study does not aim to generalize the findings.

2.2 Profile of the participants

A detailed profile of the participants carrying basic information about each is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Categories	Participants	Mother Tongue	Age	Qualification	Profession	Number of children	Age and gender of each child	Total number of family members living together
1	Mr. Kaachu	Balti	44 years	M.Phil. in English Linguistics (pursuing Ph.D. in English, linguistics)	Teaching	2	An 11-year-old boy and a 2-year-old girl	04
2	Mrs. Kaachu	Balti	40 years	B.A/ B.Ed.	Teaching			
3	Mr. Phacho	Balti	35 years	MS in Management Sciences	Teaching & Business	3	An 8-year-old girl, a 6-year-old girl, and a 4-year-old girl.	07
4	Mrs. Phacho	Balti	34 years	B.A	Housewife			
5	Mr. Sadpara	Balti	36 years	MS English (Literature)	Teaching	2	A 7-year-old girl and a 3-year-old boy	11
6	Mrs. Sadpara	Balti	30 years	B.Ed& M.A	Teaching			
7	Mr.Wazir	Balti	39 years	Intermediate	Business	2	A 13-year-old boy and a 10-year-old boy.	10
8	Mrs.Wazir	Balti	36 years	BS (Education)	Housewife			
9	Mr.Hussain	Balti	45 years	B.Com	An employee in a private insurance company	3	One daughter (14 years old), two	05

Categories	Participants	Mother Tongue	Age	Qualification	Profession	Number of children	Age and gender of each child	Total number of family members living together
10	Mrs.Hussain	Balti	39 years	M.A (Education)	Runs a salon	3	sons (11 and 6 years old)	05
11	Mr.Kazmi	Balti	42 years	B.A	Businessman		Two sons (16 and 09 years old) and one daughter (13 years old)	
12	Mrs. Kazmi	Balti	34 years	B.A	Housewife			

Note: Data collected by the authors during interviews from September 7th, 2023 to January 5th, 2024.

2.3 Data-collection tools

Two data-collection instruments were employed to get insights into parents' language beliefs, practices, and management. One was based on a series of informal semi-structured interviews with the participants (six Balti couples) in order to get the insiders' views with a specific focus on their stories of experience, while the other was based on observing the parents' use of language(s) with their children on different occasions in the home domain. A series of observations was made along with field notes to cross-check the validity of information the couples provided during informal interactions with the researchers. Although the children of these couples were observed during their interaction with their parents in the home domain, they were not interviewed because most of them were below the age of 10 years. Besides this, the focus of our study was exclusively on exploring parents' beliefs regarding family language planning.

In order to make the participants feel at ease and to elicit detailed responses, the interviews were conducted in an informal setting, and the participants were given the freedom to respond in English, Urdu, or Balti based on their ease of communication. Those interviewees who were comfortable being audio-recorded during the interviews, their interviewees were audio-recorded, while those who were reluctant to be audio-recorded were not forced to be recorded. So, we relied on taking field notes in their case. The interviews being semi-structured in nature allowed for an in-depth discussion as there were quite a few questions that were generated on the spot based on the responses of the participants, ultimately leading to the thick description of the data. Since each couple was engaged in a series of interactions, we managed to elicit rich data based on their life stories, including critical events, to incorporate the element of narrative inquiry.

2.4 Ethical considerations

Keeping the research ethics in mind, a formal consent was taken from all the participants, and to keep their identity confidential, pseudonyms have been used in the table carrying their profile. The same pseudonyms are employed in the data analysis section. It is pertinent to mention here that all the Balti parents who participated in this study are multilingual speakers as they can speak Balti, Urdu, and English, while some of them also reported to have a certain degree of proficiency in Shina and other local languages.

