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**The Effects of Bilingualism on Preschool Children within
Expatriate Families in Estonia.**

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Abstract

This study investigates the complex effects of bilingualism on preschool-aged children living in expatriate families. As the global economy and international mobility grow, more families deal with the challenging terrain of raising young children who are exposed to multiple languages while living abroad. This study examines how bilingualism affects these young learners' cognitive, linguistic, and socio-cultural development. I'll take a mixed-methods approach to gain a thorough understanding of how bilingualism affects preschoolers' cognitive development, language proficiency, and social interactions in expat families by combining quantitative assessments and qualitative observations.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Preschool children, Expatriate families, Cognitive development, Language proficiency

Introduction

A trend of expatriation has become a frequent aspect of modern family life in a connected world. Families and individuals frequently cross international borders for work-related or personal reasons, and when they do, their young children frequently become enmeshed in the diverse language and culture of the host nation. The exposure to bilingualism at a young age is one of the many opportunities and challenges that this global mobility presents.

Bilingualism, the ability to speak and understand two languages fluently, is a prevalent and growing reality for many preschool-aged children within expatriate families. This phenomenon emerges as a result of the coexistence of a family's native language(s) and the language(s) of their host country. As parents, educators, and policymakers deal with the complexities of raising bilingual children in expat communities, it is imperative to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of bilingualism on young learners.

This research endeavours to address this knowledge gap by exploring the cognitive, linguistic, and socio-cultural impacts of bilingualism on preschool children within expatriate families in Estonia. By investigating the benefits and challenges associated with bilingualism, I seek to provide valuable insights that can inform decision-making processes for parents, educators, and policymakers alike.

This research is not merely an academic exercise; it addresses a practical concern that affects the lives of countless expatriate families, my own included and has broader implications for the field of early childhood education, linguistics, and intercultural studies. In the pages that follow, I delve into the complex world of bilingualism within expat families, aiming to uncover the delicate effects that shape the experiences of preschool children in this unique context.

Research questions

Children's questions:

1. 😄 😊 😐 😞 😡 My two languages make me feel happy.
2. 😄 😊 😐 😞 😡 I like speaking both of my languages.
3. 😄 😊 😐 😞 😡 I have friends who can speak both of my languages.
4. 😄 😊 😐 😞 😡 Learning two languages is sometimes confusing for me.
5. 😄 😊 😐 😞 😡 I think being able to speak two languages is important.
6. 😄 😊 😐 😞 😡 I like telling stories or playing using both of my languages.
7. 😄 😊 😐 😞 😡 Sometimes I forget words in one language when I'm speaking the other.
8. 😄 😊 😐 😞 😡 I feel proud when I can use both languages with my family and friends.
9. 😄 😊 😐 😞 😡 Learning two languages helps me understand different things such as language rules and how people sound.
10. 😄 😊 😐 😞 😡 I feel confident when I can switch between my languages.

Objective:

The aim of this research was to investigate the effects of bilingualism on preschool children between the ages of 3 to 6, with some input from 7-year-olds who recently started first grade. The study utilised a set of ten questions, asking the children to rate their feelings and experiences regarding bilingualism on a scale ranging from 😄 (very positive/strongly agree) to 😞 (very negative/strongly disagree). The children's responses were analysed to understand their attitudes and perceptions towards growing up bilingual.

Interview questions for parents:

Below are questions used to interview parents from expatriate families. This was a face-to-face interview:

1. How many languages are spoken at home, and which ones are they?
2. How do you balance language exposure between the two (or more) languages?
3. Have you noticed any unique ways in which your child's personality or cognitive skills have been influenced by their exposure to multiple languages?

4. Are there specific cultural, personal or any other motivations for raising your child/children bilingual?
5. In your opinion, how has bilingualism influenced your child's cognitive abilities and problem-solving skills?
6. Have you noticed any advantages or benefits of bilingualism in your child's social interactions with peers and family members?
7. How does your child respond to different languages?
8. How has your child's bilingualism influenced their interactions and experiences at the kindergarten or school?
9. What advice would you give to parents who are considering raising their children bilingual?
10. Has your child ever come up with their own "language blend" that leaves you utterly confused?

Survey questions by 50 other parents

Questions:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how important do you think it is for your child to be proficient in both languages by the time they reach school age? 1 = Not important at all, 10 = Very important
2. How would you rate your confidence in managing your child's bilingual upbringing?
1 = Not confident at all, 10 = Extremely confident
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how concerned are you about potential language delays due to bilingualism during your child's early years? 1 = Very concerned, 10 = Not concerned at all
4. How would you rate the support you receive from your community or resources in fostering your child's bilingual development? 1 = Very inadequate, 10 = Highly effective
5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how willing are you to adapt your daily routine to ensure consistent exposure to both languages for your child? 1 = Not willing, 10 = Very dedicated
6. How would you rate your child's overall language development compared to monolingual children of the same age? 1 = Behind, 10 = Ahead
7. On a scale of 1 to 10, how concerned are you about potential confusion between the two languages during your child's language development? 1 = Very concerned, 10 = Not concerned at all

8. How would you rate your child's enthusiasm and willingness to learn and use both languages?

1 = Very unwilling, 10 = Extremely willing

9. On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with the current progress of your child's bilingual language acquisition? 1 = Not satisfied, 10 = Very satisfied

10. How would you rate the level of encouragement and support you receive from educators or professionals regarding your child's bilingual journey? 1 = Very discouraging, 10 = Highly encouraging

Objective:

Here I explored the experiences and perceptions of (15) interviewed families and 50 who did the survey consisting of both parents, who are raising preschool children within expatriate families in a bilingual environment. The focus is on understanding how bilingualism impacts children's development, cognition, and social interactions, as well as the strategies and motivations behind raising children bilingually. A deeper, more personal understanding of bilingual families was the motivation behind the choice to use two sets of questions, each serving the same purpose. It aimed to have in-depth conversations with these families rather than just distribute surveys to them. I did this in an effort to fully understand their perceptions, feelings, and experiences in relation to their bilingual journey and those of their kids. This method gave me the opportunity to develop a richer and more delicate understanding of the various dynamics occurring in these families, revealing insightful information about their particular struggles and successes.

In the contemporary globalised world, the importance of gaining proficiency in multiple languages, even during the early years of preschool, is on a constant rise. (Gusjuk, N., Tuul, M., & Üun, T., 2022). After conversing with a group of parents in Pärnu, Estonia, a range of opinions emerged regarding their experiences in raising bilingual children. Some expressed satisfaction with their approach, while others expressed regret over missed opportunities. A recurring theme that emerged from these discussions was the question of when is the optimal time to introduce a second/even the third language or are children confused? Or, is it good to mix languages? These inquiries weren't limited to parents with their first child; even those with second or third children felt the need to adapt their strategies because each child is different, and what works for one may not be effective for another. To foster successful bilingual development, there is a call for

policies that recognize this variability and endorse regular exposure to high-quality language experiences in both of a child's languages (Krista Byers-Heinlein, Casey Lew-Williams, 2013). I conducted one-on-one interviews with a few parents whose children are entering first grade and those whose children are still in kindergarten. They shared insights about their journey through kindergarten and their observations regarding their children's development. The main strategy was to focus on families with parents who speak different languages or who speak the same language but reside in a nation other than their home country. These families face the challenge of bringing up their children in a culture where the dominant language is a foreign one. This situation highlights the widespread occurrence of bilingualism among children in such contexts and mirrors the multicultural nature of expatriate communities. It highlights the importance of linguistic diversity within these families and how it might affect the growth and development of the kids. Bilingualism in expat families is a unique and dynamic context, where parents strive to maintain their cultural and linguistic heritage while adapting to new environments. The consistency in responses from parents provides valuable insights into the challenges and advantages of raising bilingual children in an expat setting.

Teachers' survey questions

QUESTIONS:

1. On a scale of 1-10, how effectively do you believe your bilingual students are able to communicate and interact with their peers in both languages?
2. How would you rate the level of confidence your bilingual students display when using their second language in class activities? (1-10)
3. How well do bilingual students adapt to switching between languages during different parts of the school day? (1-10)
4. How actively do bilingual children participate in classroom discussions and activities in their second language? (1-10)
5. On a scale of 1-10, how do you assess the bilingual students' ability to comprehend and follow instructions in both languages?
6. How often do you observe bilingual children helping their peers understand and use both languages effectively? (1-10)

7. How would you rate the bilingual students' progress in developing age-appropriate vocabulary and language skills in both languages? (1-10)
8. Are there any challenges or preferences that bilingual children have shown in terms of using one language over the other? (1-10)
9. How supportive do you believe the classroom environment is in promoting the bilingual development of these children? (1-10)
10. How well do you think the kindergarten curriculum accommodates the needs of bilingual children and their language development? (1-10)

Objective:

The objective of these questions is to assess the effects of bilingualism on preschool children within an expatriate setting in kindergartens. To explore their language development and social integration as they transition from kindergarten to first grade. To achieve this objective, I have evaluated the following aspects using a 1-10 scale to measure effectiveness and proficiency:

1. Communication and Interaction
2. Confidence in Second Language
3. Adaptation to Language Switching
4. Participation in Second Language
5. Comprehension of Instructions
6. Peer Help in Language Use
7. Vocabulary and Language Skills
8. Language Preferences
9. Classroom Environment Support
10. Curriculum Accommodation

Literature Review

Bilingualism And Bilingual expatriate Families.

What is bilingualism and what does it mean when we talk about an expatriate family?

Ellen Bialystok, a renowned researcher in the field of bilingualism, defines bilingualism as the ability to use two languages fluently and accurately. She emphasises that bilingualism is not restricted to equal proficiency in both languages, but can range along a spectrum. Expatriates are people who live in a foreign country but maintain ties to their home country. She emphasises the importance of expatriates navigating multiple cultures and adapting to different linguistic environments.

Let us investigate the perspectives of researchers on early childhood bilingualism and the complexities of the challenges faced and benefits gained while raising proficient bilingual children.

Bilingual parents are vocal in their desire to raise proficient, dynamic bilingual children. There are questions and yet so many answers and opinions on which is the right way to do it and when it is appropriate to start introducing the second or third language. In his book "Early Bilingualism: The Acquisition of Two First Languages in Infancy", De Houwer (2009) emphasises how remarkable it is for children to learn multiple languages at once, even as early as infancy, and suggests that this may be the best time to introduce a second language to a child. In order to promote balanced bilingualism, De Houwer stresses the value of consistent exposure to both languages in his discussion of the idea of language input balance.

In Byers-Heinlein's 2013 article titled "Starting Age and Bilingual Development", the author delves into the Critical Period Hypothesis and its implications. By proposing that language acquisition may occur at a particularly advantageous or pivotal juncture, Byers-Heinlein suggests that introducing a second language during this critical period enhances the likelihood of acquiring it more easily and at a native-like level. Among the often overlooked advantages of early bilingualism is the fact that bilingual children will possess proficiency in multiple languages, which proves invaluable for various aspects of life, including travel, employment opportunities, effective communication with extended family members, the preservation of one's

cultural heritage, and the cultivation of friendships with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Byers-Heinlein emphasises these advantages in his research.

Genesee, Nicoladis, and Paradis (1995) investigated the development of morphosyntactic (grammatical) and phonological (sound) skills in early bilingual children, with a specific focus on children enrolled in English-French immersion programmes in Canada. This study's findings were illuminating on several levels. To begin, they demonstrated the existence of an "Early Bilingual Advantage", in which children exposed to and actively engaged in bilingual environments from a young age demonstrated significant advancements in both morphosyntactic and phonological development when compared to their monolingual peers. This observation highlights the potential benefits of early bilingualism on children's language skills. Furthermore, the study emphasised that early bilingualism fosters not only linguistic proficiency but also "Cultural Competence". The study's bilingual children demonstrated a greater understanding and appreciation of both English and French cultures, highlighting the importance of early bilingualism in cultivating cultural competence and fostering deeper connections to multiple cultural backgrounds. These findings highlight the multifaceted benefits of early bilingualism, which go beyond linguistic ability to include cultural richness and understanding.

About Bilingual Families:

Parents of bilingual children frequently express their desire to bring up competent, active bilingual children. They want answers to their questions. To the point where some paediatricians still advise against exposing children to two languages, there is a complicated history of both positive and negative press about raising children in bilingual households. In contrast to scientific findings, misconceptions and myths frequently serve as the foundation for attitudes against early bilingualism. Byers-Heinlein K, Lew-Williams C. (2013).