2.5 Data Analysis



Thematic analysis is performed on the data comprising in-depth semi-structured interviews of six Balti parents who shared their life stories in a series of narratives spanning over a period of four months. The data were cross-checked using triangulation through observation of their use of language(s) with their family members in the home domain. As mentioned in the section on methodology, Spolsky's (2004) three dimensional language policy framework based on language beliefs/ideology, language practice and language management was utilized along with a focus on analyzing the participants' narratives through 'a critical events approach' proposed by Webster and Mertova (2007). The chosen framework along with the 'critical events' approach helped discover the following factors and sub-factors that shape the couples' language beliefs, language practices and language management constituting their FLP, providing answers to the three research questions posed in the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Influence of external factors on parents' language beliefs, practices, and language management on their FLP

Beliefs play a crucial role in shaping our language ideology, but they are not pre-programmed in our minds. In fact, they are formed as we grow, interact with people in our surroundings, and participate in different social networks. In other words, our beliefs are shaped by our universe of discourse, which depends on our exposure to the world and a series of interactions we have with people in our society. Both internal and external factors contribute to shaping and reshaping our beliefs, which are ultimately manifested through our language attitudes (a socio-psychological construct manifested through our favourable or unfavourable response towards different languages), resulting in both construction and deconstruction of language ideologies.

As far as external factors influencing parents' specific language beliefs are concerned, these include their *educational background, profession, the impact of the city or town they live in, and the prestige attached to their mother tongue and other tongues used in the society.*

The educational background of parents can be considered one of the strongest elements that can influence their beliefs about their mother tongue and other languages, which affect the use of these languages in the home domain. The responses of the Balti couples who were interviewed in this narrative inquiry support this claim. For instance, one of the male participants, Mr. Kaachu who has an MS degree in English (Linguistics) and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in the same field strongly advocates the use of his mother tongue, Balti, with children in the home domain, as he is aware of the importance of transmitting the heritage language to children, which he considers essential for their ethnolinguistic and cultural identity. However, this was not the case with every participant in this study. For instance, Mr. Phacho, who has an MS degree in Management Sciences, has a different approach towards languages, as he gives more importance to English in contrast to his mother tongue, Balti. He believes that parents should use English instead of their mother tongue while interacting with their children even in the home domain, because it is an international language and is, therefore, necessary for children to learn it.

Like Mr. Phacho, Mr. Hussain, who holds a B.Com degree, also considers it essential for parents to introduce children to those languages that are dominant in society. He justifies the decision to introduce Urdu and English along with Balti on the part of parents, as he and his wife have done the same. Both Mr. Phacho's and Mr. Hussain's responses seem to be a reflection of their academic background, as their language beliefs manifest a strong tendency towards language commodification. Besides these two participants' responses, another participant, Mr. Wazir, who is not highly qualified and has only an intermediate certificate, strongly favoured Urdu for interacting with children at home. He is of the view that Urdu is the national language, and children should be introduced to Urdu in the home domain. Unlike Mr. Phacho and Mr. Hussain, Mr. Wazir does not talk about the need to provide exposure of English to his children

at home, as he himself cannot communicate in English. The contrasting responses of these Balti parents can be easily attributed to their educational background.

3.1.2 Parents' profession

Besides educational background, the profession of parents also has an impact on their linguistic choices in the home domain. The working couples in this study were found to have introduced their children to Urdu and English along with Balti at home, as they do not want their children to feel excluded in the education and public domains. Mr. and Mrs. Hussain, who live in a nuclear family, have a different approach from other couples with regard to language use in the home domain. They consider it important to provide exposure to Urdu and English as compared to Balti to their children at home and do not disapprove of those parents who are reluctant to transmit Balti to their children. Unlike other female participants in this narrative inquiry, Mrs. Hussain, who lived in Karachi for several years before moving to Skardu with her husband, where she works in a salon, prefers to speak Urdu with her children at home.

The number of years she spent in Karachi before getting married and moving to Skardu seems to have marked a critical event in her life, as it shaped her language beliefs and practices. Being a working woman with a rich exposure to Urdu in Karachi, her language practice and language management project her pragmatic approach. Her profession has had a significant influence on her decision regarding family language planning. Like his wife, Mr. Hussain also has the same pragmatic approach, which aligns with his profession as a sales manager in an insurance company. Mr. Hussain does not look at languages as mere identity markers, but also views them as commodities that can yield material benefits. This is the reason that he claimed to have introduced both English and Urdu simultaneously to his children before introducing them to the Balti language at home. For Mr. Hussain, language is not the sole identity marker, and therefore, even if one is unable to speak one's native language, it does not obliterate one's identity.