Families frequently find themselves navigating the complex web of life in a foreign country, driven by career opportunities, adventure, or the desire for a different way of life. The language that is spoken in a household, particularly in the case of young children, is one of the many difficulties that expatriate families must overcome. Here, the intriguing relationship between living abroad and speaking two languages is brought to light.

Families residing in Estonia were the subject of my research paper. These families represented a wide range of circumstances, including those where one parent was an Estonian and the other was an immigrant or where both parents were foreign nationals. The main objective was to learn more about the parenting styles used by these families, their experiences supporting language development, and how the kids were absorbing it all. It's also crucial to keep in mind that while some families may find raising bilingual children challenging, others may not. Families all over the world recognise it as a significant factor.

During our conversation, one of the parents mentioned that she spoke Estonian to the kids and her husband, who is of Finnish descent, spoke Finnish to the kids. But when talking to one another, they used English. She described how one day, when there was a small misunderstanding, one of the kids just jumped in and started speaking in English. She explained how that shocked them as it was the first time hearing their 4 years old child speaking in English. Children do pick up language from hearing even if they don't necessarily use it.

Bialystok (2018), she discusses how bilingual children often exhibit enhanced executive function skills, such as attention and cognitive flexibility, which can be beneficial for academic success. However, she also mentions the potential challenge of managing two languages, which may require more cognitive effort.

In this work, she also discusses the challenges faced by bilingual children, including code-switching, where elements of both languages are mixed within a single conversation or sentence. This phenomenon, while a natural aspect of bilingualism, can pose difficulties in maintaining linguistic boundaries, particularly in formal or academic settings. Additionally, the paper highlights the challenges related to cultural differences that bilingual children may need to navigate, encompassing the understanding and adaptation to diverse cultural norms, communication styles, and expectations, which can be intricate for young children.

In their extensive review, Borrero & Eccles (2020) provide a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and benefits of early bilingualism in preschool children. They underscore that bilingual preschoolers often exhibit heightened metalinguistic awareness, emphasising the cognitive advantages of bilingualism. However, they also illuminate various potential challenges

that confront these young bilingual learners. These challenges encompass issues of language choice, where children grapple with selecting the appropriate language for different contexts, sometimes resulting in moments of confusion or hesitation. Additionally, maintaining effective communication within the family, particularly when parents speak different languages or engage in code-switching, poses its own set of complexities for these youngsters. Furthermore, the authors discuss how bilingual children navigate questions of identity and belonging, particularly in comparison to their monolingual peers, and the potential for language-related identity issues. Other challenges highlighted include vocabulary development, cultural integration, academic transitions, language attitudes from peers and society, and the demanding task of balancing and preserving proficiency in both languages through consistent exposure and practice. These insights contribute significantly to understanding the multifaceted nature of bilingualism in early childhood and its implications for language development and identity formation.

Additionally, Hummel's book, (2021) "Supporting Young Bilinguals: A Guide for Preschool Teachers", offers valuable insights into the world of early bilingualism. She underscores the benefits of bilingualism in young children, emphasising improved cognitive abilities, problem-solving skills, and heightened cultural awareness. Additionally, Hummel acknowledges potential challenges, such as language mixing or code-switching, that may impact language consistency. Her work serves as a vital resource for preschool teachers, equipping them with practical strategies to facilitate language development in bilingual children, including those from expatriate families, while effectively addressing these challenges.

Preschool Children and Language Development.

Children's speech, language, and communication development are crucial areas. Throughout our lives, they play a crucial role in assisting us in a variety of ways, including helping us to comprehend the world around us, express our fundamental needs and feelings, engage in conversation, think critically and learn, build relationships, and solve problems. They also support the growth of many other aspects of development, such as social, cognitive, and literacy.

To learn to understand two ways of speaking and to learn to speak two languages, children must know the boundaries between them. This raises the question of how children learn where one

language stops and another one starts. In studying bilingual development, the issue of boundaries between languages is a crucial one, De Houwer A (2006). A ground-breaking idea was presented in 1902 by the French author Grammont Maurice in his book *Observations sur le langage des enfants* "Observations on Children's Languages". He suggested an approach to language learning known as *une personne; une langue* "one-person-one-language." The innovative method proposed that children could more successfully and easily pick up two languages by strictly separating them from the start, avoiding significant confusion or language mixing. He added that it was possible to reduce the likelihood of language blending or mixing to some extent by associating each language with a particular person.

Research has shown that children learn faster/easily than adults, Steven Pinker (2018). It has been demonstrated that a child's early experiences have a big influence on how they develop later in life. Because of this, it's crucial for parents and other adults who work with kids to comprehend precisely what happens during these formative years. This enables us to effectively meet a child's needs and make sure they have the best start in life. Although some parents I spoke with felt that their children were still small they were still convinced that there was a need to start or continue the language exposure journey to obtain great results later.

Science tells us irrefutably that the conception to age 5 is crucial. Throughout this period the brain is developing rapidly. To better understand how age affects the acquisition of second languages, researchers in this study conducted a natural experiment. When compared to people who started learning a second language as adults, they discovered that those who started doing so as children or teenagers had higher levels of proficiency in pronunciation, grammatical correctness, and overall language proficiency. With regard to learning pronunciation and grammatical structures that are similar to those of their native language, children have an advantage over adults in language learning, according to this study's analysis of recent research. Johnson, M. A., & Newport, E. L.(2021). Our experiences lay down the foundations of the skills, knowledge and confidence that help us navigate future challenges and realise our full potential. This means children in the early years are especially sensitive to influences that promote the acquisition of perceptual, motor, cognitive, language, social, and self-regulation skills, [ipsos-MORI \(November 2020\)](#).

Data Analysis & Presentation of Results and Findings.