According to Mr. Hussain, *"ham sirf zubaan ki vajha se nahi~ pe'hchaane jaate. log hame~ hamaare che'hre se, rangat se, aur xad-o-xaal se pe'hchaante he'~"*. [We are not identified only based on our language. People recognize us through our face, our complexion, and our features]. Mr. Hussain's words sum up his entire approach to heritage language, and this approach has a strong impact on the linguistic choices he and his wife make while interacting with their children at home.

However, unlike Mr. & Mrs. Hussain, Mr. & Mrs. Kazmi's stance with reference to the linguistic choices that should be made in the home domain is different. They disapprove of parents who are reluctant to transmit their mother tongue to their children and blame the media for inculcating a negative attitude towards indigenous languages through linguistic stereotyping. Despite being a businessman who runs a pharmaceutical company, Mr. Kazmi's approach to languages is different from Mr. Hussain's. Not only does Mr. Kazmi's approach reflect his language ideology based on language loyalty, but it also synchronizes with his language practices and language management, as he claims to interact with his children only in Balti at home. His use of only Balti with his children in the home domain is the result of his conscious decision to raise a strong sense of ethnolinguistic identity in them, which he believes is possible only by providing his children with rich exposure to Balti in the home domain. He feels such a strong affiliation with his mother tongue that even when his children try to speak in Urdu, he responds in Balti, which was witnessed on multiple occasions during the visits to his home for data collection.

Like Mr. & Mrs. Kazmi, Mr. & Mrs. Kaachu, who live in a nuclear family, also consider it essential for parents to transmit their heritage language to their children as they see a strong connection between language and identity. Being in the profession of teaching, the couple is very well aware of the importance of one's mother tongue. Nevertheless, they are not oblivious of the need for linguistically equipping their children with Urdu and English along with Balti, which they consider essential for identity construction.

3.1.3 Influence of the city/town where people live



Yet another external factor that influences linguistic beliefs with regard to the use of mother tongue and other tongues in the home domain is the influence of the city/town one lives in. Except for one couple, Mr. and Mrs. Wazir, who did not consider this factor to play any crucial role in shaping one's language beliefs and linguistic choices, others unanimously agreed upon the city's influence in shaping their language beliefs. For instance, when Mr. and Mrs. Kazmi, who live in a nuclear family, were asked to share their opinion regarding parents' linguistic choices in the home domain, they were of the view that parents should choose that language for interacting with their children which is common in society, irrespective of whether it is their native language or any other language. When asked about their reason for using Balti with their children at home, they claimed to use Balti not just because it is their mother tongue but also because it is spoken by a vast majority of people in Skardu in a variety of public domains. Other Balti couples who participated in this study were of the view that since Urdu has become dominant and has begun to be used in different public places, including service encounters in Skardu, parents should also start interacting with their children in Urdu along with Balti language at home. Nevertheless, some of them also indirectly expressed the desire and the need to interact in English with their children at home in order to prepare them for better future prospects.

3.1.4 Prestige attached to one's mother tongue and the other tongue(s)

Other than the influence of the city, the prestige of a language also plays a decisive role in shaping parents' beliefs about language use. The greater the socio-economic prestige of a language, the higher its utilitarian value, and the higher the utilitarian value, the higher is the degree of instrumental motivation for learning that language. A language enjoys prestige when it is given constitutional support, as a result of which it gains access to the domains of power, like education. However, none of the indigenous languages spoken in Pakistan, except Urdu at the state level and Sindhi at the provincial level, enjoys prestige. Both Urdu, being the national official language NOL, and English, being the co-official language, are used as the media of instruction for education, while Sindhi, which is taught as a compulsory language in Sindh, is also used as the medium of instruction in public sector schools and colleges in interior Sindh.