Children's survey finding and discussion

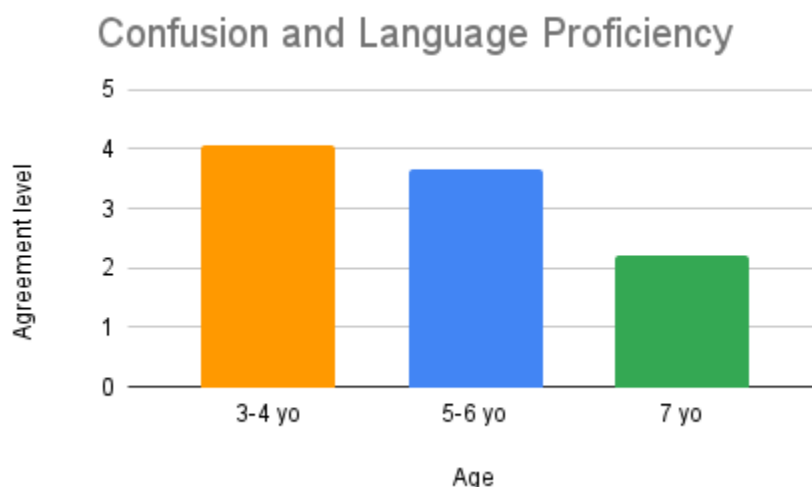
Here I examined the impact of bilingualism and how it impacts children's happiness, language proficiency, play and storytelling, pride, confidence, and the perceived value of bilingualism using a 5-point survey scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". This research adds additional details to the ongoing discussion about the benefits and difficulties/disadvantages of bilingual upbringing. I established connections with the majority of these children through play during the two birthday parties. With the assistance of their parents and caregivers, I managed to gather their candid opinions and feedback. The numbers assigned to the "agreement level" represent the combined average of the two questions described together per age group.



Happiness and Enjoyment	3-4 yo	5-6 yo	7 yo
Agreement level	2.65	4.3	4.25

Happiness and Enjoyment (Questions 1 and 2)

- The 5-7 year old group children generally express positive feelings towards their bilingualism. They agree or strongly agree that their two languages make them feel happy and that they like speaking both languages.
- While the group of 3 to 4-year-olds leaned somewhat toward neutral and disagreement.
- This implies that younger children may require additional time for their bilingualism to develop fully and for them to comprehend and grasp the true essence of bilingualism. The older the children, the more likely they are to strongly agree with these statements. This suggests that as children grow and develop, they may come to appreciate their bilingualism even more.

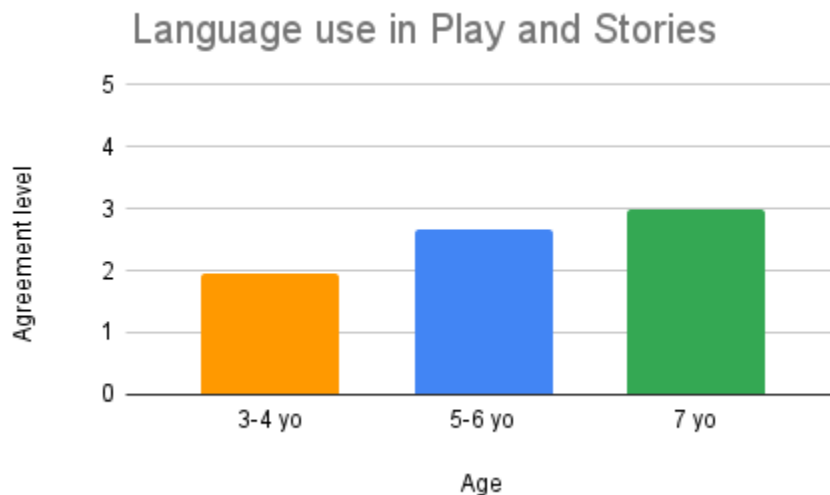


Confusion and Language Proficiency	3-4 yo	5-6 yo	7 yo
Agreement level	4.05	3.65	2.2

Confusion and Language Proficiency (Questions 4 & 7)

- For questions related to confusion, Younger children (3-4 years) ranged from neutral to strongly agree about feeling confused, while older children (5-6 and 7 years) are more likely to disagree.

- Language proficiency, on the other hand, seems to increase with age. Older children are more likely to strongly agree or agree that they can use both languages proficiently.
- Our conclusion is that as they age, their comprehension of the languages improves, their confidence increases, and they exhibit better grammatical proficiency.



Language use in Play and Stories	3-4 yo	5-6 yo	7 yo
Agreement level	1.95	2.65	3

Language Use in Play and Stories (Questions 3 & 6)

- Many children find enjoyment in using both languages during play and storytelling. The older children in the 5 to 6 age group tend to exhibit a more neutral to agreeable attitude, suggesting a certain balance in their confidence levels. In contrast, the 7-year-old group tends to strongly agree or agree that they gain pleasure from utilising their languages during play and storytelling.
- Nonetheless, the younger children in the 3-4-year-old group appear sceptical, tending to hold more neutral to disagreeing viewpoints. This indicates that while they enjoy playing, they may lack confidence in storytelling due to the evident constraints posed by their limited vocabulary in the multiple languages they are acquiring.
- This suggests that as children grow, they become more skilled and comfortable using both languages in various contexts.

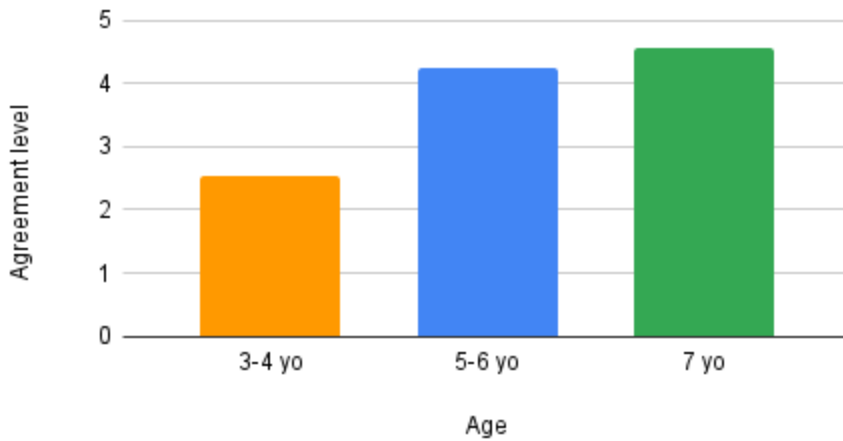


Pride and Confidence	3-4 yo	5-6 yo	7 yo
Agreement level	3.1	3.95	4.25

Pride and Confidence (Questions 8 and 10)

- The 3-4-year-old group displayed a degree of confidence, but, for the most part, they remained uncertain about their levels of confidence, with a tendency toward disagreement regarding taking pride in their languages.
- While the 5 to 7-year-old group express pride and confidence in their bilingual abilities.
- Bilingualism appears to boost self-esteem and confidence, possibly because children recognize the unique skill they possess.

The Importance of Bilingualism & Understanding



Importance of Bilingualism & Understanding and Learning	3-4 yo	5-6 yo	7 yo
Agreement level	2.55	4.25	4.55

Importance of Bilingualism & Understanding and Learning (Questions 9 & 5)

- The 3-4-year-olds, for the most part, hold a neutral stance regarding what they perceive as important in being bilingual. They exhibit a certain level of confusion since they have not been exposed to as many instances where they recognize the importance of understanding multiple languages.
- The importance of bilingualism is more appreciated by older children. The 5 to 7-year-old groups tend to agree or strongly agree more than the 3-4 year-olds.
- Older children also tend to agree more with the statement that bilingualism helps them understand different things and learn more effectively.

Discussion:

1. **Age-Related Changes:** The results indicate that as children grow older, their attitudes and perceptions of bilingualism become more positive. This suggests that exposure and experience with multiple languages may lead to a deeper appreciation of bilingualism over time.
2. **Confidence and Language Proficiency:** Older children tend to be more confident in using both languages and are less likely to feel confused. This suggests that early challenges with bilingualism may resolve with time and practice.
3. **Language Use in Play:** Children, in general, enjoy playing, and it's important to note that they never let language get in the way of having fun. They are always coming up with new ways to communicate and convey messages, whether through gestures or sounds. However, when faced with the task of speaking up and narrating a story in front of other children and possibly adults, if limited by vocabulary, children may find it challenging to accomplish this. Older children were found to have more confidence in using both their languages during play and to tell stories. This indicates that bilingualism can enhance their creativity and imagination as they get older..
4. **Importance of Bilingualism:** The perception of bilingualism's importance increases with age. This underscores the need for parents and educators to emphasise the value of bilingualism to young children.

Conclusion:

The findings suggest that bilingualism has a positive effect on preschool children from expatriate families in general. Children gradually become more at ease, confident, and proficient in both languages. They are proud of their bilingual abilities, and as they grow older, they understand the value of being bilingual in today's globalised world.

PARENTS

SUMMARY REVIEW OF PARENTS' INTERVIEWS ANSWERS.

1. Languages Spoken at Home: Whether they were couples or single parents, every one of them affirmed their practice of speaking two or more languages within their households. This illustrates the common occurrence of bilingualism within expatriate families, where multilingualism is an essential aspect of their daily lives.
2. Balancing Language Exposure: Parents mentioned balancing language exposure through speaking, TV channels, music, and radio and some mentioned play dates with children who shared the same language. This shows a conscious effort to provide a rich linguistic environment for their children.
3. Influence on Cognitive Skills and Personality: Parents observed that their child's personality and cognitive abilities had improved as a result of exposure to multiple languages and different cultures. One parent reported that their daughter showed leadership abilities in her home language group and that their child's speech development improved after exposure to different languages. She mentioned observing her child's willingness to translate to her friends during playtime.
4. Motivational Factors for Bilingual Child Raising: As justifications for raising their children bilingually, parents cited cultural considerations, improved relations with family members, and preparing their offspring for success in the future. These reasons are consistent with the social and practical benefits of bilingualism.
5. Influence on Cognitive Abilities and Problem-Solving Abilities: Parents thought that their child's cognitive abilities had been positively impacted by bilingualism. They listed

some of the advantages as having greater flexibility, adaptability to change, quick thinking, and improved problem-solving abilities.

6. **Benefits in Social Interactions:** Bilingualism was found to improve children's social interactions, enabling them to interact more confidently with strangers while travelling and communicating with family members. It was thought to be a valuable skill to be able to communicate in several languages and ask questions.
7. **Child's Response to Different Languages:** Overall, parents noted that their children exhibited confidence when using various languages, indicating that bilingualism did not lead to language confusion or hesitancy. However, a small number of parents expressed apprehension regarding their children's language development delay. Despite this concern, they also emphasised the significance of allowing children to progress at their own pace, highlighting a positive outlook.
8. **Influence on Interactions in Kindergarten or at School:** In environments such as kindergartens or schools, bilingualism was considered a valuable asset. Children were observed making additional friends and offering assistance to those who struggled to express themselves during playtime. Nevertheless, a minority of parents did bring up the fact that their children required more time to adapt, explore, and come to terms with the fact that they were once again encountering languages beyond the two they were already learning. This applied to those who went to kindergartens with the Two-Way-Language Immersion programme.
9. **Advice to Parents Considering Bilingual Upbringing:** Parents gave others the go-ahead to start their children speaking multiple languages as early as possible and not to hold back, highlighting the benefits of bilingualism for social and cognitive growth.
10. **"Language Blend" and Perceived Confusion:** Several parents observed instances where their children would occasionally create a unique "language blend", which occasionally led to confusion. Some parents admitted to having misinterpreted this phenomenon as

their children being confused. Some admitted that they felt that they were responsible for this habit because they often mix languages.

In summary:

The results from the parental perspectives of bilingual education in expatriate families highlight the many advantages of bilingualism for preschoolers. Positive effects on cognitive abilities, problem-solving skills, and social interactions have been linked to bilingualism. Parents stress the value of early exposure and urge others to embrace bilingualism for the development of their children. These observations offer helpful advice for parents thinking about raising their kids bilingually, highlighting the benefits and allaying any worries about language confusion. The experiences of these families serve as a powerful reminder of the complexity and richness of bilingual environments, as well as how significantly they affect children's growth and development. The long-term effects of bilingualism on these kids as they advance in their academic and social lives may be better understood through further study.

PARENTS

The survey responses reveal valuable insights into the attitudes and experiences of parents in expat families regarding bilingualism in their preschool children. Here are the key findings:

Parents' Survey analysis

The results are of 50 more parents raising bilingual children. Ten survey questions were used to collect data, with responses scored on a scale of 1 to 10.

Findings

1. The importance of bilingualism (Q1): With an average rating of 9.4 out of 10, parents overwhelmingly place a high value on bilingualism. This suggests a steadfast commitment to making sure their kids are fluent in both languages by the time they start school.
2. Confidence in Handling a Bilingual Upbringing (Q2): With an average score of 6.3, parents demonstrate a moderately high level of confidence in their ability to oversee their

child's bilingual upbringing. This shows a moderate level of confidence, though not a high level.