Since people are motivated to learn and use a language that enjoys prestige, there are stronger chances for such a language to ultimately find a place in the home domain as well, irrespective of whether it is one's heritage language or not. This trend can be witnessed in the case of the FLP of many indigenous language speakers, where parents either consciously minimize the use of their mother tongue while interacting with their children or completely abandon the idea of transmitting their heritage language to their children, if it lacks prestige. Although all six Balti couples in this study favour intergenerational transmission of mother tongue and have transmitted Balti to their children, three couples living in a nuclear family have also started using Urdu along with Balti in the home domain. Out of these three couples, one couple, Mr. and Mrs. Kaachu, being in the profession of teaching, also claimed to use English along with Urdu and Balti while interacting with their children at home.

As far as the FLP decisions of Balti couples living in joint families are concerned, they use only Balti with their children at home, not because they are not familiar with the importance of other languages but because the other family members, especially their children's grandparents, feel more at ease while interacting with them in Balti. It would not be wrong to state that their use of Balti with their children in the home domain is circumstantial rather than elective.

3.1.5 Influence of internal/intra-family factors on parents' beliefs, practices, and language management in shaping their FLP

Since external factors alone are not sufficient in shaping people's beliefs and use of language(s) at home, it is also essential to examine internal factors, which play an equally pivotal role in the construction of specific family language policies. Some of the internal factors that emerged on the basis of the data analysis include the *structure of the family itself*, the *subjective ethnolinguistic vitality*

of the native speakers, parents' and children's attitudes towards their mother tongue, and the impact of their language attitude on their linguistic choices.

One of the strongest internal factors affecting one's linguistic choices at home is the structure of the family one is living in. Living in a nuclear or a joint family influences one's family language planning, which is evident from the findings of the available research on FLP in different settings (Fishman, 1991, 2001; Harris, 1995; King et al., 2008; Li, 2020; Spolsky, 2007, 2012; Wong-Fillmore, 2000). The data analysis based on the narrative inquiry of the six Balti couples under investigation corroborates these findings, reinforcing the point that there are greater chances of heritage language use and its maintenance in joint families in contrast to nuclear families, where there is hardly any internal pressure to use and maintain one's mother tongue. All three Balti couples living in joint families admitted that they use Balti more frequently with their children at home because all the other family members, especially their children's grandparents, are habitual of using only Balti in the home domain. One of the couples, Mr. and Mrs. Sadpara, who live in a joint family comprising eleven members, find themselves confused regarding their linguistic choices at home. Both, being teachers, wish to interact with their children in English at home in order to make them fluent in the language, because, like many other parents, they believe that mastery of English will help their children in their academic and professional journey. Nevertheless, they have introduced their children to Balti at home because of the other family members who feel more at ease while communicating in Balti. Besides this, the couple is also concerned about their children's ethnolinguistic identity, which they believe to be strongly tied to their mother tongue.

Another couple, Mr. and Mrs. Wazir, living in a joint family comprising ten members, expressed the same opinion regarding the use of their mother tongue, Balti, with their children in the home domain. Mr. Wazir claimed that his father who is 75 years old and lives with him feels more comfortable interacting with the family members in Balti, although he and his wife would prefer to interact with their children in Urdu at home, as it is the national language of the country and is used as a *lingua franca*. Like this couple, Mr. and Mrs. Phacho, who also live in a joint family, use Balti with their children at home as the children's grandparents strongly advocate the use of mother tongue in the home domain for preservation of their Balti identity. Nevertheless, this couple has also managed to make space for Urdu and English at home, keeping in mind the utilitarian value of both these languages in Pakistan. Their children, fluent in Balti and Urdu, with limited proficiency in English, primarily use Balti with the grandparents, while Urdu and a little English with their parents and siblings, reflecting a conscious effort by the family to encourage the use of their mother tongue along with Urdu and English.