3. Concerns Regarding Language Delays (Q3): Parents generally express moderate worry (average score of 5.0) about possible language delays brought on by bilingualism. This suggests striking a balance between being aware of potential obstacles and not becoming overly anxious.
4. Community and resource support (Q4) With an average score of 6.5, parents generally have positive opinions of the support they receive for encouraging bilingual development. This shows that they only find the community support and resources to be somewhat effective.
5. Willingness to Adapt Daily Routine (Q5) As evidenced by the high average score of 7.0, parents clearly show a strong willingness to modify their daily routines to ensure consistent exposure to other languages.
6. Language Development Comparison (Q6): With an average score of 6.1, parents believe that their children's language development is on the same level with or slightly ahead of that of monolingual children. This hints at belief in the advantages of bilingualism.
7. Concerns Regarding Language Confusion (Q7): Parents are moderately concerned (average score of 5.0) about their child's potential language development confusion between the two or more languages. This indicates an awareness of a potential challenge.
8. Children's Interest in Bilingualism (Q8): With an average score of 7.0, parents generally state that their kids are eager and enthusiastic about learning and using both (from home) and other languages (from school).
9. Contentment with Language Learning Progress (Q9): With an average score of 6.6, parents are only moderately satisfied with their child's progress in learning two languages

and others which they are exposed to at the kindergarten and school. This implies that there is room for development but overall satisfaction.

10. Support and Encouragement from Professionals in Education (Q10): The average score of 7.7 indicates that parents receive positive feedback and support from educators and professionals. This shows that experts have a useful role to play in supporting bilingualism.

In summary:

The results of this survey show that parents value being able to speak two or more languages, and they are generally committed to giving their preschoolers exposure to more languages. They are confident in their ability to manage a bilingual upbringing, and their children's enthusiasm is encouraging, despite their worries about possible language delays and confusion. Along with receiving encouragement from educators and professionals, parents also feel supported by their communities and resources. These findings imply that expat families are committed to encouraging their children's bilingualism because they are aware of the potential advantages it may have for their cognitive and cultural development. To provide a thorough understanding of bilingualism in expat family settings, additional research may further explore particular tactics and difficulties.

TEACHERS' SURVEY AND FINDINGS

Findings:

Teachers data analysis (findings)

Discussion

1. **Communication and Interaction:** Teachers on average rated the effectiveness of bilingual students' communication and interaction with their peers in both languages as low (4.0), suggesting room for improvement in this area.
2. **Confidence in Second Language:** The level of confidence displayed by bilingual students when using their second language received a moderate rating (5.5), indicating that there's some room for improvement.
3. **Adaptation to Language Switching:** Bilingual students' ability to switch between languages during different parts of the school day was rated reasonably high (6.0), suggesting that they adapt well to language transitions.
4. **Participation in Second Language:** Bilingual children's active participation in classroom discussions and activities in their second language received a relatively high rating (6.7), indicating their willingness to engage in activities in both languages.
5. **Comprehension of Instructions:** The ability of bilingual students to comprehend and follow instructions in both languages received a moderate rating (4.2), suggesting that there may be some challenges in this area.
6. **Peer Help in Language Use:** Bilingual children helping their peers understand and use both languages effectively received a moderate rating (5.4), indicating average level of peer support in language development.

7. Vocabulary and Language Skills: Bilingual students' progress in developing age-appropriate vocabulary and language skills in both languages was rated positively (6.8), meaning that they are making good progress.
8. Language Preferences: Teachers noted that some bilingual children have shown preferences for one language over the other (5.0), suggesting that individual preferences may influence language use.
9. Classroom Environment Support: The classroom environment's support for bilingual development received a moderately positive rating (5.8), meaning that there is room for improvement in this area.
10. Curriculum Accommodation: Teachers rated the accommodation of the kindergarten curriculum for bilingual children's language development as relatively low (4.3), suggesting potential adjustments may be needed.

Summary and Conclusion:

The results indicate that while bilingual kids in the surveyed kindergartens show strengths in language adaptation, active participation and vocabulary development, there are some areas that could use improvement, including communication and interaction, self-assurance in using the second language, and comprehension of instructions. Additionally, some kids might have language preferences, so the curriculum might need to be changed to better serve bilingual/multilingual kids.

Overall, these findings emphasise the value of ongoing assistance and resources for fostering the advantages of bilingualism among preschoolers from international families. It is essential that educators and institutions adapt their methods to meet the unique needs of this diverse group of students and to foster an environment that is welcoming and supportive of their linguistic and cultural development.

Benefits & Challenges of Bilingualism by Children.

Benefits

During my research on the impact of bilingualism among preschool children within expatriate families, I gathered valuable insights from children aged 3 to 7 regarding the benefits they perceive from growing up bilingual.

For the younger children, aged 3-4, the benefits primarily revolved around their immediate social and familial experiences. They mentioned that being bilingual allowed them to understand what their family members were saying, engage in conversations and play with friends at the kindergarten and playgrounds, and even help their friends who didn't speak the same language. These early advantages centred on communication and social inclusion.

Among the 5 to 7 year-olds, a more delicate understanding of the benefits of bilingualism emerged. They highlighted the ability to converse more effectively with cousins, appreciate music in their second language, and find comfort in hearing their language spoken when visiting grandparents. Notably, they were beginning to recognize that speaking multiple languages could be akin to having a superpower, enabling them to think in different languages at will.

The 7 year-olds expressed a deeper level of insight. They articulated that speaking foreign languages could be a "superpower" and emphasised their ability to think, sing, and speak in multiple languages, providing a cognitive advantage. Furthermore, one child shared a heartwarming story of feeling happier and more confident when meeting a friend at school who spoke the same language as she and her mother did at home. This indicates that as children get older and meet other people, they find their "superpower" more useful than ever.

In conclusion, the benefits of growing up bilingual for preschool children within expatriate families are multifaceted. These children experience improved communication with family and friends, enhanced cultural appreciation, cognitive advantages, and a sense of belonging and confidence. Bilingualism not only enriches their linguistic abilities but also fosters social and emotional development, contributing positively to their overall well-being.

Challenges

Preschoolers and first graders in bilingual expatriate families encounter several challenges as they navigate the complexities of “multilingualism”. One common hurdle is code-mixing, where children seamlessly blend words from different languages within their sentences, occasionally hindering clear communication. Fortunately, this phase typically self-corrects over time. To some, it is not seen as a challenge because some parents mix languages when they are conversing with children or one another at home.

Another challenge lies in grammatical errors, which can lead to children feeling embarrassed. Striking a balance between correction and maintaining their confidence becomes essential for caregivers and parents. Two 7 year-olds in particular felt that because they had started school, their parents had become stricter about how they should and shouldn't speak.

In their multicultural environments, children become increasingly aware of diverse accents and linguistic variations, fostering a broader understanding of differing perspectives. However, correct pronunciation can be taxing, especially when grappling with distinct phonetic systems across multiple languages.

Children may also develop language preferences, often influenced by their peer groups or limited exposure to one language. While these preferences are genuine, many children hesitate to express them openly, fearing that it might disappoint their parents.

Lastly, some children aspire to attain full proficiency in both languages but express concerns about parental language mixing, which can create inconsistency. Maintaining consistency in caregiver language use becomes crucial to prevent confusion and promote optimal language development in these young learners.

In summary, effort and challenges aside, all children feel special when they can communicate in their languages. They feel proud when they can help their friends who don't understand, they are able to learn and see different views and understand people and culture differently more especially as they mature. Those who have had the opportunity to travel not only are they able to

speak to their families, but when they go to the playground or shopping malls, suddenly the language they have been learning becomes even more fun to use.

Benefits & Challenges of Raising Bilingual Children.

In Estonia, as these parents' insights reveal, raising bilingual children comes with its own set of unique challenges and remarkable benefits. One of the most significant challenges lies in maintaining a delicate balance in language exposure to ensure proficiency in both languages. This requires strict discipline and dedication, as many parents openly admit to the struggle of maintaining consistency due to the frequent mixing of languages in their home conversations. Several parents expressed concerns about whether their children might become confused due to exposure to multiple languages. These concerns arose as parents observed their children learning and interacting with peers who spoke not only Estonian but also Russian. Additionally, some kindergartens in the region had welcomed preschoolers from Ukraine and Russia due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Consequently, the children were also exposed to the Ukrainian language, which is perceived to have similarities with Russian, including shared vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation features, Lăpuşneanu (2023).

But we are reminded or consoled by many searchers' findings including that of renowned (Bialystok, E., et al., 2004) that children growing up bilingual do not experience confusion with their languages, despite occasional word borrowing between them.

In this multilingual context, the "One Parent, One Language" (OPOL) approach can be particularly challenging, as illustrated by Andrea Breitenmoser in her YouTube video. She emphasises the difficulties that arise when family members gather around the dinner table, and one partner does not speak the same language, leading to fragmented conversations. To address this, families often need to decide on a common family language for smoother communication during gatherings, such as meals.

Andrea's argument underscores the importance of adhering to the OPOL strategy to optimise their children's language development. Deviating from this approach may jeopardise the minority language(s) spoken by the children, potentially hindering their linguistic progress. This viewpoint is reinforced by Leonare Arnberg's opinion, cited by Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert (2004)

in her book "Language Strategies for Bilingual Families", suggesting that the best results are achieved when both parents use the minority language when addressing each other, exposing the child to it more frequently. However, it remains unclear whether this approach might compromise the child's proficiency in the majority languages, possibly depending on the child's capacity to absorb languages.

In the context of Estonia's two-way language immersion education system, where children are exposed to both Estonian and Russian languages in kindergartens, expatriate families face the challenge of managing exposure to multiple languages, including those spoken at home. This situation requires parents to actively seek out communities, resources, and friends to support their children's language development.

Additional challenges mentioned by parents include time management for language exposure, maintaining connections with minority language-speaking relatives who may be at a distance, fostering motivation in children to engage with multiple languages, and the ultimate need for consistency in language use. During her YouTube interview, when questioned about whether children can acquire up to five languages by the age of 10 and if it might overwhelm their developing brains, Bialystock underscores that it's not an impossibility. Nevertheless, she highlights the limitations of how much information children can absorb, emphasising that there simply isn't enough time in a day to effectively teach all those languages to them. It's evident that time is of the essence, and it's vital for parents to establish a balance to consistently provide support.

Despite these challenges, parents in Estonia, like those in other bilingual contexts, employ various strategies, including using television and radio, to ensure language exposure. According to parents, the rewards are substantial. Bilingualism is observed to enhance cognitive abilities, problem-solving skills, and personality development. Children's social interactions thrive as they confidently engage with peers and navigate diverse cultural contexts. Moreover, bilingualism strengthens familial and cultural bonds while preparing children for an increasingly interconnected world. Although occasional "language blends" may seem to lead to confusion,

they reflect the linguistic richness that bilingualism offers. Overall, parents advocate for early bilingual upbringing, highlighting its potential for social and cognitive growth in children.

Benefits & Challenges of Working with Bilingual Children by Kindergarten Teachers.

Most kindergartens in Estonia established a Two-way language Immersion (TWI) program for Estonian and Russian groups, to cater language learning opportunities. But teachers still face both challenges and some advantages in supporting bilingual and multilingual preschoolers from expatriate families. The advantages of TWI programmes are evident in the strengths observed among bilingual children, such as language adaptation, active participation, and vocabulary development. However, teachers also encounter several challenges.

One significant challenge is addressing the diverse linguistic backgrounds of children from expatriate families. These children may come from households where neither Estonian nor Russian is the primary language, making it essential for teachers to navigate a multitude of languages and provide adequate support for language development. This diversity can complicate communication and interaction in the classroom, as well as hinder children's self-assurance in using the second language. Additionally, comprehension of instructions may be affected when children have language preferences.

Furthermore, adapting the curriculum to better serve bilingual and multilingual children can be a complex task. Teachers may need to modify their teaching methods and materials to accommodate the unique needs of these students. Additionally, fostering an inclusive environment that welcomes and supports the linguistic and cultural development of expatriate children is crucial.

Despite these challenges, TWI programs offer valuable opportunities for children to become proficient in multiple languages, which is increasingly important in our globalised society. Teachers play a vital role in shaping the educational experiences of these children, helping them

navigate the complexities of language and culture. Therefore, ongoing assistance and resources are essential to ensure that the advantages of bilingualism are maximised among preschoolers from international families, creating a more inclusive and enriching educational environment.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusion

The research on the effects of bilingualism on preschool children within expatriate families in Estonia has provided valuable insights into the complex world of language development, highlighting the perspectives of children, parents, and kindergarten teachers. This comprehensive understanding allows us to draw meaningful conclusions and offer relevant recommendations for this context.