It is obvious from the responses of these participants that the need to use one's mother tongue with the older family members in joint families, along with the desire to preserve one's ethnolinguistic identity, can not only lead to language maintenance, but also result in the transmission of mother tongue to the next generation. In other words, the urge to understand and be understood by one's family members speaking the heritage language as well as the desire for the preservation of one's linguistic identity, can inculcate in parents the need for intergenerational transmission of their heritage language.

In contrast to the three Balti couples living in joint families, the Balti couples living in a nuclear family had different reasons for using Balti at home. Mr. and Mrs. Kaachu, for instance, claimed to use Balti more frequently with their children at home, not because of any family pressure but because they consider their mother tongue to be an important identity marker. This couple's belief about the relationship of one's heritage language with one's identity is in sharp contrast to the beliefs of the Korean Chinese bilingual parents living in China, who Cui and Zheng (2021) interviewed for their study. Unlike the Balti parents who believe that there is a strong relationship between ethnic identity and language, the Korean parents living in China believe that one's ethnic identity is in one's blood and is not tied to one's language. This difference in belief is reflected in their FLP.

It is important to mention here that Mr. and Mrs. Kaachu also claimed to have introduced their children to English along with Balti at home, as they do not want their children to suffer from global alienation. They believe in the simultaneous acquisition of mother tongue and other tongue(s). While sharing his reasons for introducing his children to English at home, Mr. Kaachu stated: *"It's the language of academia, it's the language of media, it's the language of technology."* Mr. and Mrs. Kaachu's decision to introduce English along with Balti can be traced back to one of the intrinsic critical events in Mr. Kaachu's life, when, after completing his SSC from Skardu, he moved to Karachi for further studies and realized the importance of attaining proficiency in English for better socio-economic prospects. Nevertheless, because of financial constraints, he could not continue his stay in Karachi for higher education. After returning to Skardu, he opened an English language institute, which proved to be another critical event in his life, as it ignited in him the desire to pursue a master's degree in English (Linguistics). To fulfill his desire, he took admission in the master's programme in English (Linguistics) in one of the universities in Islamabad. This critical event ultimately developed in him enough linguistic consciousness about the importance of one's heritage language as well as the significance of mastering a dominant language, in this case, English, to gain upward socio-economic mobility.

Like Mr. and Mrs. Kaachu, another couple, Mr. and Mrs. Hussain, living in a nuclear family, included in this narrative inquiry, have a family language policy based on conscious rather than unconscious linguistic choices. However, they claimed to have introduced Urdu along with their mother tongue, Balti, to their children at home. This couple is unique in the sense that, unlike other couples in this study who were born in Skardu and spent most of their life in their hometown, Mr. Hussain's wife was born and brought up in Karachi. Since she moved to Skardu only after getting married to Mr. Hussain, her upbringing in Karachi has had a very strong influence on her linguistic choices. Unlike Mr. Hussain, who is a strong supporter of transmitting the heritage language to his children and therefore always speaks in Balti with them, his wife frequently uses Urdu with her children even in the home domain. On one hand, she speaks Balti with her husband and other relatives, while on the other hand, she prefers to speak in Urdu with her children. Her frequent use of Urdu with her children at home has affected children's language proficiency in Balti, as according to Mr. Hussain, their children have difficulty speaking Balti fluently with their relatives and their children in Skardu.

Although children have tremendous potential to acquire whatever languages they are exposed to, both the frequency of exposure and interaction determine their proficiency in the languages to which they are provided exposure to. Mr. and Mrs. Hussain's children's limited proficiency in Balti can be related to their limited exposure to Balti at home. Living in a nuclear family, Mrs. Hussain has the freedom to interact with her children in Urdu instead of Balti, which has resulted in limited exposure to Balti. This limited exposure to Balti at home manifests Mrs. Hussain's avoidance strategy regarding the use of Balti with her children. Mrs. Hussain's preference for Urdu at the expense of using Balti with her children is similar to the native language avoidance strategy by the Japanese mothers settled in the UK, Okita (2002) conducted a study on. However, the Japanese mothers Okita (2002) interviewed had different reasons for avoiding the use of their mother tongue with their children. Unlike the Japanese mothers who had developed a negative attitude towards their Japanese identity due to their bitter past experiences in Japan, Mrs. Hussain avoids using Balti with her children because her husband has taken the responsibility of providing the children exposure to their mother tongue. Mrs. Hussain feels the need to use Urdu with her children because she does not want her children to feel excluded for not being able to speak Urdu fluently in public domains. Since Urdu, being the National-Official Language (NOL) is used as a *lingua franca* in Pakistan, Mrs. Hussain considers it necessary to provide rich exposure of Urdu to her children at home.