Benefits of Bilingualism for Preschool Children:

Our research revealed a multitude of benefits that preschool children within expatriate families in Estonia derive from bilingualism. These advantages evolve with age and encompass various aspects of their lives.

For the youngest participants, aged 3 to 4, bilingualism primarily enriches their immediate social interactions and family connections. It enables them to communicate with family members, engage with friends at the kindergarten, and even assist peers who speak different languages. Bilingualism at this stage fosters early communication skills and social inclusion.

As children mature into the 5 to 7 year-old group, their appreciation for bilingualism deepens. They recognize its role in more profound family connections, cultural appreciation, and the ability to engage with music and media in different languages. The 7 year-olds in our study demonstrated a higher level of insight, emphasising the cognitive advantages of bilingualism. They understand the ability to think in multiple languages as a unique skill that enhances their

problem-solving abilities. Additionally, they spoke of the emotional benefits, such as increased confidence and a sense of belonging when communicating in their mother tongue.

In summary, bilingualism offers preschool children in expatriate families improved communication, cultural appreciation, cognitive advantages, and enhanced self-confidence. It enriches their lives socially, emotionally, and intellectually, contributing positively to their overall well-being.

Parents in this context face unique challenges and remarkable benefits in raising bilingual children. Maintaining a delicate balance in language exposure proves to be a significant challenge. Consistency is crucial, and parents often grapple with language mixing within their homes. The "One Parent, One Language" (OPOL) approach is challenging but essential for optimising children's language development. It's important for parents to establish common family languages for smoother communication during gatherings.

Despite these challenges, parents are motivated by the substantial rewards of bilingualism. It enhances their children's cognitive abilities, problem-solving skills, and personality development. Bilingual children confidently navigate diverse social contexts and engage with peers from various cultural backgrounds. Bilingualism also strengthens familial and cultural bonds, preparing children for an interconnected world.

Kindergarten teachers play a pivotal role in supporting bilingual and multilingual preschoolers from expatriate families. While Two-way language Immersion (TWI) programs offer evident advantages, teachers also face challenges in managing linguistic diversity and ensuring effective communication and interaction in the classroom.

Diverse linguistic backgrounds among children can complicate teaching, particularly when addressing language preferences and maintaining consistency. Adapting the curriculum to meet the unique needs of bilingual and multilingual students is a complex task, necessitating flexibility and creativity.

Despite these challenges, TWI programs provide valuable opportunities for children to become proficient in multiple languages, which is important in our globalised society. Teachers contribute significantly to children's educational experiences, shaping their language and cultural development.

Recommendations

Parents:

Consistency is Key: Maintain consistent exposure to both languages, use the "one parent, one language" approach if possible, where each parent speaks their native language to the child. This helps children distinguish between languages and become proficient in both.

Promote Cultural Identity: Encourage an appreciation for both cultures associated with the languages. Celebrate cultural traditions, holidays, and customs to help children feel a sense of belonging in both their expat community and their heritage culture.

Patience and Flexibility: Understand that language development in bilingual children may vary. Be patient and avoid unnecessary pressure. Children might mix languages, but this is often a natural phase of bilingual development.

Multilingual Resources: Utilise multilingual books, videos, and games that can help reinforce language skills and cultural understanding. These resources can make language learning engaging and enjoyable.

Educators:

Individualised Support: Recognize that bilingual children may have different language needs and levels of proficiency. Tailor teaching strategies to accommodate these variations, providing additional support as needed.

Promote Language Diversity: Encourage a classroom environment that values and respects linguistic diversity. Create opportunities for students to share their languages and cultures with peers, fostering an inclusive atmosphere. For instance, on a dress-up day, children have the opportunity to don traditional attire representing their indigenous backgrounds.

Language Assessment: Use appropriate language assessment tools to accurately evaluate bilingual children's language skills. Assess both languages separately to understand their proficiency in each, bearing in mind that the child may have a third or a fourth language.

Professional Development: Provide training and resources to educators on effective strategies for teaching bilingual students. Equip them with the knowledge and skills to support language development in a diverse classroom.

Policymakers:

Support Bilingual Education: Advocate for bilingual education programs in schools, particularly in expat communities. These programs can help children develop proficiency in both their home language and the host country's language.

Language Policies: Establish policies that recognize the importance of bilingualism and provide resources for language learning in early childhood education. Support initiatives that promote multilingualism in educational settings.

Cultural Integration: Encourage initiatives that promote cultural integration alongside language acquisition. Support cultural exchange programs and activities that foster cross-cultural understanding among expat families.

Research and Data Collection: Invest in research on the effects of bilingualism within expat families to inform evidence-based policies. Collect data on language proficiency, educational outcomes, and cultural adaptation among bilingual expat children.

Parents, educators, and policymakers can collectively create an environment that not only supports bilingual children within expat families but also recognizes the rich linguistic and cultural diversity they bring to their communities. This holistic approach can help these young learners thrive academically, culturally, and socially.

Building on these findings, it is clear that ongoing support and resources are essential to maximise the benefits of bilingualism among preschoolers from international families. In addition to the challenges identified, the role of support networks and government-sponsored language learning opportunities for expatriates cannot be overstated. Organisations such as Expat Living in Estonia and (Expat Living in Pärnu/Tartu) offer valuable community-building and resource-sharing platforms, addressing the concerns of expatriates in Estonia.

The Estonian government's sponsorship of language learning opportunities for expatriates living in Estonia for less than 5 years is a commendable initiative that should be further promoted and expanded. It is a critical tool for facilitating language proficiency among newcomers, enhancing their integration into Estonian society, and fostering a deeper appreciation of the country's linguistic diversity.

In conclusion, the research underscores the significance of nurturing bilingualism in preschool children within expatriate families in Estonia. This entails not only recognizing the challenges but also leveraging the benefits. With the active involvement of parents, educators, and support networks, bilingualism can become a powerful tool for enriching the lives of these children, promoting their cognitive and social growth, and preparing them to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. Additional research opportunities exist in exploring effective methods for boosting parents' confidence and consistency when raising bilingual children, particularly when they themselves are learning a new language. Additionally, comprehensive training programmes can be developed to provide educators with the tools and strategies they need to effectively support children in such multilingual environments.

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