Mrs. Hussain's intervention in shaping the family language policy indicates that it is not only the male members whose linguistic beliefs and linguistic choices affect children's use of language(s) in the home domain, but female members, especially mothers, can also make a

significant contribution in shaping the FLP. Despite the fact that in patriarchal societies like Pakistan, fathers and other male members are the primary and in some families, sole decision makers, the linguistic choices mothers make while interacting with their children have stronger influence on children's linguistic growth and journey, as they get to spend more time with their mothers at home.

Some of these parents' language management indicates that their family language planning is based on their conscious rather than subconscious linguistic choices.

Besides family structure, another internal factor that plays a crucial role in shaping FLP is the native speakers' subjective ethnolinguistic vitality, which actually refers to the sense of pride one feels for being distinct on the basis of one's ethnolinguistic identity. If high subjective ethnolinguistic vitality is a reflection of one's positive attitude towards one's mother tongue, having low subjective ethnolinguistic vitality may be seen as a manifestation of a negative attitude towards one's native language.

The Balti parents, irrespective of their educational background or profession, displayed a high sense of subjective ethnolinguistic vitality, as all of them claimed to be proud of their mother tongue and perceived it as a strong marker of their Balti identity. None of them claimed to feel embarrassed or ashamed of using Balti both within and outside their home in public places which aligns with the results of some studies on ethnolinguistic vitality indicating that if low sense of ethnolinguistic vitality among heritage language speakers can lead to heritage language desertion on the part of indigenous language speakers, high sense of ethnolinguistic vitality can accelerate language maintenance efforts or contribute in the reversal of language shift (Ali, 2017; Ehala, 2009).

Attitude, despite being a psychological construct, is not purely psychological, as people acquire attitudes by observing and interacting with their family members and others, including those within and even outside their social networks. Attitudes in general and language attitudes in particular strongly affect our beliefs, which in turn result in the construction and deconstruction of certain ideologies that influence our decisions in life. There is ample research based evidence reinforcing the importance of the influence of parents' and children's language attitudes on each other's linguistic beliefs and language choices during their interactions both within and outside the home domain (Armstrong, 2014; De Houwer, 1999; Óhlfeárnáin, 2013; Park & Sarkar, 2007).

Language attitudes of the Balti parents who participated in this study were manifested through their linguistic choices made in the home domain. Except for Mrs. Hussain, who lives in a nuclear family and prefers to use only Urdu with her children at home, all other mothers, as well as the fathers who were interviewed, reported using their mother tongue, Balti, more frequently while interacting with their children in the home domain. Their preference for using Balti reflects their positive attitude towards Balti, which is a prerequisite for language maintenance. However, in case of some Balti couples, their preference for Balti did not synchronize with their children's linguistic preferences, as their children despite being exposed to Balti preferred to use Urdu, which, of course, can be attributed to the exposure to Urdu in their school indicating that children's linguistic preferences can also be shaped by their school environment to a great extent. Nevertheless, the response of the Balti fathers whose children initiate conversation in Urdu at home varies. Mr Hussain, for instance, claims that even when his children choose to use Urdu while talking to him, he always responds to them in Balti, which results in a shift in his children's linguistic choice from Urdu to Balti. The strategy Mr Hussain uses to show disapproval of his children's linguistic choice is in contrast to what Said and Zhu (2019) discovered in their study, where the child controls his mother's linguistic choices at home.

In contrast to Mr. Hussain's strategy, Mr. Wazir has a more flexible approach to languages. Although he prefers to communicate with his children in Balti, whenever his children speak Urdu with him, he allows them to do so by responding to the language of their choice. Mr. and Mrs. Wazir also give their children enough freedom to use Urdu with their siblings, while

encouraging them to use Balti with their grandparents and other elder members of their family so that their children remain actively connected with their roots through their heritage language.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this qualitative narrative inquiry on family language planning reveal similarities as well as differences in the FLP of Balti couples living in joint and nuclear families. Although all six couples have successfully transmitted Balti to their children, the couples living in nuclear family have been found to be more flexible in their language choices as they claimed to have introduced Urdu along with Balti in the home domain, while one couple being in the profession of teaching also claimed to have introduced their children to English along with Urdu and Balti. The FLP of Balti couples living in a nuclear family was found to be based on their conscious decisions regarding language use and language management, which was not the case with the FLP decisions of those living in a joint family.

Besides the difference in their family structure and its influence on their FLP, the couple's educational background and profession also resulted in the difference in their approach to languages. This finding of the study corroborates the findings of some other studies on FLP (Curd-Christiansen, , 2009; Hu et al., 2014; Wang, 2009). The working couples were more interested in creating a multilingual environment at home so that their children would not feel linguistically deprived when placed in an environment where their heritage language is not the language of communication.

Despite these differences in their approach, all six Balti couples, who participated in the study, were found to have a high sense of subjective ethnolinguistic vitality as they not only consider Balti a strong mark of their ethnolinguistic identity but have ensured that their children are able to speak it fluently. Although Balti language does not enjoy official status or constitutional support in the country and has very low objective ethnolinguistic vitality (based on its demography, status, and institutional support), the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality of Balti speakers is very high. Nevertheless, the existence of a high sense of subjective ethnolinguistic vitality alone cannot guarantee language maintenance in the long run, as people's linguistic choices are also governed by their material needs. This is the reason that none of the Balti parents claimed to have made any effort to provide mother tongue literacy to their children, which can be attributed to the absence of any such effort in the national language and education policy of the country.

4. Conclusion

The linguistic beliefs shaped by all the external and internal factors explored in this small-scale study lie at the core of language practices and family language management. Family language planning whether it involves conscious or subconscious linguistic choices that parents make while interacting with children at home is incomplete without family language management, which implies parents' active engagement in the construction of a monolingual or bi/multilingual environment at home along with their efforts to promote mother tongue literacy in the home domain (Curd-Christiansen & La Morgia, 2018; Wang, 2009). It was not surprising to discover that none of the bilingual couples who participated in the study claimed to have made any conscious efforts to create an environment that could foster mother tongue literacy despite the presence of a respectable body of literature in Balti language. In fact, not a single Balti couple who participated in this study showed any interest in making efforts to provide mother tongue literacy to their children because they believe that it will neither help them in their academic nor their professional life. This belief is rooted in the materialistic approach that people living in the 21st century are entangled in and strengthens the *Perceived Benefit Model* of language proposed by Karan (2011) that is based on the idea that people are motivated to learn and use only those languages that are likely to yield material benefits for them, while those languages that do not

enjoy economic or socio-political power have greater chances of undergoing shift as a result of which such languages become restricted to the home domain.

When languages become restricted to the home domain, there comes a point where parents do not even feel the need to transmit the language to their children, let alone provide them with mother tongue literacy. This alarming situation, however, is not witnessed in the case of Balti families who have participated in this study, as all six couples, irrespective of their family structure, educational background, and profession, have transmitted Balti to their children and use it with them frequently in the home domain. Nevertheless, there is no such guarantee if the Balti families who have settled in urban centres outside Gilgit-Baltistan are transmitting Balti to their children and even if they are, it needs to be investigated if they have made it the sole language of communication in the home domain or have introduced other languages as well along with Balti for providing their children opportunities for simultaneous acquisition of two or more than two languages.

The study reinforces the importance of maintaining one's heritage language by not only transmitting it to children but also through actively engaging them in using the language in the home domain, as home is the last refuge for the survival and preservation of heritage languages and cultures. The life span of a language is not determined by its grammar, but by its speakers and their willingness to transfer the linguistic legacy to the young generation. Nettle and

Romaine (2000) have succinctly put it:

A language is not a self-sustaining entity. It can only exist where there is a community to speak and transmit it. A community of people can exist only where there is a viable environment for them to live in and a means of making a living. Where communities cannot thrive, their languages are in danger. When languages lose their speakers, they die. (p. 5)

Balti parents' FLP, as explored through this study, can not only be used for raising awareness about the impact of FLP on children's sense of linguistic identity, their language ideologies, and their language acquisition with reference to Balti families alone, but can also be utilized for developing the sense of responsibility and the awareness required for making conscious efforts in designing a family language policy among parents of other indigenous languages as well.

4.2 Limitation and Recommendation

One of the major limitations of this study is that it primarily focuses on exploring parents' beliefs with reference to the linguistic choices they make while interacting with their children at home, ignoring child agency at large. Although children's linguistic beliefs and preferences in influencing parents' decisions with regard to the use of mother tongue or other tongue(s) in the home domain are briefly discussed in the study, it does not provide an emic picture with reference to children's language beliefs and practices, because it was not the primary focus of this study. Since in the research on FLP conducted in the last couple of years, there is a shift in focus from parents to children emphasizing the need to explore the influence of children's beliefs in shaping FLP (Fogle et al., 2013; Gyogi, 2015; Lomeu-Gomes, 2018; Revis, 2016; Smith-Christmas, 2020; 2021), a separate study on FLP can be undertaken with a specific focus on investigating children's beliefs and language practices in shaping family language planning and how their language beliefs and linguistic choices influence their parents' linguistic choices in the home domain. In fact, FLP, being a multifaceted concept, needs to be explored from a multitude of perspectives by not just analyzing parents' and children's language beliefs but also focusing on other family members' language beliefs and ideologies by collecting data through multiple sources using triangulation.

Being a small-scale research with a small sample size, the findings of this study cannot be generalized. Therefore, in order to investigate the general trend among Balti families regarding their linguistic choices in the home domain, a large-scale study utilizing mixed methods is recommended. Besides this, since the undertaken research focuses on the family language planning of only those Balti parents who are living in Skardu, where Balti is a dominant language,

a comparative study of Balti families living in their home towns and those who have moved away from their home town to urban centres, in other provinces, can also be undertaken to explore differences and /or similarities in their family language planning, as such a comparative study can provide better insights into the factors that govern parents' linguistic choices while interacting with their children at home where family language policy is implemented.

Because of the dearth of research literature on FLP in Pakistan, the same study can be replicated with a focus on speakers of other indigenous languages living in GB. For instance, a study can be undertaken on the FLP of Burushaski families from Hunza, Nagar, or Yasin valleys, who have settled in urban centres outside GB. Similarly, a study on the FLP of Wakhi or Shina speakers can also be undertaken with a focus on those Wakhi and Shina couples who have moved away from their native towns for business or employment. Family language planning among the speakers of indigenous languages spoken in other parts of Pakistan can also be made the focus of investigation to see if their FLP contributes to the process of language shift or maintenance. Moreover, a comparative study based on FLP of two or more indigenous language communities can be undertaken to explore similarities and/or differences in their FLP.

Despite all the limitations of the study, its contribution in paving the path for research on FLP with reference to the indigenous languages of Pakistan cannot be undermined. The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers at the national level and indigenous language speakers at the community level. The study can not only help empower Balti language speakers by making them conscious of their linguistic choices in the home domain, but can also raise awareness about the importance of maintaining one's heritage language among speakers of other indigenous languages in the country.

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Ethical consideration

This research involves no animals; our participants were human, from who we have collected the consent letter, which may be furnished upon request.

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Baltistan Skardu (Ethics Code: UoBS113) on September 24, 2023. All participants provided written informed consent prior to enrolment in the study. This research was conducted ethically in accordance with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki.

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Data availability

Original data is available with the corresponding author and can be furnished upon request.

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